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PERCEPTIONS AND REFLECTIONS  
OF  
MOTHERS' WORKING LIVES:  
  
NARRATIVES FROM WOMEN  
ON THEIR SECOND, OR SUBSEQUENT,  
MATERNITY LEAVE.

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## **Abstract**

A longitudinal study addressed the question: what can women's stories tell us about their working lives? Of specific interest was the importance of maternity leave to career which is treated by academics and organisations alike - as a period of absence. Furthermore, all maternity leave periods are considered equivalent. Feminist epistemological frameworks, drawing on psychological understanding, were used to choose methods and interpret findings. Six married women were interviewed during their second or subsequent maternity leave (T1) and re-interviewed approximately three years later (T2). The women represented typical, middle-class families of two or more children. The women had worked full-time before motherhood and full or part-time after their first child, most at a lower status/pay. The women used the management of their first maternity leave to inform their work plans. By T2, one woman opted to take a career break; two returned to part-time work; two were focusing on unpaid community work; one woman had just given birth to her third child. The transcribed stories captured in-depth reflections and self-analysis. Biographic narrative interpretative method identified thematic coherence across time. Semi-structured interviews explored sense-making of working life trajectories. Interpretative phenomenological analysis identified shared perceptions of a 'man's working world', which 'good employee' sense-making permitted the women to largely be unaffected by - up until their second child. This 'good employee' master theme disintegrated, whilst the master theme of 'a woman in a man's world' remained strong, developing into 'traditional stay-at-home rationalisations' and perceptions of 'anti-mother organisations'. The women's community network together with self-development during the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave led to three conclusions:

- a. Second or subsequent maternity leave is qualitatively different from first maternity leave, critical to working-life trajectories. This is an unidentified feature in career theory.
- b. The women's understanding of work, job and career, change as a consequence, emphasising the need for a shift in organisational perceptions of maternity leave.
- c. The interviews resulted in powerful and emotive events supporting future use of this form of narrative collection and analysis.

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*Everything will be alright in the end.....if it's not all right, it's not yet the end.*

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## Introduction

### (i) Women in the workplace: are we nearly there yet?

Originally, the researcher's intention was to consider research to date on maternity leave from an individual's perspective and position maternity leave into current career theory, highlighting any gaps or possible incongruence. However, by drawing on relevant research evidence, a strong argument to listen to women's voices separately regarding maternity leave experience developed. In fact, very quickly, it became clear that the literature review produced a more complex overview, which could not easily separate maternity leave from women's career paths and how they differed from men's, or the theories that explained careers. The impact of women taking leave on the organisation deserved a section on its own – hence the first chapter is divided into an organisational perspective and a woman's perspective. A key theme of conflict clearly emerged between organisational and individual perspectives; different parties expectations; spoken and unspoken norms. Added to this, is a myriad of different authors' perspectives on contributing factors to this conflict as well as the issue of inequality of opportunity and pay: government statistics; professional bodies; legislation and so on. Considered comprehensively, the result was originally an almost unmanageable tangle of evidence and theory. Yet these different perspectives, individual, organisational, legal and cultural, had to be accommodated. They all add to the intricate weave of historical and cultural understanding shared by our society, which in turn, shapes women's opinions, perspectives and expectations, which shape legislation and consequently contribute to women's experiences. For example, topics such as the history of inequality in the workplace ensure a wealth of on-going data collection by government bodies for the purposes of monitoring equality. The question of whether this monitoring is really effective, needs to be addressed. Then there is the cultural expectation of motherhood, which is influenced by the media. The media readily reports the statistics, and will inevitably colour a woman's perceptions and choices of work as well as the 'right' way to be a mother. The media often presents 'either/or' options or openly bemoans the impossible situation women who find themselves in the dual role of mother and discriminated against employee (Moore 2011, Purves 2012, Driscoll 2012). Issues of interest in the current research were relevant to those women who have been through pregnancy and maternity at least once already and experienced organisational policies affecting their working life decisions. Inevitably, their decision-making process was coloured by cultural expectations and the current research needed to be situated within the lived experience of the participants. The parameters for selection of academic material explored for the current research had to be broad, crossing both management and psychology disciplines so as to ensure three levels of understanding – **individual**, **organisational** and **cultural**. Whilst the choice of methodology and

interpretation of women's experiences will stand the test of time, the stories told by the women of their perceptions of their working lives reflect the current culture the women live in. The picture is constantly changing. During the course of writing the literature review, new proposed legislation was announced to help promote work-life balance through increasing the availability of flexible working options as well as the all embracing Equality Acts (2010). The first task of the current research is therefore to identify patterns and contextualise this in terms of academic theory and models. The research therefore begins with facts and figures regarding women in the workplace; maternity leave, career breaks more generally - and pay gap gender discrimination. Whilst these subject areas have been summarised by many before, over many years, it is still worth noting from the outset that the overall picture is not a positive one, although huge strides have been taken in both legislation and organisational policy. A balanced viewpoint is then, hard to achieve when the evidence described in the following chapters still points to strong discrimination against women. The sample used in the current research resides in Scotland, yet the majority of previous evidence comes from general UK and American data; although, as will be become apparent, a similar pattern of findings, albeit to greater or lesser extents, is also evident further afield. After an initial overview of women in the workplace, maternity leave will be explored from a business perspective: in short, it is necessary to explore what the facts and figures associated with maternity leave mean to organisations. There have been legislative attempts to turn around the negative trends described and these too, will be included, drawing parallels with other nations. Legislation is based on striving for equality of opportunity for women and this often translates as ensuring flexibility of working time arrangements, as highlighted below:

*The usual argument is that many more women would achieve top jobs in the workforce if employers could be persuaded to adopt family-friendly work arrangements and benefits for employees-such as parental leave, part-time working and so forth. (Hakim 2006 p.280)*

It is questionable whether an understanding of the barriers women face be reduced to better working hours for women. Consideration is therefore then given to the women's perspective of employment. The justification for an exclusive focus on women is well-established, (Miller et al. 2008) however, the discussion also points to a slow change in men's working patterns, or at least a growing demand for change. In conducting a literature review, cross-disciplinary research is drawn on, notably from business, psychology and sociology. Several themes emerged during the course of the literature review. One 'theme', the feminist perspective, was both pervasive and powerful as it offers a deeper understanding of women's experiences from their perspective, not predetermined perspectives based on existing theory, which as will be described, often uses a male stance as the norm. Female experiences of career are clearly different from that of men (Cotter et al. 2001).

Consequently, feminism has been ascribed a chapter to itself (see chapter 3). The final strong theme to emerge is that of role conflict and this links together the organisation's and individual's perspective. Notably, this 'problem' working mothers specifically face, is slowly becoming one which men too, face.

The breadth of the career chapter (chapter 2) material is large and this is necessary to reflect the diversity of influences which may be reflected in any individual's narrative. Taking into account the patterns identified, many questions arise, for example: how does any career theory accommodate some or all of the above issues. Is maternity leave properly represented in any career theory – or is maternity leave really, simply a pause in working life, irrelevant to any models of career? The central question of the current research: 'what does narrative research uncover about the perceptions of working mothers' is considered from the theoretical frameworks offered to date – i.e.: the research questions whether career theories got it right. New and old theories are examined. This second chapter moves naturally on from an overview of the feminist perspective. The first three chapters together inform the methodology and sheds light on why the same workplace governed by the same legislation promoting equality - and the same organisational culture - result in very different experiences, expectations and ultimately career and working life decisions for men and women. Throughout the chapters, there will be a tentative attempt to answer the question: are we there yet? The answer, it seems, may be that the question needs to be re-framed – instead of asking 'are we there yet?', research needs to consider 'where are going?'



## **(ii) Research aims and objectives**

The overall aim of the research is captured in the research question: *What can narrative analysis uncover about women's working life trajectories at the time of women's second or subsequent maternity leave?* Objectives of the research from the above are identified as follows:

**Objective 1:** to consider whether career theory accommodates experiences described by women after two or more experiences of maternity leave.

**Objective 2:** to explore the possible influences – real or perceived – affecting a working woman's working life trajectory after two or more children.

**Objective 3:** to ensure women's voices are privileged and compare their reflections to academic conceptualisations of working life.

## **(iii) Outline of thesis structure**

The thesis has the following structure:

**Chapter one** describes the current context of women in paid employment, with specific reference to issues affecting women who take maternity leave, career breaks and working patterns other than full-time.

**Chapter two** positions the information above into existing career theory.

**Chapter three** offers an overview of the associated feminist perspective.

**Chapter four** describes the rationale behind the methodological options chosen for the research.

**Chapter five** describes the method in detail, outlining both procedural details of both stages of this longitudinal research – the first set of interviews, then the follow-up interviews approximately three years later. The chapter also includes detail on the narrative methods of analysis – both an abbreviated version of the biographic-interpretative narrative method and interpretative phenomenological analysis.

**Chapter six** describes the first set of findings (T1), as uncovered by the two sets of analysis conducted.

**Chapter seven** describes the second set of findings (T2), when the women are revisited, as uncovered by the two sets of analysis.

**Chapter eight** collates the findings and in this discussion chapter triangulates the findings with the literature review and research question.

**Chapter nine** highlights issues which emerged due to the nature of the methods the research adopted.

**Chapter ten** includes comments on recommendations and research conclusions.

## Chapter 1 Are we nearly there yet?

### 1.1 Women in the workforce

1. Women are still paid, on average, 22.6 per cent less per hour than men. The figure has risen slightly since 2007, when it was 21.9 per cent.
2. The full-time gender pay gap, which was 12.5 per cent in 2007, is now 12.8 per cent.
3. Pay gaps are greater for part-time workers (39.9 per cent), which is significant given that 41% of women work part-time compared with just 12 % of men.
4. Many women work below their skill levels.
5. There are 22 companies in the FTSE 100 that have all-male boards.
6. Gender discrimination due to maternity leave remains present in the employment sphere.

Adapted from Day 2009.

Figure 1: Women in the employment - an overview

Quantitative data offers an objective context for such findings. Lopez-Claro et al. (2006) placed the UK in 7<sup>th</sup> position in a study of gender equality taking the following variables into consideration: economic opportunity; economic participation; health and well-being plus political empowerment (i.e.: number of women in government). The top two countries were Sweden and Norway, America came 17<sup>th</sup> and Switzerland 34<sup>th</sup>, based on pre-recession data. The gender equality report reflects, in part, the existence of maternity legislation, which is then reflected in organisational policies – an area covered in section 1.5. With respect to women in the workplace, the latest data for Scotland states that as many women work as men (MacPherson and Bond, 2009).

In 1928, Emmeline Pankhurst led the campaign for the right to vote for women. Within living memory, women stopped work as soon as they married, or in later years, stopped when they became mothers. For example, female Civil Servants were obliged to stop work as soon as they married, despite holding a range of posts during the First and Second World War. The rationale was that women in employment was a *pis aller* (Zimmeck, 1984). With reference to the anti-married women policy during the interwar years in the 1920's and 30's:

*The Treasury's staffing policies resulted in inefficiency, under-utilization of personnel resources, and loss of morale..... It served only the singular interests of the gentlemen at the top. (Zimmeck 1984 p.924)*

This 'under-utilization' of women reflected not only the organisations' policies but also the cultural stance on married women and their employment. There were exceptions, especially where cottage industries flourished. From a legal perspective, attitudes have moved on considerably from the formally stated expectation of men to be the main breadwinners and women to stay at home once the married couple have children, to a peak in current years where equality for all in the employment world is actively sought. Trade unions played a role in the historical shift: see Budd and Mumford (2004) for an overview. In this respect, in response to the question: 'are we there yet?' in terms of employment equality, perhaps then, the answer is 'yes' – but as will be seen, there is still some way to go. Critics of success point to the 'glass ceiling' which appears to be still firmly in place globally (Zahida and Ibarra 2010); the speed of change despite legislation, is very slow. This expression of gender inequality in organisations has well described historical routes and descriptions, with which contemporary research, yet to be discussed in this literature review, is familiar. The subsequent and recently well-publicised pay gap affects women at all levels is considered next.

## **1.2 The gender pay gap**

The inequality in the workplace is well-reported (for example, Miller et al. 2008) but it is worth teasing out some of the variables which make up the facts. The pay difference between male and female employees that is widely reported both academically and in the popular press is not a new phenomenon and can be traced to the interwar years (Zimmeck 1984). Going back one generation, in 1970, the pay ratio of women's to men's average earning was 63%; this was reduced to 82% by 1982. In April, 2009, the European Human Rights Commission reported that the UK, along with Germany, Holland and Austria still had a gender pay gap of between 20-30%, whilst other European countries had managed to reduce this to 10% or under, for example: Slovenia, Malta and Belgium – Italy, notably has reduced the gap to 4.4% (Metcalf 2009). A recent report by the Chartered Management Institute (2009) suggests that women managers will have to wait 187 years before they achieve equality in terms of pay. Scottish female managers fare exceptionally badly in the report: with current rates of improvement, women need to wait 358 years before there is parity. The MacPherson and Bond report (2009) also admits that a gender pay gap still exists. Furthermore, this gap is comprehensive, it exists:

*...in full-time and part-time employment, in hourly and weekly take home pay rates, between women and men with and without dependent children, and between younger and older women and men. (MacPherson and Bond 2009 p.viii).*

There is evidence that whilst mothers who had not stopped work to raise their families were as well paid as childless women, neither were as well remunerated as men (Joshi, Paci and Walfogel 1999). This would suggest that maternity leave per se is not the problem, being a woman is. Interestingly, research suggests that the pay gap is not restricted to part-time workers or those taking leave (Hegewisch 2009). A report looking at trends over two decades published in 1995 concluded that women were still at a disadvantage in the workplace and *“the considerable barriers to progress remain and are likely to do so for some time to come.”* (Court 1995 p. 26). The pay gap therefore represents a negative, robust fact that is both well-documented and as discussed in the ‘women’s perspective’ section later, well-known. The Office for National Statistics (ONS 2011) updates the picture with seemingly positive figures: the gender pay gap overall has decreased from 10.1% to 9.1% overall. The figure below, (taken from Pike 2012) which uses mean hourly rates, puts these figures into context:

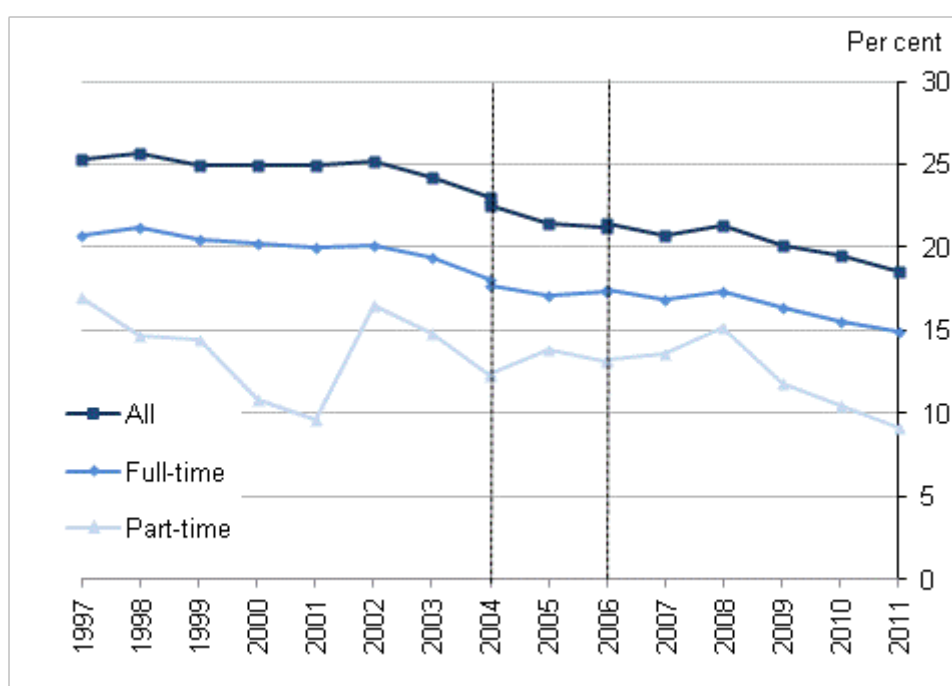


Figure 2 Pay gap between women and men's mean hourly earnings

The ONS report goes on to identify further elements of pay gap differences in the UK:

*The proportion of additional payments of mean gross weekly earnings for male employees working full-time was higher than that of their female counterparts over the period 1997 to 2011. In 2011 male employees earned £42 additional payments,*

*which accounted for 6.3 per cent of their total pay, whereas women's additional payments (£16) accounted for just 3.0 per cent of their total pay. (Pike 2012 p.9)*

The figures in the report are crude, based on median and mean descriptive statistics but they serve their purpose in identifying the on-going difference organisations pay their employees. The fact remains that 80% of the part-time workforce is female (ACAS 2010) and figures show that there is greater disparity still between part-time wages and full-time wages.

The question why the pay gap persists still remains. Some research evidence finds a strong link between the transition from full-time work to part-time work (Judiesch and Lyness 1999). The obvious time for such a transition is when a woman becomes a mother. Furthermore, if a woman takes one year out her salary drops to 89% of an equivalent man's, if she takes three or more years out, a woman's salary drops to 63% of those who do not take a break (Waldfogel 1999 cited in Hewlett, 2007). This would therefore appear to contradict Joshi et al.'s evidence. The data relies on organisational reports and an investigation in 2006, led to the conclusion that:

*despite new and substantial forms of gender impact reporting and widespread reporting of gender/diversity policies and programmes, reporting of gender impacts and performance is still generally low and idiosyncratic. (Grosser and Moon 2009 p.1)*

Are we nearly there yet? No. The answer is however, not straight-forward so a careful piecing together of different perspectives and evidence, is necessary to see the bigger picture. To begin with, the topic of flexible working patterns is explored, specifically part-time work and career breaks as these are options considered most often (although not exclusively) by women at the time they become mothers.

### **1.3 Flexible work and part-time work**

As many women start full-time employment as men, reflecting the equal education available to all and a level playing field to begin with. Proportionally, the number of women who are in employment part-time remains constant (Aston et al. 2005). In Scotland, there is a greater percentage of women working part-time, reflecting in part a higher percentage of female carers in Scotland - 62% female (cited in Downie, 2009). More recent figures suggest that 80% of part-time workers are women (ACAS 2010). Figures, however, indicate that only 43% of organisations offer part-time work (CIPD report). Free information fact-sheets are available from professional bodies (for example CIPD) and comprehensive information booklets about flexible working including impact on maternity leave from bodies such as ACAS. It is also mooted that gender equality reporting may not be entirely objective.

Realistically, there are few conditions under which an organisation will readily admit it has a gender inequality issue. An organisation is unlikely to admit to pay bias and may not even be aware of losing its employees as they become parents. Or perhaps companies may not even be aware of a bias towards promotion for male managers or a male culture. Not only might such admissions lead to legal action but there is also the possible negative impact if the media finds out (Grosser and Moon 2009). It might therefore be the case that gender inequality is actually more prevalent than figures suggest.

In summary, today as many women as men are in paid employment but many more women work part-time. A quarter of women return to full-time work after maternity leave; 40% of women taking maternity leave return to part-time work. The statistics show that pro rata women earn comparatively less; are more likely to have a lower status within their organisation and are restricted to the number of organisations that do offer flexible, part-time work (Darton and Hurrell 2005).

The legislation to support equality is in place; the statistics show that there is incongruence between demand and supply. The next section begins to address how organisations react to such figures. It will then be possible to consider how this impacts on women's decisions on their work history. Are we there yet? Taking into account the above facts, the answer for the majority of women not wishing to work full-time, would appear to be, an emphatic, "no".

#### **1.4 Maternity leave/career break definitions and rights**

Accepting that maternity leave is a critical transition point, as such it is imperative to ensure a tight definition:

*...maternity leave refers to specifically job-protected leave from employment at the time of childbirth or adoption. In many countries, maternity leave is a combined period of pre-and post childbirth leave. Most OECD countries set a certain percentage of wage replacement, ranging from 50% to 100% of wages. (Tanaka 2005 p.17)*

In the UK, there are three types of maternity leave:

- Compulsory: an employee is not allowed back within 2 weeks of childbirth;
- Ordinary: 26 weeks
- Additional: 26 weeks

Neither ordinary nor additional leave is subject to reduction based on organisation size, pay or length of service. Whilst the parameters of what constitutes maternity leave are clear cut, as will be demonstrated later in the case studies, the tight boundaries are not universally shared by all women. The majority of literature considering maternity leave or 'career break'

highlights the negative impact bearing children has on both the mother and her career path in the same way part-time work affects both career paths and also the mothers themselves (Caplan 1998). One definition of maternity leave is a *break* from work to *recover* [emphasis added] from childbirth/adoption (Hyde et al. 2001). If the focus is shifted slightly to 'career breaks', a less negative picture emerges. A good example comes from a paper written from the Irish employment law perspective:

*Employees that take career breaks, or who can look forward to one are often much more focussed on their work and come back from breaks invigorated and enthusiastic.* (Moffett 2008 p.126-127)

Alternatively, perhaps a more cynical view is that career breaks not linked to maternity leave can be taken by men and women. Notably, the Moffett paper was published in a veterinary journal where in 1998, only 33% of all UK vets were female, but this was perhaps a changing trend as only 11% were aged over 50 years. It might be argued a career break taken by a man is perceived as irrelevant in terms of career. Or even, as Moffett suggests, the career break is perceived by an organisation as a positive step. Literature in this area is very limited – men are not traditionally associated with career breaks. However, tentative analogies can be drawn from data which draws on conscription. Here, research suggests that when a man is away from work for a fixed length of time, no negative impact exists. For example:

*Whilst women's career breaks were viewed negatively by Swedish employers according to Wahl (1992), the compulsory military refresher courses for all men up to the age of 50 were seen as character-building, positive experiences.* (Singh 1999 p.123)

Legally, under the Equality Acts 2010, section 73 implies that a woman on maternity leave must not be negatively impacted by her absence with respect to pay increases. This does not represent a change in favour of women; it merely straightens out a legal technicality.

With respect to equality in career breaks, research points to the need to consider cultural understanding (Metcalf and Afanassieva 2005) rather than a legal understanding. This line of thinking is would be worth exploring further in a country such as Finland for example, which legally offers 3 months leave to the mother, 3 months to the father and 3 months to either parent. Since the 1st April 2011, parents can now share the leave (Middlemiss and Downie 2009).

Are we there yet? For women, at least, a preliminary dip into the discourse of maternity leave and legislation would suggest the response is 'no' – and certainly not in the UK.

At the simplest level, all women are entitled to one year off work after the birth of their child. The Civil Service, for example offers up to five years unpaid leave, with a guarantee of a



position in the same grade on return. There are also additional rights organisations should offer such time off for dependants in an emergency. The legislation is designed to support women's rights to equality but its impact is not necessarily positive in so far as offering choice to parents as to when they return to paid employment. A very good example was offered by cross-cultural research evidence collected by Saurel-Cubizolles et al. (1999). Findings suggested that the different social policies in Spain, Italy and France made a significant difference to the length of maternity leave taken. Also, the educational level of the mothers pre-maternity leave, led to widening social inequality after maternity leave. Legislative changes are not always as universally applied: between 1987 and 1994, state and federal laws in America led to an increase in paid leave. Only highly educated women benefit from the legislation and it only affected half the workforce since size of organisation and tenure were critical to the application of the legislation (Han, Ruhm and Waldfogel 2009). Just as legislation is an important variable to consider, so is the economy. The last recession broke down the class divide visible in women's return rates to work (Smeaton 2006). Similarly, political environment plays a role in maternity leave decisions. An insightful study by Metcalf and Afanassieva (2005) found post-socialist politics had a negative effect on women's rights in Central and Eastern Europe. In the UK, women are arguably as influenced by cultural expectations as our political environment is relatively stable.

Returning to definitions of maternity leave, career leave and associated rights, are we nearly there yet? Quantitative data in the UK and further afield suggests that legislation is heading in the direction of equality of opportunity for women and there are clear efforts to move towards such equality, politics, economy. But are we nearly there yet? No, but the state is trying to ensure equality legally.

The next section focuses on the organisation's perspective of women, specifically working mothers, before moving on to how these organisations' policies and procedures are managing working mothers and their leave.

## THE ORGANISATION'S PERSPECTIVE

### 1.5 Organisations, women and maternity leave.

So far, there is evidence to suggest that there are inequality issues surrounding women and their status as working mothers. Furthermore, there is also legislation to enforce equality and designed to eradicate gender discrimination, yet problems obviously exist for those women who stop work to raise a family, and/or take a career break, especially if their return is part-time. What organisational perceptions have been exposed by relevant research? The problem is particularly well reflected in studies of dual career roles (for example: Smith, 1997) where the balance between family and work is magnified, especially where both parents are in paid employment and considering re-location. In recent years, this growing body of evidence has also taken the father's perspective into focus, for example, Henwood and Procter (2003). The dual role parent issue was not considered in the current research and the focus here will be on the mother's perspective. The four topic areas outlined in the introduction of this chapter will now be considered from the organisation's perspective, namely: women in the workplace (and the glass ceiling); the gender pay gap; flexible working (including part-time work) and maternity leave.

### 1.6 Women in the workplace and the glass ceiling

As mentioned at 1.2 statistics confirm that women are simply not achieving the same pay or positions as men consistently (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). Pregnancy is still identified as a stigma in the world of paid employment (King and Botsford 2009). From an organisational perspective, the problem is twofold. Firstly, if not enough women are applying to work in any given organisation, the selection system suffers from a restricted sample. This issue has in the past been a sector wide problem, which specific industries, sometimes with government funding have tackled head on by targeting women students at university. Strong support is growing to reduce this within organisations, see for example the Athena Swan Standards (2005) aimed at supporting women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. By signing up to this charter, universities agree to abide by best practice guidelines that support women's careers in science. In Scotland, the barriers and financial implications of losing women from science is highlighted in the Royal Society of Edinburgh's (2012) report: *Tapping all our Talents*. The issue appears to be less of women being attracted to traditionally male sectors, as it is maintaining them - the glass ceiling seems to hinder progress (for example: Cotter et al, 2001). Davis et al. (2005) report that many employers are simply unaware of pregnancy related rights. These gaps in knowledge, hinder equality attempts as the ignorance has a knock-on effect in employer's ability to negotiate with their

employees or design effective policies (for example: Buzzanell and Lui, 2005). Another issue commonly raised by women as a barrier to progression within an organisation, is the long hours working culture prevalent in the UK (Court, 1995). This not only restricts women's progress if they have family commitments but more importantly leads to a negative perception of the woman if she does not join in and work the 40, 50 or 60+ hours a week (Acker 1990, Dick 2010). Organisations often perceive this lack of physical presence as a lack of commitment (Stone, 2008), which hinders promotion prospects. Furthermore, research on organisational citizenship has found that it is exactly this input of the extra hours that demonstrates commitment and the 'added effort' becomes the norm, which working mothers cannot or will not subscribe to (Singh, 1999). This leads to a masculine work culture, reinforced and perpetuated by the lack of working mothers able to join in. Such cultures were typical in Stones' (2008) case studies of high flyers who 'opted out', or as Hewlett describes it in her book, women who go 'off-ramps' (Hewlett 2007). The lack of awareness of rights and male-dominated culture begins to shed light on why maternity leave and flexible working are not good news for women. For some organisations, women who are working part-time, unable to show "commitment" - and therefore already marginalised - are perceived to be further distancing themselves when they take maternity leave (Hewlett, 2007). The story of the glass ceiling is common and has filtered through from academic writing to popular culture and discussion articles in newspapers, for example: '*Pease sparks the mother of all rows suggesting a year's maternity leave is too long...*' where the one year maternity leave option was described as damaging for careers - and organisations (Walsh 2009).

It is worth highlighting here too, that the current recession may prove to be a greater factor in this complex picture than initially assumed. Jobs are being cut in public sectors, traditionally associated with higher percentages of women (TUC 2010). Career breaks for women have already been linked to the inequality issues in the workforce (Arun et al 2004). Right now, however, career breaks are being embraced by organisations affected by the recession. Some organisations have offered career breaks across the board as a means by which to reduce costs at critical times, thus reducing the need for redundancies. Examples include British Airways where 4000 people took up the offer of an unpaid break (Taylor, 2009). Time will tell whether such broadening of career breaks lessens the stigma attached to taking time off work. It is feasible that the new extended demographics of those taking career breaks could lead to a change in a general change in approach to women taking career breaks to raise children. However, acceptability of career breaks is not a panacea - problems women face of displaying organisational citizenship and demonstrating commitment from an organisation's perspective will not be resolved solely through more career breaks being

taken. Again, the media's reflections together with organisational policy plus expectations will all feed into decision-making processes women make at the time of maternity leave about longer term career plans.

### **1.7 Gender pay gap**

Over half of those who return to work part-time as working mothers take a pay cut and often take on work which requires lesser responsibility and skills (Darton and Hurrell 2005). The gender pay gap is very well explored and documented. It is widely reported academically although new research papers continue to explore why the pay gap persists. For example, Judge and Livingstone (2008) conclude that traditional gender role attitudes are slowly disintegrating but many variables contribute, as the quotation from the ONS report in section 1.2 illustrates. When reviewing literature, consideration needs to be given to nationality of participants, sector, age of employees etc. before generalising. Figure 2 demonstrates the general pattern of discrimination organisations have been permitted to develop and continue. The Equality Acts (2010) did include provision for a pay survey (Section 78). This would have led to pay differences between genders within organisations of 250 or more employees being exposed. Whilst some of the larger organisations did pre-empt this requirement, the present coalition government opted not to include this provision. The pay survey is not therefore a legal requirement. In this respect, the Equality Act lost an opportunity to be more than a consolidating Act.

It is worth stopping to consider what information about the pay gap are organisations exposed to. Current news stories reflect the problems of trying to introduce a level playing field, for example, an approach to ensure equal pay has led to strike action in Leeds Council, leaving street cleaning and rubbish collection on hold. In short, the moves to ensure men and women received equal pay in similar jobs left several hundred workers worse off. The council is obviously an organisation clearly attempting to deal with inequality of pay but in doing so, perhaps causing further negativity towards women and the legislation put in place to protect their pay. Are we there yet? No, but organisations are unwittingly being positioned to consider how they manage career breaks and even if aware of the legislation they may not necessarily be aware of the best way forward. If they are informed, they are not necessarily encouraged to put best practice (for example pay surveys) into place.

### **1.8 Flexible work and part-time work**

When organisations attempt to offer family friendly working patterns, employees do not necessarily feel able to take up better work-life balance options (Kodz, Harper and Dench 2002) . A request to move from full-time to part-time puts a sharp focus on the nature of the

individual's psychological contract with her line manager but any decision will also have a group wide effect (Dick 2006). From a legislative perspective, the list of reasons of when an organisation has the right to refuse flexible working options, could be perceived as support for an organisations lack of investment in contractual variety for employees. The list of permitted reasons for not allowing flexible workings is as follows:

- i. burden of additional costs;
- ii. the detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand;
- iii. an inability to re-organise work among existing staff;
- iv. an inability to recruit staff;
- v. the detrimental impact on performance;
- vi. insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work;
- vii. planned structural changes. (Employment Rights Act 1996 section 80G(1) (b))

Unsurprisingly, this is difficult to challenge and the maximum penalty an organisation faces is limited to 8 weeks pay. This is further compounded by a three month maximum delay to lodge an appeal and limited or no legal aid. It would appear the law takes the side of the employer in this area. From this fact and the picture painted at the start of the chapter, it is possible to surmise that the choice and availability of paid employment remains limited for those who opt for part-time work, notably women. The Equality Act (2010) does offer improvements: for example, there is no longer a qualifying period of service required before a request for part-time work is made – and in fact, the law is on an applicant's side if a full-time post is advertised (Downie 2009). As was discussed in 1.6, this knowledge is not widely known. There are organisations which have introduced policies which actively monitor career progression within specialist grade banding, for example in accordance with Athena Swann standards. Athena Swan standards are linked to a charter set up in 2005, which universities can sign up to. Bronze, silver and gold levels can be achieved through demonstration of commitment to supporting women in their employment. Such schemes help ensure salaries are not negatively affected after maternity leave. The organisations which agree to specifically supporting women's employment and retention, such as those striving to meet Athena Swan type standards, tend to be the larger, public organisations, with recognised unions, highly educated employees and a large proportion of women. Dex and Smith (2002) support this conclusion and it is evidenced across a number of sectors. Tomlinson (2004) for example, paints a depressing picture of flexible working pattern experiences in the UK hospitality sector. Part-time work equated with less promotion and less skills development for those with fewer qualifications. Managers experienced flexibility if they were perceived to be a valuable asset to the organisation. Negotiations however, were based on informal arrangements and as such, very open to unfair practices. Tomlinson argues there is a strong business case for family friendly policies but those interviewed at

best, often perceived restrictive flexibility, in other words, flexibility but at a cost. The discontent over the necessity to work full-time, as it stands meaning over and above the contractual hours in the UK, is spreading and is not restricted to women. Patricia Fili-Krushel, executive vice president of administration at Time Warner at House of Commons in 2005 stated that there was a drain of valuable employees due to men's increasing desire to spend time with their families. Kodz, Harper and Dench (2002) found that employers are aware of these changing demands; only some organisations are trying to meet them. According to their research, employers are reporting low take up and describe this as a work-life balance 'take-up gap'. The stigma organisations associate with job sharing is roughly equivalent for men and women (27% and 35%) and Hewlett (2007) further describes flexible working as "*so toxic, [that] women routinely quit rather than apply for policies that ostensibly are on the books*" (p. 32). Again, men are seen by their employers to be more committed; they are more visible and likely to work the longer hours (Bailyn 1984). Findings such as Tomlinson's, and Kodz, Harper and Dench's (2002), are representative of the vast majority of research in the area and mirror the negative picture painted in the introduction. Flexible working of any sort, whilst available by some organisations in the UK does indeed seem a 'toxic' choice. There is, also, an increasing awareness that whilst the legislation appears to generally support women, there is a problem which needs to be addressed - a 'brain drain' or as the Royal Society of Edinburgh (2012) describes it: 'a leaky pipe'. Organisations are beginning to recognise and address this – at the simplest level because it costs them money but also as there are less obvious gains, too. Examples of approaches will be described in the following section.

## **1.9 Maternity leave**

Women who might take maternity leave are to be avoided as far as many organisations are concerned. Anecdotal evidence is plentiful even though new legislation now squashes the most blatant expressions of such discrimination – there is still a shortfall of research evidence (Hegewisch 2009). Interviewers are not allowed to ask whether interviewees are planning to have any more children, for example. Nor are they allowed to use pregnancy as a reason for not hiring a candidate otherwise identified as employable (Dekker v Stichting Vormingscentrum voor Jong Volwassnen (VIV Centrum) Plus). In this case, the employer-to-be argued unsuccessfully that the burden of maternity leave payment would not be covered by insurance, therefore using the financial detriment to the organisation as defence. The ruling was that since employment was based on pregnancy it amounted to sex discrimination (Middlemiss and Downie 2012). The author's own experience of training interviewers confirms the difficulty some course participants (both male and female) face in accepting a women of child-bearing age, (or 'worse still', a women returning to work *after*

maternity leave part-time), as anything other than a second choice to an equivalently skilled and experienced man. Without a well-rehearsed policy, there will be more effort to manage those returning from leave full-time. Legally, a woman on maternity leave should be notified of any relevant vacancies or promotions in her organisation. More fundamentally, research suggests that some employers are simply neither offering flexibility nor are open to alternative to the full-time norm, (Kodz, Harper and Dench 2002). Yet the rewards for the effort, for example, increased employee engagement, for an organisation that does offer an accommodating approach, are high (Miller et al, 2008). Secondly, the authors suggest organisations should make it transparent what effect various career trajectories might have so they can make an informed decision. Since the career trajectories appear to be rather negative if maternity leave is taken, this might increase the 'brain drain' and reduce the return to work statistics. Statistics over the decades do however, show a gradual increase in women returning to their previous employment from maternity leave, which could be due to both better protection of employment and greater financial need (Metcalf 2009). A good example is that it has been calculated that as long as women return to work within a year, there is no economic consequence to the individual or economy (Joshi, Paci, and Waldfogel, 1998; Waldfogel cited in Millward, 2006). The support for flexible working hours is made strongly in the Law Society's consultation document on 'Modern Work Practices' (2011). Organisations do not appear to mirror this support. Although whether it is possible to force modern work practices in all but the largest of organisations needs to be questioned. Instead, Liu and Buzzanell (2004) suggest a more micro-level solution seeking approach is taken by employers:

*...maternity leave can be viewed as a situation posing dilemmas for bosses. Bosses may consider workplace pregnancy and maternity leave to be predicaments because they work to sustain organizational effectiveness, whereas maternity leave may connote absence from the office, increased tasks for others, scheduling difficulties, or worry about project deadlines (for example, Mock and Bruno, 1994; Schwartz, 1989). (Liu and Buzzanell 2004 p.325)*

One option for women is to minimise the time off after having a child and returning to work part-time. 'Judith' one of Hewlett's case studies explains how incomprehensible this is to organisations approached by women returning to work after a career break:

*Potential employers don't understand how anyone would opt for a pay cut. They simply can't grasp that an ambitious professional would not want to make as much money as possible; they seem unwilling to understand that other goals could be more important. (Hewlett 2007 p.109)*

There is also research which suggests that perhaps the negativity is limited to poorly informed individuals within organisations, rather than an issue at an organisational level. In

other words, although processes and systems are in place, it is individual managers who are not following protocols, for example, with regards risk assessment for pregnant women, (Davis et al. 2005) – or keeping up to date with legislative changes, for example: the new maternity rights or implications of the Equality Acts. Interestingly, this finding comes from qualitative research, which is more open to listening to women's voices and thus arguably better reflects experiences and the reasons for the statistics – although this is the researcher's opinion. That said, the legislation, which organisations are readily exposed to, must be in place in the first instance. In the United States, tenure is critical to the access to rights, less so in the UK. Within the UK, however, it seems even if legislation is relevant and organisational policies appeared to be supportive, then, there may be a counter-culture working against it, as described by Borrell and Kidd (1994). The Borrell and Kidd study was a small scale one, involving interviewing parents on their working lives after their first child - and the paper is over ten years old. More recent research continues to find similar results as described in the next section which continues considering the women's perspective. Findings point to a common, often covert and/or inadvertent discrimination in organisational culture, which women face at the time of maternity leave. Why this organisational level discrimination persists, is a question not easily answered as contributing factors come from many directions. For example, Prescott and Bogg (2012) found a persistent correlation between masculinity and job fit. The research used Sandra' Bem's sex role inventory (1974, 1994), which is linked to classic research exposing health professionals' perception of a 'normal healthy adult' with the traits associated with a 'normal healthy male' (Broverman et al. 1970):

*Thus, for a woman to be healthy, from an adjustment viewpoint, she must adjust to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex, even though these behaviors are generally less socially desirable and considered to be less healthy for the generalized competent, mature adult. (Broverman et al. 1970 p.6)*

Even where policies incorporate legislative rights for women, it is perhaps no surprise that women in the workplace still experience negativity from their employers. Together with qualitative research, (for example Sandberg 2000) research is beginning to give a clear insight into why from an organisational perspective a negative reply is often given to the question: are we there yet?

The question which next must be addressed is: what are organisations doing to manage the negative response to the question? Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) use a metaphor, which is summarised on the next page:



### **A different world**

A world exists, which is ruled by short people. Discrimination against tall people has been finally acknowledged and change is planned. Three options exist:

- a. Teach tall people to act short. For example, stooping, sitting in a hunched position.
- b. Celebrate differences. In short, encourage tall people to do jobs that short people find difficult, for example: stack tall shelves.
- c. Make some changes, specifically offering fast track routes for those tall people negatively affected by the rules of the short people.

**Figure 3: Discrimination management metaphor from Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000.**

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), suggest the third option leads to offering flexible working hours; mentoring schemes and adding back time to women's tenure on return from maternity leave. (These suggestions form the basis of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report and reflect the Athena Swan standards, Wallace, 2012). The authors also argue that all this does not eradicate the rules created by the short people. Indeed, the literature review supports the not wholly successful adoption of this third option, which from academic articles appears popular at the present time.

Option (a) is suggesting instead that men are taught to act more like women. This does not happen anywhere in paid employment – no courses exist that are aimed at men to help them act more like women in their respective organisations. Only organisations set up by women appear to promote non-masculine approaches to work for example, White Stuff and Body Shop. In the 1990's training courses strove to teach women to be more dominant in their presence and use this stance in negotiations and discussion with male counterparts. For example, the Civil Service ran a course called: 'Development for Women' in the mid 1990's. More recently, there are efforts encouraging women to play golf. For example, an organisation, the 'LPGA Golf Clinics for Women' on its website makes explicit links to the need to fast track to a man's world:

***Empowering women through the game of golf.***

*Breaking through the glass ceiling.*

*Why is learning to play this game so important? It is about inclusiveness and access. As women continue to gain prominence as a powerful recognizable force in both private and public sectors, we need to call upon every known resource to gain that competitive edge as we whittle away at the “glass” or perhaps “grass ceiling.” If an MBA would provide you with that advantage, then you would work diligently to earn that degree. If your company was doing business with a foreign entity you would probably attempt to become more proficient with that language. If meeting face-to-face with a key decision maker was of paramount importance, you would exhaust all of your resources in that effort. Believe me when I say that the ability to play golf will offer you greater advantages and opportunities than all of the above. (Taken from: LPGA Golf Clinics for women, 2010).*

**Figure 4: Advertisement aimed at women in business.**

Are we there yet? No. Importantly, the question remains as to whether organisations accept where the end destination is – or needs to be.

## **WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE**

### **1.10 Women in the workplace:**

A rather negative picture has been painted with respect to equality for women in the workplace in terms of pay, career progression despite legislative support. A vivid account in the British Medical Journal by a woman who decided to change her career at 40 also offers an insight into the reaction women are given to the news of pregnancy: "*Each maternity break that I had would raise the question of whether I wanted to return*" reflecting the common default opinion that paid employment will stop with the start of a family. The story in fact sends out a positive message about changing careers despite the hurdles (Dawson 2006). Whilst the organisational perspective on working mothers and associated working patterns and leave periods reflect an uneasy relationship, this section considers the research from a woman's perspective about her workplace. The section seeks to understand how the organisation's stance affects women's perceptions of her working life? In doing so, it considers what type of information, cultural norms and expectations about working mothers are reflected in women's perceptions and decision-making. It is possible to surmise that the sexist gaffe caught on camera here, is indicative of the attitude many have to women in the workplace. (BBC News, 2009b) The reference is to a video clip, which shows a journalist asking whether the room of consultants are secretaries, an assumption he admits was based on their gender to the incredulity of his co (female) presenter. Another article, in the Daily Telegraph claims in its headline: '*Working Mothers 'damage their children's health'*'. In fact, the headline is misleading, as the research which originally sparked the article was commenting the extensive use of nurseries with low ratios of staff to children. Are we nearly there yet? Taking into consideration the relatively short historical period in which it has become normal for women to work, the answer is 'not yet', there is still much surface negativity associated with working mothers generally. There is next a need to consider what part do women play in reinforcing or breaking the common perceptions. The following sections consider the same sub-topics as previously: gender pay gaps, flexible working and maternity leave.

### **1.11 Gender pay gap**

The gender pay gap is well publicized in a variety of media. Legally, section 78 of the Equality Act, which attempted to stop employees gaining access to other's pay, was deemed to be unenforceable. This type of information is however, not readily available to women. Nor will women in organisations generally be exposed to academic papers. Instead secondary sources via the newspapers and magazines will be seen. For example: there is often a flurry

of reports as new statistics are released, such as a survey by the Institute of Directors released in November 2007, led to newspaper articles such as “Why women are still poor relations?” (*Independent Saturday* 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007). Then there are token articles re-addressing the balance, often highlighting other European approaches, often Scandinavian. An example took the cover of the *Sunday Times* magazine: “*Now Who’s Wearing the Trousers?*” Such articles are in the minority; negative reminders are far more common. A famous case, which first tested the Equal Pay Act, was brought forward by Julie Hayward, then a cook in Birkenhead, now Bexley’s Head of Youth Services (Trowsdale, 2009). The news stories on women in the workplace however, far out-number the positive stories and generally, it appears to be the case of not *which* sectors have instances of pay inequality, but *where and to what degree*, in the UK, it exists (Holdsworth, 2009), see below.

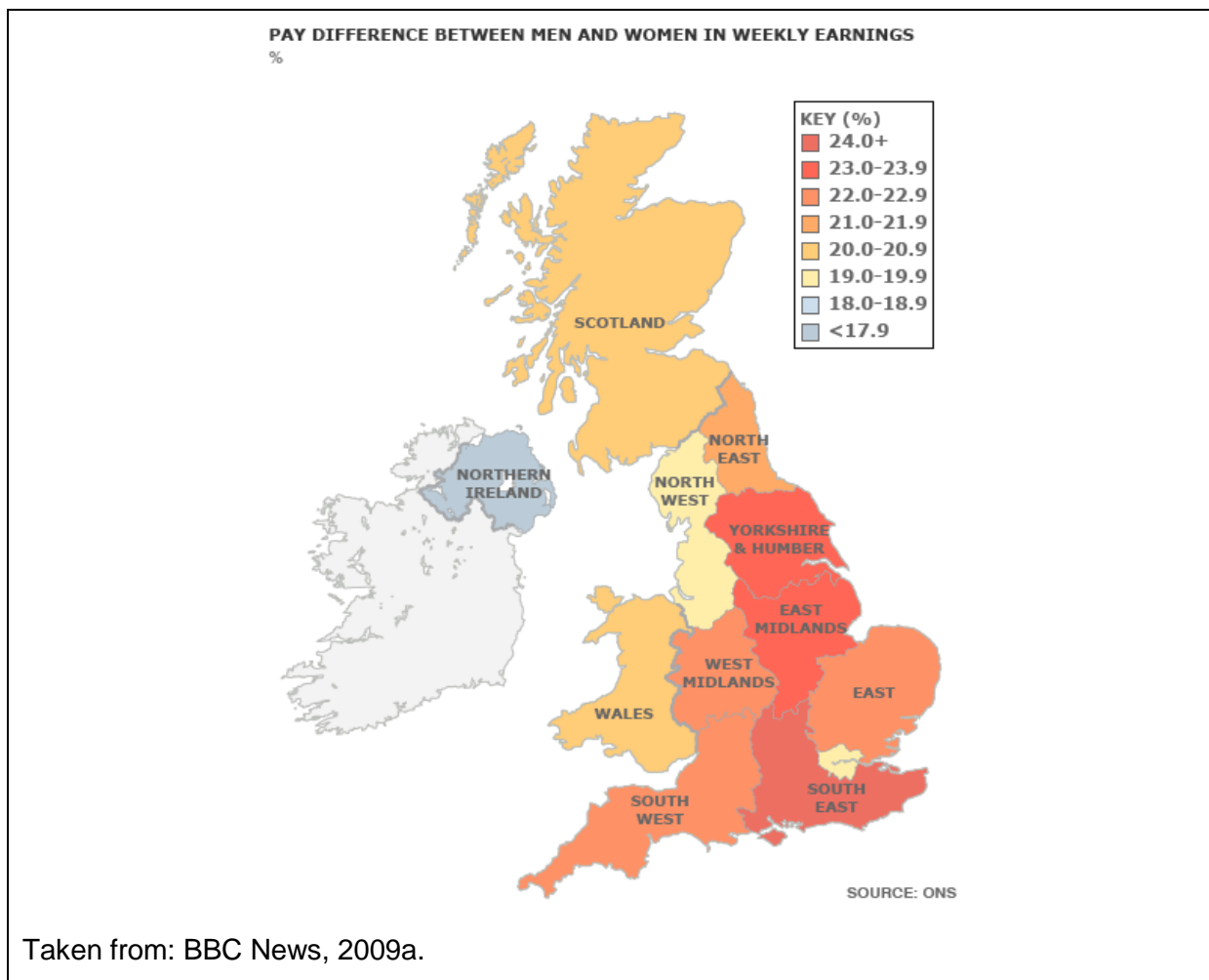


Figure 5: UK summary of gender pay differences

Working women are therefore exposed to negative portrayals regularly by the media and simultaneously ostensibly ‘equality’ messages from their organisation. In response, the internet has seen a steady rise of forums, networking sites and advice groups, aimed

specifically at working mothers written by women, for example: [mumandworking.co.uk](http://mumandworking.co.uk); [netmums.co.uk](http://netmums.co.uk); [workingmumsday.co.uk](http://workingmumsday.co.uk). [mumsincontrol.co.uk](http://mumsincontrol.co.uk); [motheratwork.co.uk](http://motheratwork.co.uk) etc. The content of such websites is broadly similar and increasingly vocal. [workingmums.co.uk](http://workingmums.co.uk) is typical: the first blog discussion point reads: “*Flexible working: a female myth or are men just not aware of the benefits?*” The sites, some of which are franchises, also commonly address work-life balance issues; naming ‘good’ companies to work for and offer advice regarding rights, especially regarding flexible work. Interestingly, there are similar sites for working fathers for example: [fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://fatherhoodinstitute.org) but these are far fewer in number. Notably, the ‘Fatherhood Institute’ (2012) reflects the gender pay gap as an issue for men too:

*The fact that men's earnings are generally a higher proportion of the family income than women's can limit the time men are able to spend with their children. Different patterns emerge where women earn more.* (Fatherhood Institute 2012 [online])

Such comments indicate that there is more to the simplistic figures offered by the ONS summaries (Pike 2012) and illustrated in figure 2. The gender pay is narrowing but this could be due to a skewed sample. The fact that women are frequently and openly exposed to concepts such as the ‘glass ceiling’ for example may discourage them from applying for jobs where discrimination is known to exist - or be discouraged to seek higher responsibility and status, where again, it is acknowledged that women are in the minority, for example CEO roles. This perspective of the gender pay gap concentrates statistics better reflecting organisations which do carry out pay surveys and suggest a false improvement in the gender pay gap - a potential type 1 error.

The UK lags behind other European countries with regards fairness in a number of family related measures (Williams 2010). It could be argued that websites and reports reflect what women (and men) are interested in and reflects their current issues and needs. Such trawls through the internet however, without a systematic methodology, simply add anecdotal evidence.

One way in which to address the contradiction between organisational values of equality and policy outcome is to apply the concept of ‘doublethink’ (El-Sawad, Arnold and Cohen 2004). Simply put, the notion of doublethink is where two contradictory narratives are offered by the same individual, seemingly unaware of the contradiction. The El-Sawad et al. paper even offers two examples of gender discrimination in their small sample: one view reflecting the equal opportunities policy and one view, the opposite reality. It might be argued that women also demonstrate double-think – adopting a different set of values in the workplace, as employees. An alternative explanation could be to hypothesise an association between an organisation’s personality (Brown 2010) and the experience a woman may have within

certain types of organisations. Or, the incongruity of women's values and that of the organisations are so exacerbated by the time of motherhood when the pay gap due to maternity leave is most salient, it leads to opting out. The latter appears to be the hypothesis authors such as Hewlett (2007) embrace. This then might lead to a different construction of working life in which motherhood as a new career is considered an option (Palladino Schultheiss 2009). Another explanation of the women's acceptance of a pay gap, and indeed a more general discrimination against them, especially at the time of maternity leave is to consider their perception of agency. If the woman feels she has agency in her decision, she is subsequently less likely to perceive discrimination as a factor in her decision-making process. This was tested experimentally through the manipulation of the saliency of own decision-making (Stephens and Levine 2011). The experimental group rated gender discrimination in a questionnaire as less evident in the workplace when choice was reinforced subtly through a poster on the wall with the title: "Choosing to Leave". The authors hypothesise causal links to a woman's decreased likelihood to report discrimination and society's tendency to inaction if this model is correct. An extrapolation of these findings therefore suggests that media articles in the UK will raise saliency of women's belief of agency when they accept lower pay. Regardless, this does not consider the woman's own sense-making at times of critical decision-making. Stephens and Levine's choice framework has not yet been developed this far. Klein et al. (1998) found that incongruence with preferred employment status was correlated with anxiety and anger. Length of maternity leave and whether employment was part-time or full-time did not have as significant effects on mothers' mental health, reflecting the importance of the right decision being made. Ideally, this type of finding should encourage organisation's adherence to legislation which under their duty of trust and confidence require them to contact their employee during maternity leave to consult about their return to work (Middlemiss and Downie 2012). A recent survey by Women Like Us (2012) however, revealed how unsupported women felt they were outwith maternity leave and how unlikely any previous career advice was to be relevant to their new circumstances as mothers. The combination of organisational perspectives and current norms appear to inadvertently both raise the profile of inequality and perpetuate it to some degree – and this includes the persistence of a pay gap.

### **1.12 Part-time work and flexible work**

From an organisation's perspective, flexible working rights are either avoided, intentionally or otherwise, or perceived to be troublesome – indeed returning to a professional role as a mother is enough reason, research suggests, for difficulties to be experienced (Dick 2010). Women's websites mirror this. An employee's right to flexible working is now well-established however; the method of enforcement is weak. Organisations found in breach of

this legislation face a restricted penalty as previously mentioned. Part-time work, as already described, equates with less promotion and less skills development for those with fewer skills - and there is little legislation to prevent part-time work being equivalent to full-time work. Research taking a women's perspective on problems faced with employment which is not full-time does exist: for example, Tomlinson (2004) paints a depressing picture of what women experience in the UK hospitality sector. Female managers described how they enjoyed flexibility if they were perceived to be a valuable asset to the organisation. This so-called flexibility blurs the line between part-time work and flexible work. Tomlinson describes negotiations which were based on informal arrangements. As such, negotiations between employee and employer were likely to be associated with unfair practices. There are plenty of media articles reflecting the demand for flexible work, see for example the BBC (2009c) as well as the aforementioned websites. But a Department of Trade and Industry survey, of over 1000 individuals found that less than 50% of respondents were aware of flexible work entitlements (2005) which does not mirror take up. Research suggests that the perceived cause of such figures also lies with managers, who are often perceived to be unwilling to consider alternative working patterns (Borrell and Kidd 1994). Women have come to expect this potential discrimination and lack of awareness. The result is that women are placed in position of lesser power - and therefore less able to negotiate a psychological contract. Many women, Hewlett (2007) notes, in response to this negatively weighted scenario, go 'off-ramps' or take a 'scenic route' with respect to their careers. In fact, she calculates the number of fully qualified women perceiving employment inequality and opting out of the planned linear career path could be as high as 60%. Many might argue that organisations are right to be wary of part-time work. Visser and Hemerijk (1997) describe management of unemployment in Holland, through the promotion of part-time work. It is of interest to this paper that jobs the Dutch offer as part-time, are exclusively considered full-time only in southern Europe. The perception of working patterns other than full-time are clearly socially constructed and women's expectations arguably lead to a degree of self-fulfilling expectations.

### **1.13 Maternity leave**

Focussing specifically on maternity leave legislation, in the UK there are moves towards increasing rights for women with respect to maternity leave entitlement and guaranteed positions to return to. It is worthy of note that legally however, the woman returning from maternity leave does not have the right to return to the same job (*Blundell v St. Andrew's Primary School*). Again, media articles tend to highlight the negative corollary: the Daily Mail, (Barrow, 2005) announcing one such move to increase leave, in the very first paragraph spoke of a '*chaos for companies*'. The article then continued to describe a '*further blow*' with

respect to the need to leave the job open for returning women. It was noteworthy that the first comment online in response to this article was as follows: “*I worked for a company for many years that had an unwritten policy of employing women over 40 for this very reason*” Freddie, Northants 4/10/2006. Research suggests that in fact men and women generally respond the same behaviourally to different situations but differences become evident when considering reactions to negative emotions (Hess et al. 2007). There is suggestion that such differences are due to socialisation processes (Broody 1985). Further gender differences become salient at the time leading up to maternity leave, specifically affecting decision making. For example: “*The choice of women’s meanings of contribution to the collective rather than to the individual*” (Singh 1999 p. 276) which suggests a different basis from which to make decisions regarding working life. The woman may therefore be more inclined to consider first collective (family over employment), then herself, whereas a man contributions will place emphasis on the individual (career) first – both genders may be striving for the same end goal of family **and** work stability. Furthermore, Lui and Buzzanell (2004) suggest that when it comes to negotiations, there is an assumption that that women take charge – in fact however, the discourse, is weighted against women. They go on to say:

*Assessing how policies are perceived and carried out depends, in part, on stakeholders’ differential expectations. Because maternity leave is a socially constructed process within particular interactional contexts and organizational structures, organizational members might have very different interpretations of what is appropriate, reasonable, and negotiable. When these expectations conflict, there can be opportunities for dialogue aimed at developing shared understandings. However, there also can be failed communication attempts, that is, perceived inability to reconcile expectations and negotiate interests. (Lui and Buzzanell 2004 p.324)*

This quote is particularly poignant as it draws together evidence and ideas from the previous sections. The ‘stakeholders’ are often managers and they also represent the larger stakeholder, the organisation. These managers may well have different interpretations of organisational policies, which themselves are interpretations of changing legislation. Whilst the legislation is clear, for example with regards the need to offer a job, albeit not the same one, not giving the women an opportunity to state a preference can lead to successful claims of discrimination (aforementioned *Blundell v. St Andrew’s Primary School*). Add in a woman’s expectation, which is formed, in part inevitably from exposure to negative statistics and press and there is little surprise then, that the result is ‘failed communication’. Hewlett’s (2007) snapshot survey found that 93% of women planned to return after their maternity leave. This makes the statistic of 40% returners outlined in the first section more extreme. More research from the women’s perspective is needed, admitted by Lui and Buzzanell,



(2004) whose sample consisted of 15 participants. Whilst insightful, it is not a study which can lead to generalisations. The combined weight of in-depth studies is nonetheless robust. Alban-Metcalf and West (1991) articulate the issues women managers face, which are multiplied when maternity leave is taken. The Daphne Jackson Trust (1991) identifies that maternity leave is a time taken to enhance skills, the example offered is women who take the step towards tutoring with the Open University or Workers Educational Association (WEA). Even where such work is paid, there is little value attached to this by organisations if it is conducted during maternity leave – despite the benefits reported by the women. Legally, women are entitled to up to 10 paid days during maternity leave and this can be used for training purposes. This does not affect her statutory pay and it is voluntary.

Millward (2006) explored the transition period from worker to mother using interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology. This idiographic approach promotes the women's voice and as such limits any preconceptions. The findings support the negativity associated with taking maternity leave and calls for better management of the transition. A difficulty with studying maternity leave decisions rests with the fact that there if the researcher takes an organisational perspective, the sample is often self-selected from one or more organisations' employees. (Millward offers a rare exception). Hyde et al. (2001) for example, comments that 74% of their sample believed maternity leave was too short and financial constraints restricted further time off. By not including those that did not return, it is not possible to gain a complete picture. Stone make a strong case for her in-depth exploration of those 'opting out' as her sample consists solely of Ivy League graduates or otherwise proven highly qualified 'high flyers'. Hewlett's extensive research, together with Stone's (2007) does specifically consider the factors associated with maternity leave decisions from a woman's perspective but both are based on an American sample. As has already been demonstrated, the popular press offers interpretations of academic research, to which women are exposed – and this in turn may also reflect cultural norms and expectations.

#### **1.14 Role conflict**

Research on women's working careers often points to role conflict – a robust finding regardless of the methodology. It is therefore important to be clear about what variables in this conflict are perceived to exist. Judge and Colquitt (2004) suggest that work-family conflict is a term used for a variety of scenarios. The two key variables most often seen to be incompatible are family time and work demands. The Hyde study (2001) was specifically looking at the length of maternity leave and correlates this variable with a general sense of role overload, not to mention personal and marital distress (Hyde 1994). The repercussions of role conflict are far-reaching and deeply rooted (Gueutal and Taylor 1991) and start with

the disclosure of pregnancy, as described by King and Botsford (2009). The latter paper takes an employee perspective, applying a stigma theory. Specifically, the timing of disclosure is found to have an impact on the favourable outcome for women, with early disclosure being favourable. From a management perspective, it seems obvious that the more time given to prepare for change, the better. The relationship between disclosure and management is more complex, take for example the paper's eighth proposition: "*Delay of expectant status disclosure will partially mediate the relationships between number and clarity of policies and intra-individual and interpersonal outcomes*" (p.7) Certainly, the current research acknowledges the importance of perceived individual managers' support, almost regardless of organisational policy, as already noted. It however, might be argued that if one takes into consideration the difficulties women face, as detailed in this chapter up to this point, the notion of 'role conflict' might be interpreted as further placing the 'problem' at the women's feet. Hewlett (2007) offers an example, which could be used to demonstrate this shift of an essentially gender neutral issue to a working mother issue:

*...another scenario had two members of a team arriving late for an early morning meeting. Both were single parents, one a father and one a mother. The team joked about and then forgot the man's tardiness but assumed the woman was having child care problems. After the meeting the team leader, a woman, suggested that she think seriously about her priorities.* (Hewlett 2007 p.66)

It might even be argued that the very fact that the problem of work-life balance is more commonly and openly discussed in our society might be due to it fundamentally being an issue men are also suffering. The work-life balance discourse has, in effect, moved into an arena open to men and women (McCracken 2000). An example of this shift is the increasing number of politicians referring to their family lives as sources of knowledge and experience – although inevitably, some overlaps are driven by political motives and 'character marketing' which can backfire (Flatt, 2009). Examples of good organisational practice to improve work-life balance do exist, increasingly packaged as improving work-life balance for *all* employees. Many organisations' 'About us' pages acknowledge working life balance as a 'selling' point of their policies (for example BT 2005) It has become common in our culture's discourse and organisations are attempting to acknowledge this in their websites, as described. To move to this point, organisations have to instigate culture change. Small wins strategies have been successful. Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) for example describe a European retail company whose strategies included tackling the lack of clarity and discipline in working hours for example. The notion of 'unbounded time' was slowly accepted into the organisational language and was mentioned whenever meetings were scheduled at short notice, over-ran or were booked outside normal office hours. Similarly, interview lengths were increased so that interviewees had time to work against first impressions and questions

were asked about how they could contribute to the firm's mission rather than listing successes to date. Another success story, with respect to employees' perceptions of working time is offered by McCracken (2000): Deloitte and Touche was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest accounting tax and consulting firm in America. Since the 1980's there was a drive towards gender equality in recruitment, yet only 14% of women reached partner status. The paper tells a story from an individual inside the organisation from the point when the then Chief Executive Officer, Mike Cook, made a business case for change. A number of two-day workshops were held to uncover assumptions about careers and needs of women. The workshops found that the female drop-out was not to start families; most women left because of male-dominated culture. It was emphasised that the culture did not just affect women, younger men were also happier with shorter hours and less pay. In other words, there was a significant proportion of the workforce that desired a better work-life balance. There is still some way to go as 'doublethink' is prevalent. BP, for example, actively advertises its work-life balance strategies, drawing attention to its move away from long hours culture and experimental, open approaches, see BP (2011) The website also offers an example of a working mum as a case study. The story is of a high flyer who on having her first child, returns to manage the conflicting demands successfully: "*some simple rules including being home before bedtime three nights a week, not working weekends and never travelling away from home for more than five days a month*" [online] The fact that she returned to work after only 'two or three months'; her husband does not work and looks after the children seems incongruous with the case study's intentions. A light-hearted approach was taken by the *Times* citing a longitudinal study '*New ways forward: A working mother's first job is to be our scapegoat*' (Knight, 2008). It could be hypothesised that women, who have experienced the effects of organisational policy as well as the reality of taking on another role, are being forced into an active resolution of work-life balance concerns. Research on work-life balance policies in Scotland is sparse (MacPherson and Bond 2009). From the above, it seems that women's role conflict, if slipped under the umbrella term of 'work-life balance' somehow becomes more palatable – and therefore more likely to be championed. The underlying issues that cause role conflict in the first place are still however, gender orientated. Yet this does not necessarily have to result in negative outcomes according the role accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974):

*where multiple roles are seen to enrich each other and the stress arising from one role can be compensated for by the satisfactions of another.* (Borrell and Kidd 1974 pp.267-8).

Importantly, for the current research, organisations expect role conflict to be inevitable – and negative - for women. Chapter 3 on feminism digs a little deeper to understand why this may be the case. The issue of work balance can in fact, be re-framed to positively perceive a life

outside of work. Re-framing is necessary to the point where paths for skills and knowledge are considered transferable and interchangeable by women and their employers. This is explored further in the following chapter.

### **1.15 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to consider women in the workplace with a specific focus on three levels of research to date, namely, objective statistical support for on-going inequality of work and availability of flexible working; organisational perspective which pointed to a difficulty in accommodating working mothers, and, finally the impact this has on women, from their perspective. The research which carried most weight became increasingly focussed on qualitative methodology, which allowed women's voices to be heard. Often, what legislation dictates and seemingly non-discriminatory organisational policy recommends, is masked by male organisational culture, lack of awareness and peppered with conflicting media stories of academic research. Another emerging theme considers that if equality of opportunity is the end goal of legislation and organisational policy, the question: 'are we there yet?' is the wrong one. The point is further emphasised when the concept of work-life balance is brought to the fore – notably a topic affecting men and women. The reasons behind a different set of expectations, experiences and needs for women as working mothers is further explored through a review of relevant literature from a feminist perspective in the chapter 3. First, a short review of career theory will be offered. Career theories should offer a framework which the themes above must accommodate. Are we there yet? No, we are still working out where we are going but inequality, despite Emmeline Pankhurst's efforts, is still in evidence 96 years on from her famous speech:

*If we win it, this hardest of all fights, then, to be sure, in the future it is going to be made easier for women all over the world to win their fight when their time comes.*

## Chapter 2 The meaning of career and career theory.

### 2.1 Introduction and chapter overview

The chapter begins with an exploration of the word 'career'. This is informed, in part, by an understanding of 'career success'. It becomes clear that to fully appreciate the connotations of 'career' in everyday discourse, a feminist perspective must be acknowledged. A separate chapter has been set aside to explore this particular avenue to understand how the definition of 'career' and associated success is tangled in discussions of gender identity. An attempt to clarify the parameters of the word career, specifically bearing mind the research interest in women's careers, moves the discussion naturally to notions of transition and agency. Literature offers a mixed view with regards the degree of agency individuals have. Reflecting Arthur, Hall and Lawrence's (1989) call for the study of career to be a "*nexus for trans-disciplinary study*" (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989, p. 8), the chapter continues to delve into overlapping psychological perspectives to offer a background to understand the evolving gender polarisation. It is argued that this helps inform understanding of career theory as well shedding light on the methodology chosen for the current research. There then follows a review of four contemporary theories to consider. The aim is to evaluate the validity of the theories from the specific perspective of a woman's working life experience at the point of her second or subsequent maternity leave – or that of a potential employer of a woman at this stage of her working life.

The first theory considered is Hakim's preference theory (2002). This theory, whilst accommodating many of the variables considered in chapter 1, plays down reference to transition. The next theory is that of 'boundaryless careers' and the more recent development, 'protean careers'. At this stage, the critical discussion is pulled towards the importance of the community, which is included but arguably underplayed. The final theory to be considered is that of "kaleidoscope career", which does position family and work-life balance as a central concern. Concluding comments reflect ongoing negativity associated with the working lives of mothers and consider the academic call for a multidisciplinary approach. Finally, an extension to O'Neil et al.'s (2008) patterns and paradoxes of women's career theory paper is offered. The question this chapter leads to is: what more can we add to our understanding of career and specifically, women's working lives when taking the perspective of women on their second or subsequent maternity leave? The perspective is that of women who have experienced the effects of organisational policy as well as the reality of taking on another role. Whether these women are forced into an active resolution of

work-life balance concerns is considered. Also, the implications for current career theories and models are discussed.

To begin this chapter, it is first necessary to explore what is meant by the word 'career'. Focus is placed on the shared meaning of management and psychological, academic papers. Without a common understanding of the notion of a career, model, theories or frameworks cannot easily be compared. It is worth noting that through a social constructionist perspective, it is argued that any meaning of a word such as 'career' is multi-faceted, with different connotations for different individuals at different times and depending on the circumstances of the word's use. As such, perhaps a meaning closer to the verb 'career' is relevant, in so far as it reflects the terms dynamic nature (Gabriel 2008). In everyday discourse the word career is strictly associated with paid work – it would be extremely unusual to hear an individual refer to their cub-scout leader role when asked about their career, for example. It is therefore associated more commonly with an organisational career and contextualised in a CV as 'an orderly and meaningful progression' (p.31 Grey cited in Gabriel 2008). Interestingly, in Grey's definition, it is noted that the idea of a career is a comparatively new phenomenon historically, which has quickly come to form one way we make sense of our lives in the West.

Academically, much has been written to try and capture an understanding of career that embraces more than an organisational stance. Huang (2006) offers twin career concepts, these could be perceived as an attempt to reconcile the differences between academic and common discourse meaning of the word career. Specifically, Huang's paper refers to 'life career', which places emphasis on role constellations and 'occupational career' is orientated on paid employment roles:

*Life careers were characterized by the ways in which individual's integrated educational, paid work, and family involvement throughout their adult lives. Occupational careers were characterized by the trajectories of occupational movements.* (Huang 2006 p.56)

Notably, parental leave is considered as separate from occupational careers and the inference is that the leave is part of life career only – quite distinct from paid occupational concerns. Maternity leave is by inference, then, a pause in occupational career. Yet the outcome of maternity leave decisions has huge implications on occupational progress as noted in the first chapter. This distinction of life and occupational career is therefore rejected in favour of a more holistic definition. Khapova et al. (2007) also attempt to split the concept into two and offer an interesting distinction. The authors identify differences between an individual's *subjective* career – as perceived through the eyes of the individual - and the

*objective* career – that which is perceived through the eyes of society. Using the metaphor above, what is visible mirrors the traditional discourse of ‘career’ in our culture. Subjective careers are more difficult to explore and undoubtedly affected by expectations of objective careers. Objective careers accommodate an externally visible break in paid work - such as during maternity leave and or subsequent career break - as a complete stop to working life. The two periods of paid work and career break are described as distinct and not overlapping in any way, shape or form. This idea is supported by Goffman (1961) who described career as both an objective phenomenon and a subjective process:

*Traditionally the term career has been reserved for those who expect to enjoy rises laid out within a respectable profession. The term is coming to be used, however, in a broadened sense to refer to any social strand of a person’s course through life . . . The concept of career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society. (Goffman 1961 p.127)*

To a degree, this bears a similarity with Wengraf’s (2007) work. His biographic narrative analysis results in a separation of ‘lived life’ and ‘told life’ stories. One life ‘strand’ is visible and public; the other personal, reflecting the individual’s perception of events. Many of the theories and models considered below do not always make clear whether an objective or subjective career perspective is considered. The use of narrative analysis in the current research specifically privileges the subjective, personal reflections of career, whilst drawing comparisons with organisational understanding and expectations – an objective perspective.

A different approach is put forward by Nicholson and West (1989) who discuss the appropriateness of a journey metaphor for career. This is based on the semantic root of the word – ‘carriageway’ or ‘road’. This metaphor holds some initial appeal but as the authors point out: *it inclines one to view the journey as an attribute of the traveller rather than the compulsive shape of the terrain”* (p. 181). The question of agency is one which will be returned to again later in this chapter in section 2.4. With regards a definition of career, Super (1980) an early, leading career theorist, suggests a career is: *“a sequence of positions held during the course of a lifetime.”* Whilst there is no inference that these positions are paid, there is an implied suggestion of on-going linearity through the use of the word ‘sequence’. The previous chapter however, describes women who at times worked voluntarily, for example as careers or work part-time, stepping on and off a ‘career ladder’. This is not reflected in Super’s (1980) definition. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) offer a less value based definition, therefore moving away from an arguably organisational notion of career linearity, moving the definition away from assumed goals of status and promotion by stating simply that a career is: *“the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experience over*

*time*" (1996 p. 6). This definition has the advantage of not restricting work to 'paid' work and permits a less linear order – not necessarily upwards. Once unfolded, one assumes the implication is that that parts can be re-folded. This is important so as to reflect the fact that if a woman goes to work part-time, she frequently works below her skill level. It is unclear though, where maternity leave sits within such a definition. Maternity leave does not easily fit into this folding metaphor unless it is to be represented as a pause, suggesting a maternity leave has no role in working life decisions or outcomes. The previous chapter clearly indicates that maternity leave does mediate decisions regarding working life transitions and impacts the perception, pay and promotion prospects of a woman's work experiences at both an individual and organisational level. To accommodate this, perhaps then, the definition of a career could be modified to: *"the transitions of a person's work related experience over time."* Taking this definition further, the use of the word transition suggests growth may or may not be expected and transitions can be positive or negative. There is also no implied link to paid work or organisational expectations in terms of upward movement over time with respect to pay, status or salary. However, an individual's specific 'energy' for learning or motivation may be stored and can be used to facilitate a future transition and agency may or may not be associated with the transition. This metaphor also suggests that career can reflect movement back to a previous position or onwards to a new direction. The notion of career as a set of transitions also acknowledges that a lack of transition may reflect a new start or decline, i.e.: recognition that a change may be occurring without visible signs of change. This recognition is important as maternity leave may represent a transition time which Brown and Brooks (1996) capture in their definition of career: *"a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing and typically continuing to make choices from among many occupations in our society"*. (p. xv). For the purposes of the current research, Arthur and Rosseau's (2002) modified definition of career captures the evidence presented as to the current cultural and academic findings of women's experiences of maternity leave: the concept of a career captures the transitions of a person's work related experience over time.

## **2.2 Career success**

At this point, it is worth perhaps reminding the reader of the fact that any definition needs to capture the different experiences of men *and* women, arguably a failure for more specific definitions which place focus on an organisational perspective. Capturing male and female experiences can be achieved by being broad enough to embrace the variety of experiences. This gender focus in part exposes some root causes behind commonly cited difficulties of career theory. Hewlett's book of case studies (2007) clearly demonstrates that for many women, work is *not* necessarily a one-way, upward-only career ladder. Also, work is not



necessarily separated from family and often women do not follow organisations' expectations, frameworks and legislative mind sets. As Hewlett (2007) says:

*The dominant approach of conventional theories of career within the literature of organisations and work tends to relegate women's career matters to concerns for obstacles to career opportunities, the equalisation of rewards and benefits, concern for childcare and maternity provision (Elian, 1982, Flanders, 1994, Hewitt, 1974)... they fail to address more fundamental questions such as whether or not the concept of 'career' is adequate to the task of describing the range of motivations, rationalisations and means of evaluating outcomes that might be held to characterise women's experience of work.*

Hewlett goes on to emphasise that women who are successful in the male model of career are in minority, 60% are not successful. It must then, be questioned what career 'success' is, although, as Hopfl and Atkinson (2000) point out, in questioning the notion of career success: *"you are exposing the fragility of organisations' power bases and in doing so potentially taking power away from them – and men"*. In Buzzanell's and Miu's paper (2007) on maternity role negotiations, point out: *"Sexuality dissolves the veneer of rationality and gender neutrality in organizing."* (p. 465) as well supporting the notion that career decisions are often as a result of gender specific issues such as balancing work and life. Academically, in terms of defining what a career success is, the following captures the problematic gender differences theme: *"our overall conclusion is that male-defined constructions of work and career success continue to dominate organizational research and practice"* (O'Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria 2008 p.727). This male-dominated model of career and career success is discussed by Stone (2008). Whilst it is aimed at an American audience, the message is a common one echoed also in Mainero and Sullivan (2006) and the aforementioned Hewlett (2007). The feminist perspective is one which will be returned to later in chapter 3 as it also informs the common theme in career theory of role conflict. The feminist perspective aside, there appears generally to be an 'unhealthy dependence' on organisations (Bosley, Arnold and Cohen, 2007) when mapping a traditional career and therefore what it means to be successful in one. Notably, since identity and occupation are closely linked – and indeed values are tied up in this (Briscoe et al. 2006), it is perhaps not surprising that transition periods when considering going 'off-ramps' during maternity leave are of interest to the current research. In doing so, traditional notions of career success lose relevance.

### **2.3 Transitions**

Transitions have not gone unrecognised but they are arguably under-represented in career theories. Arthur, for example, mentions women using maternity as a transition but since only 4 of 13 in managerial or professional occupations had children, the sample in the associated

research was rather small and not aimed at this interest area. In contrast, in a chapter by Marshall (2000) 16 women managers who felt they had to leave were extensively interviewed with a narrative interview focus, as part of a two-year study. Here the sample was also arguable unrepresentative as the women represented a minority - they were 'privileged' in terms of their financial status. However, over-arching themes, which emerged from the analysis of these interviews, further support the evidence offered with respect to the perception that employment was for them in 'male-dominated environments'. As a consequence, the interviewees felt they were always striving to maintain a viable sense of self and experienced stress coupled with tiredness. Marshall (2000) reinforces the evidence for serious organisational inequality at high levels. Importantly, she also describes how change was about meaning-making and this process often triggered a transition to another form of work, or working pattern. Marshall (1989) points to the fact that such findings are congruent with Gunz, Evans and Jallard (2000). It would therefore seem prudent to explore the concept of transitions further, since this concept appears to tie together evidence presented in chapter one along with an under-represented dimension of 'career' in most definitions. Nicholson and West (1989) suggest that career and work history should be studied in three ways – the first, the study of transitions to enlighten the second two study perspectives. The second study area Nicholson and West (1989) propose is that the study of career biography as psychological structures that shape decisions and career outcomes. The third area is the study of culture:

*If one defines culture in terms of shared belief systems and ways of living, then careers comprise some of the myths, historical themes and action, structures that make up their content. (Nicholson and West 1989 p.182)*

Importantly, for these authors, transitions relate to job changes but as will be described, it is conceivable that their categorisations can also be relevant to women on second or subsequent maternity leave – a point to be considered in the analysis of the case studies. The study of transitions, the authors argue, has identified four common stages which are described below with comment linking the relevance of each stage to this particular research. Note that the stages leans towards 'problem-solving' or 'path-finding' rather than stress and coping – the former being a common theme in literature associated with women's working lives.

(see overleaf for figure 6)

### Transition stages (Nicholson 1986)

I. Preparation: process of expectation and anticipation before the change. There is little research here since job change is often unpredictable. However, a biographic narrative approach can tap into what level of preparation existed.

II. Encounter: affect and sense making during the first days or weeks of job tenure. Support for the positive nature of encounter comes from Nicholson's own research. Here, the 2300 manager sample:

*"are quite prepared to describe the experience as 'stressful' but further analysis reveals these reports to be highly positively correlated with reports of challenge, freedom, authority, satisfaction and fulfilment"* (Nicholson and West, 1988).

III. Adjustment: subsequent personal and role development to reduce person-job misfit. Role development they argue comes first with personal change being slower and more difficult. Role development again is very much in terms of paid work, specifically for managers who may have to hit the ground running.

IV. Stabilisation: Settled connection between person and role

V. Preparation: the renewal of the cycle

The current research only interviewed women during their second or subsequent maternity leave so is ideally placed to consider stages II, III and IV and V.

**Figure 6: Transition stages from Nicholson (1986)**

Nicholson and West question the negativity associated with transitions (encounter stage) and suggest that researchers perhaps find what they are looking for. This research is positioned well to consider whether the start of maternity leave is a transition, which could be categorised as outlined above. Certainly, there is (or should be) preparation along with a degree of formality with regards the start of paid leave and discussions regarding contractual obligations. The authors do touch upon taking on jobs that are below skill level or no job at all although this is not explored in any depth. They also review literature which leads them to conclude that the notion of continuity and control in working life are either self-delusions or:

*the alternative view is that uncertain opportunities and influences are the raw material upon which the self-directed person exercises improvisation skill. (Nicholson and West 1986 p.191)*

Whether the transition to maternity leave is controlled or part of some continuity of career path – or indeed whether control is a self-delusion - will be explored in the case studies of the current research. It can however, be argued that O’Neil and Bilimoria’s (2005) three stage career theory supports the notion of self-delusion. Their first stage is ‘idealism’ followed by endurance and finally reinvention. Perhaps, it is the case that ‘idealism’ is in part the preparation time before the arrival of a second or subsequent child, before gender inequality in the workplace becomes particularly salient. Second or subsequent maternity leave takers would then be more experienced in the reality of returning to work and the balance of different roles at home and in the workplace so perhaps more certain of their opportunities. The second maternity leave would represent a very different transition experience to that following the birth of the first child. The current research can explore the relevance and appropriateness of this hypothesis. In either event, the conventional paradigm of orderly careers and planned development would seem to have, as the authors suggest, “*limited applicability.*” (p. 191). From an organisational perspective, work role transitions are ideal developmental opportunities, although a downward move is associated with greater negative impact than temporary lack of employment (West, Nicholson and Rees 1990). Well-planned induction processes, as part of an overall human resource management strategy should make good use of these transitions. Yet evidence suggests that many organisations simply do not use induction processes for much more than administrative functions (Paul and Anantharaman 2003). The transition to and from maternity leave from the evidence in the first chapter, appears not only to be unmanaged but also unrecognised as developmental transition from which both parties could otherwise benefit.

Chapter 1 suggests there is good reason for the experience of maternity leave to contribute to working life decisions regardless of whether or not women continue after the maternity leave as before. This must be addressed by career theory. If there is a change in working pattern, this represents a transition and there is even more reason for maternity leave to be accommodated as part of a ‘career’, regardless of whether a woman opts to return to paid work – and the rationale for exploring women and men’s working life separately is supported. This line of argument leads to more complexity: Brown and Brooks (1996) can be re-visited: if both transition and gender differences are to be accommodated, their notion of ‘occupations in our society’ (pg xv) needs to consider unpaid roles, such as a stay-at-home mother. Whether or not unpaid (for example, community roles) should be incorporated into discussions of career must be considered. Returning for now to the discussion of transitions,

it is interesting to note that 'discretion' and 'propulsion', dimensions of transition as offered by Nicholson and West do not assume agency over the transitions, yet the definition Brown and Brooks give, pointedly does assume agency. Agency, when considering career is another common theme in the literature and is therefore topic of the next section.

## 2.4 Agency

Hopfl and Atkinson (2000) question several career theory assumptions, for example:

- career is characterised by a structured approach to life...and involves a pattern of related activities
- "*Careers are usually seen in terms of definitions of success, with expectations fulfilled or otherwise, with power, status and influence and material gain...*" (p.136)
- career is planned and includes choice of work and work/life balance.

It is this last assumption this section explores. As the assumptions above suggest, the literature either assumes there is agency or questions it. Another distinction to consider is how much agency women *really* have and how much they perceive to have? The first chapter suggests that women, especially those who have taken maternity leave or career breaks earn less and take work beyond their qualification level. The question then arises whether the decision to do so is through choice or a perceived lack of choice. Huang's research would suggest there is restricted agency:

*These results indicate that the influence of the individuals' own lifestyles on occupational careers was stronger than the influence of family. The thesis thus confirms the claims that there is a heightened role of agency in career construction within the post-industrial society (for example, Hakim, 2000; Heinz, 2003; Shanahan, 2000). (Huang p.64)*

This may however be a reflection of Swedish culture, on which his paper is based. Looking at psychological theories, support can be found for both sides of the argument. For example, developmental theories often describe a degree of determinism in the sequence of development but increasingly, an acknowledgement of interaction with environmental events is embraced. This is captured in the concept of dynamic interactionism, defined as: "*the multiple interactions that can occur between different variables and different levels of explanation*" (Wood, Littleton and Oates p.55). In psychodynamic terms, agency is underpinned by unconscious drives<sup>1</sup>. Freud (1923) describes behaviour in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Freud promoted the idea that there is a degree of determinism in human development (psychosexual stages) and that behaviour is driven by an on-going struggle between demands of the id, ego and superego, which constitute our personality. Furthermore, in his later writing, Freud

satisfying the demands of the id and unconscious drives of the libido through the expression of creativity in work (or aggression in the expression of Thanatos). It could be speculated that excessive demands on the ego comes from the multiple roles women have, as mothers, partners and employees. Psychodynamic ideas have been applied to organisational settings (for example: Bion 1946, 1961) with respect to women in leadership roles (Dumas 1985) and notions of resistance in organisations (for example: Gabriel 2008), see also chapter 3. With respect to maternity leave within working lives, psychodynamic perspectives may offer an understanding of individuals, unconscious conflict, which arguably removes a degree of agency. Jungian ideas give arguably a more direct link to the current researcher's interest. His writing is notoriously difficult to comprehend but many good interpretations exist, for example Stevens (2001). Jung's discussion of mother archetypes offers an interesting explanation for the multiple role conflict. Since these archetypes are unconscious and emerge with motherhood, they offer one perspective on starting maternity leave, women – and subsequently organisations – are surprised when the planned return to work suddenly becomes an unwanted option. The archetype, once triggered, seeks fulfilment and is a reflection of a collective unconscious. This archetype links Jung's ideas to the notion of a pre-determined developmental trajectory. Agency is dependent of a degree of self awareness. This transition stage is incorporated into the individual's psyche – so the experience of motherhood has a deep and lasting impact on personality, values and perceptions. For second-time mothers, presumably the archetypes are firmly established and the result of their influence already experienced. Whilst this is difficult to objectively research and even unpalatable to some, Jung's metaphor of sunrise and sunset, the midday point (around the age of 35-45) results in self-reflection and is easier to accept and relate to maternity leave in relation to working life:

*The wine has fermented and begins to settle and clear....one begins to take stock, to see how one's life has developed up to that point. (cited in Stevens 2001 p. cw xvii)*

This would appear to suggest that agency is limited but as mentioned, Jung clearly believed that agency could be acquired through reflective processes. In direct contrast, the humanistic perspective evolved as a conscious reaction to the lack of respect for free-will. Humanists place emphasis on individuals' agency (for example, see Rogers and Skinner 1956, for a humanist versus behaviourist discussion on this and related topics). In fact, this perspective, the 'third force' came into being as a direct result of a growing body of psychologists' dissatisfaction with the 'crippled' approach offered by the psychoanalytic perspective. The new thinkers were also angry at the behaviourist school of thought, described by the founders of the humanistic school of thought as being 'devoid of

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proposed that there are two fundamental drives – libido and thanatos. Ultimately, thanatos, a drive towards death wins.

consciousnesses'. The humanistic perspective does not seek to establish generalisations from positivist methodology and instead uses qualitative methodology from which to understand individual motivation and perceived barriers. It is worthy of note that much career theory - both contemporary and classic - is based on quantitative methods. For example, Mainero and Sullivan's book (2006) reflects on a series of internet surveys to test ideas and theories. The methodology used in the current research, narrative analysis, lends itself more to the humanistic framework, whilst arguably borrowing psychodynamic ideas, with the open interview method and arguably tapping the unconscious to bring to the surface beliefs and values - and perceived agency, or lack of it (see also chapter 4).

Career theories through their methodology could be argued to ultimately seek causality if they adopt quantitative methods but fundamental differences have deep roots with regards an understanding of agency. Arnold and Cohen (2008) suggest there are career theory authors who disagree that there is degree of agency associated with the pursuit of a career, citing for example El-Sawad, who emphasises the 'politicized processes' of working life. Perhaps it might be argued that whether or not there is agency depends on the level of analysis and perspective. At a micro level, when it comes to individual transitions, the options a woman takes depends on what options she perceives exist at that stage of her life - and so the range of choice is restricted culturally. This stance would accommodate Hewlett's (2007) case studies of women who choose to take a 'scenic route' or go 'off-ramps'. In fact, the discussion regarding agency is not a simple polar one; multiple roles interact with numerous variables including personal, organisational and cultural perceptions plus expectations (Ruderman et al. 2002). When individuals look back over their career, depending on their locus of control (Rotter 1954), they may either subscribe to an internal locus of control; for example: 'I choose to take a wage cut to manage my work-life balance' or external locus of control: 'it was the only way I could manage the work-life balance due to the organisation's long hours culture.' The idea of socially constructed perceptions of decision-making after the event is also supported by Stephens and Levine's (2011) exploration of mechanisms behind discrimination. The following ties together the discussions of transition and agency rather well and serves as a useful introduction to the critical discussion of Hakim's (2002) preference theory:

*More recently, Robson et al. (2006) have suggested five criteria based on analyses of aging: adaptability and health; positive relationships; occupational growth; personal security; and a continued focus on and achievement of personal goals. Of course, some of these diverse alternative criteria may be in people's minds when they subjectively evaluate their career success. However, the fact that they do not feature more explicitly in measures of career success perhaps signals that careers*

*research neglects a “whole person” perspective. Consistent with this observation, Heslin (2005) notes that few measures of subjective career success contain items on work–life balance. This is despite the fact that a defining feature of the boundaryless career is people’s openness to making work decisions on the basis of non-work concerns. (Arthur and Rousseau 1996 p.88)*

Finally, a reminder that any framework needs to consider whether it can or should be culture specific: whilst an assumption here is that socially constructed patterns are by their very nature geographically limited in explanation, this is not universally accepted. Evidence comes from Crompton and Harris (1999) who developed a typology of career trajectories. Their typology reflected their findings of 150 female bankers and doctors. Of note was their equal emphasis on constraints *and* agency across the board. The bankers and doctors represented five European countries.

This section then ends, with the point that dictionary definitions, academic definitions and common usage of the word “career” differ and there have been various attempts to consolidate different meanings so as to incorporate the ‘elasticity’ of the working experiences of women – both in positive and negative circumstances, thus reflecting chapter one conclusions. An adaptation of an existing definition: *“the transitions of a person’s work related experience over time”* appears to accommodate the variations of meaning placing emphasis on the potential importance of transition – with or without agency. An alternative approach to the discussion of how to define ‘career’ is to then adopt the term ‘working lives’ as has been done before by Shamir and Salomen (1985), thereby avoiding any conflicting or unintended meaning – or indeed narrowing of concept. In the current research, the terms career and working life are used interchangeably in the literature review. The chapter now continues with the first of three critical reviews of contemporary career theory and is preceded by a short introduction.

## **2.5 Career theories**

Over time it has become clear that there are problems with traditional career theories. There is, as Arthur (2008) describes, a lack of dynamic interplay, with little emphasis on the subjective career. There have been many attempts to re-address the balance, especially with regards capturing women’s work experiences. Emphasis has been placed either on developmental phases such as O’Neil and Bilimoria’s model of idealism, endurance and reinvention - or theories focusing on differences, obstacles and barriers, which need to be overcome, for example, see Sullivan (1999). In a similar vein, there has been much evidence to support the inclusion of role conflict and identity in any career theory. Ruderman’s work



(2002) was distinctive in its positive spin in his conclusion that multiple roles can be enriching rather than depleting. Piecing together the parts of role conflict, development, subjective career and so on has led to the following imagery to capture women's work experiences:

- a double helix – career and family sub-identities (Hall 2004)
- a network or tree of possible alternatives (Larwood and Gutek 1987)
- rivers – the two banks representing family and work (Powell and Mainero 1992)
- kaleidoscope – focusing of the needs to reflect different needs at different point in a woman's life.

The most popular contemporary career theory is undoubtedly the 'boundaryless career' and later 'protean career' (Arthur 2008). This section will begin with a theory aimed specifically at understanding women's experiences.

### **2.5.1.1 Preference theory**

Differences between genders are not necessarily due to differences in cognitive processing but as the previous chapter describes, differences are shaped by differences in gender needs and expectations – be they organisational or culturally reinforced. Legislation – and in theory organisational policies are in place, this theory offers an alternative reason why statistics demonstrate an undeniable pay gap. Hakim (2006) suggests there are distinctive work orientations and "labour market behaviour", (p. 280). Hakim's career theory attempts to address specifically the work orientation differences in gender. This theory therefore has the potential to explain the previous chapter's findings. Herr (2005) suggests that more segmented theories permit emphasis on:

*specific forms of obstacles, barriers, reinforcements, received messages, and other variables affecting the career behavior of women...* (Herr 205 p. 39)

However, Hakim's theory suggests all women fall into one of only three 'segments' (2002) and in 2006 offers further evidence to support her theory. She begins by citing research by Visser and Hemerijk (1997) and the Dutch ability to manage part-time work patterns which supports the importance of society and culture into any theoretical framework, if only to ensure flexibility to accommodate social norms and expectations. However, Hakim balances accounts of such success with the fact that this is possible through a pattern of concessions. In the Dutch case, this was through tri-partite agreement between unions, employers and the government. Hakim argues that it is inconceivable that all jobs at all positions can be equally open to those who require strong boundaries between work and home to accommodate family needs. She offers the example of a surgeon, who due to some tragic accident or catastrophe would work excessively long hours to save lives. Hakim also suggests it is illogical to accept that someone working full-time will have equal experience to a part-time

worker – and is as available to manage emergencies in the workplace. This fact is supported by her research finding that half of the women in top positions are childless, even if married (Hakim 2004). This begs the question as to whether childlessness is chosen over a career. Taking maternity leave would conceivably damage their ‘career success’. It is inferred then that such women the ones who are left once the women with children go ‘off ramps’. So as well as gender differences in the workplace, which one way or another are weighted against women, especially those with children and not in full-time work, there are also differences within genders. Hakim suggests that these differences are in fact, partly - and increasingly - due to agency rather than societal or cultural restrictions. In other words, women **choose** the paths they take, be they less well paid or less status orientated. Hakim’s (2002) preference theory is thus defined as:

*a new theory for explaining and predicting women’s choices between market work and family work, a theory that is historically informed, empirically based, multidisciplinary, prospective rather than retrospective in orientation and applicable in all rich modern societies.* Hakim p.286 (2000, cited in Hakim 2006)

Preference theory offers a theoretical framework to interpret on-going pay gaps as more women are more likely to opt for shorter hours over more money (Babcock and Laschever, 2003). Huang’s (2006) paper offers further support in his research:

*The few differences in health and wellbeing were explained by Hakim’s (2000) preference theory and life course theory (Elder, 1992; Elder et al. 2003) which hold that lifestyle choices are largely based on personal preferences.* (Huang 2006 p.56)

For Hakim, personal preferences are based on work orientation and are summarised as follows; women fall under one of three columns: home centred; adaptive or work-centred. The three types are described overleaf with comparisons made between the three types on five different variables. The table comes from Hakim 2006 (p. 288). According to Hakim’s estimates, figures in first row can vary 20% either way, reflecting different population norms.

**Table 1 Hakim's (2006) typology**

<b>Home-centred</b> 20%* of women	<b>Adaptive</b> 60%* of women	<b>Work-centred</b> 20%* of women
Family life and children are the main priorities throughout life	This group is most diverse and includes women who want to combine work and family, plus drifters and unplanned careers	Childless women are concentrated here. Main priority is life is employment or equivalent activities in the public arena: politics, sports art, etc.
Prefer not to work	Want to work but not totally committed to work career	Committed to work or equivalent activities
Qualifications obtained as cultural capital	Qualification obtained with the intention of working	Large investment in qualifications/training for cultural capital
No. of children is affected by government social policy, family wealth etc. Not responsive to employment policy.	This groups is very responsive to social policy, employment policy, equal opportunities policy/propaganda, economic cycle/recession/growth, etc. including: income tax and social welfare benefits, educational policies, school timetables, child care services, public attitude towards working women, legislation promoting female employments, trade union attitudes to working women, availability of part-time work and similar work flexibility, economic growth and prosperity and institutional factors generally.	Responsive to economic, political or artistic opportunity. Not responsive to family/social policy.
<i>Family values:</i> caring, sharing, non-competitive, communal, focus on cohesion	Compromise between two conflicting sets of values	<i>Marketplace values:</i> competitive rivalry; achievement, orientation, individualism, excellence.

Further support for this type of typology and explanation comes from O'Neil, Bilimoria and Saatcioglu (2004). The paper describes support for career types: 'achievers' equating to 'work-centred women' and 'accommodators' who are similar to 'adaptive' women in that they seem to be a combination of types, rather than a clear category. The final type in O'Neil, Bilimoria and Saatcioglu (2004) is the 'navigator'. This type of woman's pattern of preferences/career does not correlate perfectly with Hakim's typology but this is not surprising as Hakim's theory includes 'home-centred women' and O'Neil et al. focus on career meaning paid employment. At best, Hakim's theory offers some overlap.

Preferences as Hakim describes them, are relevant only to 'prosperous modern societies' – at the current time of recession, it is questionable whether many women in our culture currently feel 'prosperous'. Hakim does state that cultural and economic factors are intertwined but she argues that these are exerting less and less influence. This is questionable and would appear contradict government figures on the recession's effect on women returning to work to support the household finances. In our society, Hakim believes, public policy is biased towards one group. Government policy, looking at the legislation in the UK, is very much in support of careerist preferences – providing legislation to support women returning to work. Organisations however, appear to support women in their paid employment until motherhood – unless motherhood is managed without impact on employment and kept very separate, in other words, employment remains full-time and perceived to be fully committed as before. By default, organisations therefore reinforce their preference for home-centred types - through their lack of support for working mothers not wishing to continue on the same employment terms after motherhood. This support for either of the two minorities, as categorised by Hakim, is incongruous with organisations' declaration of support for adaptive preferences through the promotion of 'family friendly' diversity policy – where the assumption is one size fits all. This position mirrors our culture as popular press and media generally, as it too sends out mixed messages on the preferred cultural preference – a homely, family orientated stay-at-home mum or an organised, fulfilled career mum are offered at equally attractive yet opposite ideals. It is no surprise then, that one of the newest women-centred career theories is agreeing that there are two extremes when categorising women's working life preferences but somewhere in the middle is a larger group who accommodate life goals and values, which are distinct from organisational ones. In the previous chapter, indisputable evidence was presented for gender inequality – be it in terms of pay or 'career success' (although this is, as we have seen, a gendered concept) or a glass ceiling. This inequality remains in place, even where there are firm family-friendly policies unless proactively acted on (for example as in Sweden) as compared with the USA situation (Albrecht et al 2003). In this respect, there is support for the adaptive women

preference suggestion, i.e.: women who: *'women who want the best of both worlds'* (p. 289 Hakim, 2006). The adaptive women would, according to the theory, gravitate towards careers and organisations that offer family friendly policies – and presumably if not successful in their search, go 'off-ramps'. However, this proposition is not accommodated in Hakim's theory which infers fixed types of women. Of note for the current research is the comment that lifestyle preferences can only be explored through qualitative research: specifically Hakim mentions person-centred analysis. The emphasis on contextualising the individual evidence fits well with the current research and accommodates media enhanced 'norms' for stay-at-home mothers and working mothers. It is however, perhaps no surprise that it is quantitative research which provides the most robust contradictory evidence. Man Yan Kee (2005) used historical data from the British Household Panel Survey (1991-1999) to test Hakim's (2002) preferences. Using sophisticated inferential statistics, it was possible to prove, for example, that gender role attitudes and women's working patterns reflected a reciprocal rather than unidirectional relationship: *"that is, women's work orientation is endogenous to their labour market experiences"* (p. 20) Such findings led Man Yan Kee to conclude that Hakim's typologies and subsequent trajectory predictions are 'simplistic' - a point made all the more powerful in its position as final comment in the paper. Whilst an effort was made to point to some support for aspects of the theory, proportions attracted to each preference type also proved to be inaccurate. For example, 30% had worked mostly full-time and included women who had taken career breaks over and above maternity leave. This group is therefore difficult to categorise. As Man Yee Kan surmises:

*This finding goes against the corollary from Hakim's theory that women who are committed to their careers are more work-centred than women who have intermittent career trajectories.* (Man Yan Kee 2005 p.19)

McRae (2003) supports this interpretation with results from a longitudinal study of first-time mothers. In support of Hakim, home-centred women were less likely to work full-time continuously and work-centred attitudes correlated with full-time work. Also, if a woman was work-centred, dependent children did not affect continuous employment patterns but employment patterns were affected if attitudes were not work-centred. This links into the discussion later on work-life balance. It may be that the work-centred women are sacrificing family life to maintain this continuous employment. This leads to the question: how much of such decision-making can be attributed to real agency if a 'sacrifice' is perceived to be part of the equation. A mortgage, for example, was proven to increase the likelihood of women working full-time. This seems fairly obvious however, what such findings also demonstrate is that there is more than simply a woman's work orientation, or 'preference' that affects career trajectories. Discontinuity, as described by McRae, is possible in work-orientated women. The negative perspective of women in work is subtly challenged by Hakim – if a woman

wants to work, her typology can be realised by working – but not according to the evidence in chapter one. Hakim's original statistics are, according to Man Yee Kan 'flawed' in that casual assumptions are made from inappropriate tests. Statistics alone however, do not offer the sole criticism of Hakim's theory. The theory neither accommodates changing trajectories or transitions towards different 'preferences', nor considers what might happen during career breaks/maternity leave(s). The question of agency within Hakim's theory is explored next.

### **2.5.1.2 Preference theory and agency**

Hakim first suggested that the three groups attracted different types of women and the adaptive ones were classified as 'drifters' (Hakim, 1996). This word has rather negative connotations and infers no conscious decision-making processes. Furthermore, flying in the face of feminists and efforts to ensure men and women are seen as equal paid employment, Hakim asserts that:

*...employment careers are centrally important for only a minority of women.....more than half of adult women accept the sexual division of labour and treat market work as an additional secondary activity to be fitted in with the demands of domestic life.*

(Hakim 1996 p. 88)

The qualifications row of table 1 specifically suggests a woman's educational journey is part of a possible end goal of family life and a means by which to secure valuable 'cultural capital' presumably for the purpose of attracting a good husband. Applying Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for validity, rhetoric as well as authenticity appear to be lacking. Although no research to support the following could be found, anecdotally, it is common to find undergraduate women, especially first year students, are generally naive to gender inequality in the workforce. This reflects the 'idealism' stage of O'Neil and Bilimoria's developmental phases. It would be surprising to think that any early stage undergraduate consider their future ability to balance work and home life at such an early stage, let alone maternity leave options. Men similarly are unlikely to face this decision-making process, so they would presumably be represented in the final column – although even this assumption can be questioned with the increase wave of public acknowledgement of the importance of 'work-life balance' (see later discussion under boundaryless careers, section 2.5.2). Hakim's assumption that there are conscious decisions made about women's working life preferences supports Giddens (1984) who also places agency firmly with the agent - the woman in this case. Tomlinson (2006) also picks up on the question of agency. Her own research supports the gender differences of employees - 80% of part-time workers are women (Blackwell 2001) - and acknowledges that the transition to part-time work follows childbirth. The associated drop in quality of work correlated with motherhood (Tomlinson et al., 2005), Tomlinson argues is not necessarily through choice. This contradicts Hakim's

theory as agency is particularly important; women, she argues, choose their work style preferences. Most importantly for the current research, Hakim's (2002) preference theory does not help understand the implications of second or subsequent maternity leave on working life trajectory.

The next section will reflect on the importance of career breaks, which often precedes part-time work after maternity leave. The aim is to demonstrate how any career theory cannot be complete without embracing the concept of this leave. This forms the argument that maternity leave with or without subsequent career break leave is part of an on-going continuity of working history, rather than a black hole, through which some women emerge again as 'employees'.

### 2.5.1.3 Career breaks and maternity leave – part of a career.

There are many approaches to the study of career breaks and the collation and interpretation of data. The following from Arun, Arun and Borooh (2004) is one example:

$$\Pr(PERSINC_i = j) = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_{ik} x_{ik} + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_{ik} x_{ik} BREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \delta_{ik} x_{ik} CHDBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \pi_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i \times CHDBREAK_i \quad (1)$$

$$\Pr(SAMEJOB_i = 1) / \Pr(SAMEJOB_i = 0) = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_{ik} x_{ik} + \sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \delta_{ik} x_{ik} CHDBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \pi_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i \times CHDBREAK_i \quad (2)$$

$$\Pr(PERSINC_i = j) = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_{ik} x_{ik} + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_{ik} x_{ik} SAMEJOB_i \quad (3)$$

$$\Pr(SENLOSS_i = 1) / \Pr(SENLOSS_i = 0) = \sum_{k=1}^K \alpha_{ik} x_{ik} + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_{ik} x_{ik} SAMEJOB_i \quad (4)$$

$$\Pr(NOPLAN_i = 1) / \Pr(NOPLAN_i = 0) = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_{ik} x_{ik} + \sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \delta_{ik} x_{ik} CHDBREAK_i + \sum_{k=1}^K \pi_{ik} x_{ik} LNGBREAK_i \times CHDBREAK_i$$

Figure 7: Calculating the cost of maternity leave.

Although to an untrained statistical eye, the figure overleaf looks little more than an over-enthusiastic attempt to quantify the unquantifiable, it has allowed researchers to make statements such as: *Taking a long (instead of a short) child-related break raised the probability of being in a different type of job from 35-46%*. This adds weight to the criticism of Hakim's set types since it adds to the argument that career breaks need to be accommodated. Career breaks could be linked to the option of transition between preferences. Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) suggest that when women opt out, they do so to fulfil their changed needs - further discrediting the notion of a fixed type. Cabrera (2007) also highlights the importance of some form of transition in working life trajectories, referring to opting out of traditional career models, but this too reinforces the importance of transition following maternity leave. In Cabrera's (2007) line of thinking, career breaks appear to be a pivotal time. Time not in paid work often implies 'stagnant time' and is void of career movement. However, it evidently plays an important role in working life trajectories. There has been some limited recognition of this fact outside of career theory, for example Marshall (1989) who pointed out that both career activity and non-activity are equally important. Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (2003) referred to the non-paid time off employment as a plateau rather than a full stop or transition but even in this paper, a description of a career being 'interrupted' by periods of part-time employment to allow family to be given 'priority' was referred to. The part-time employment appears not to be considered as part of the on-going working life trajectory. It could well be argued however, that this important transition time continues to add to the development of the whole person, which in turn helps develop the employee. This point has been made by Pringle and Mallon (2003), who say that the crossing of home-work boundaries needs more research. In terms of development, Belenky et al (1997) demonstrated how women's epistemology rested very much in an understanding of connecting personal events and knowledge. Perhaps this understanding can illuminate Arthur, Inkson and Pringle's (p. 75) comment:

*...permanent or temporary moves of career women into maternity and childcare situations, may involve the recognition that the over-zealous pursuit of a work based career can lead to imbalance*

Self reflection often during maternity leave and career breaks is again not recognised within Hakim's typologies, again due in part to a lack of movement.

This critical review of Hakim's theory can be concluded with the rejection of strict typologies due to the over-whelming evidence – or re-interpretation of existing evidence - which demonstrates that not only transition but also that career breaks are likely to be a pivotal point in women's working life trajectories. Agency is of course an important factor but the



degree of agency is restricted in many instances, or rejected in favour of work-life balance, which becomes the focus of the next critical review.

### **2.5.2 Boundaryless careers**

*Put simply, boundaryless careers are the opposite of 'organisational careers' – careers conceived to unfold in a single organisational setting. (DeFillipi and Arthur 1996, p. 5)*

This quote offers a reassuring start: the issue of transition is taken into consideration. This section explores what more does the concept of a boundaryless career has to offer. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) point to the context, which holds a career in place and this permits movement. A career is not restricted to one organisation with its associated hierarchy and the theory accepts 'off-ramps' decisions, which favour family over work. The boundaryless career concept therefore tries to accept the notion of a subjective career over an objective one. In turn, a different psychological contract is inferred and thus there is room to embrace women's different experiences of employment. In doing so, transition and agency should be accommodated. Pringle and Mallon (2003) note that more could still be done in embracing variations due to culture and society:

*we argue that social structures such as a national context, gender and ethnicity are not given sufficient credence in boundaryless career development. (Pringle and Mallon 2003 pp. 839-840)*

Their study specifically considers the New Zealand context with which to challenge Arthur's concept of boundaryless careers. As already mentioned, care must be taken when generalising across cultures, since the variations in legislation, cultural values and discourse generally is so variable. The idea that careers are ingrained within a wider context, thus supporting mobility has been picked up by other researchers. Firstly, Briscoe et al. (2006) note that the mobility is often inter-firm. This means that transitions in and out of paid work, in other words, during maternity leave or career breaks, are not perhaps given due credence. Secondly, Sullivan (1999) argues that the lack of formal, organisational pathways and emphasis on additional networks disadvantages women. This might be the case especially, when women move out of paid organisational networks and become invisible to employers. This invisibility at an organisational level, however, temporary, is linked with perceptions of commitment and loyalty (McDonald, Bradley and Brown 2008). This mirrors the problems women face when not complying with a long hours culture; the effects are proven 'career penalties' (see chapter one). In a cleverly designed experiment, Padgett and Rodgier (2004) clearly demonstrated that keeping all other variables equal, two women whose capability and job performance was perceived to be equal were rated differently on the following dimensions: job and career advance, potential, and job and career dedication

solely because of their contracted hours. This supports previous research (Cohen and Single 2001). So whilst boundaryless careers describe and promote transition, evidence suggests the reality is that there is a price to pay for breaking the norm of traditional career trajectories and the theory does not explain this. Whilst career theory accepts the individual agent, real agency only exists if social networks are in place to support working patterns other than those promoted and reinforced by dominant organisations. Women on maternity leave and career breaks otherwise become disempowered due to being cut off and made invisible as far as their objective career is concerned. This point is further made by Lips-Wiersma and McMoreland (2006):

*Several parameters of career success suggested boundaryless career theory, such as portable skills and adaptability, seem to be primarily directed at market forces external to the individual. The driver for change is thus predominantly economic necessity...the self becomes "career brand", the marketable, employable unit. (Lips-Wiersma and McMoreland 2006 p.150)*

This perhaps means that the focus is on the working life trajectory rather than shorter term decision-making. If so, this has implications on women, whose trajectories are often more discontinuous reflecting changing demands. The boundaryless career has clear advantages over Hakim's theory but falls short of offering a framework of understanding for women on maternity leave.

To conclude this theory's critical review, the boundaryless career, despite claims of movement, transition and agency still appears to be associated with problematic issues in recognising women's experiences of maternity leave. There are two sides to the argument. On one side, some argue that the concept of a boundaryless career is too static, especially when the boundaries are within and between organisations (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). Others argue that the concept if over-stretched becomes untenable (Arthur and Cohen 2007). One way to put together the two sides is to accept that the boundaries are dynamic but made impenetrable by society, not necessarily individuals' perceptions (Pringle and Mallon 2003; Rodrigues and Guest 2010; Sullivan 1999). Indeed, it might be argued that parameters allow individuals to position themselves and therefore help create their identity. Regardless of employment status, individuals often define themselves by their work (Brewis 2004) although Brewis' paper is based specifically on city dwellers. Hewlett (2007) does support a broader generalisation as she describes how women's professional identity remains their primary identity, even when on a career break. The following quote captures the conflicting positions well:

*Developing a term like the boundaryless career and its associated practices is, at best, a way of helping individuals understand the apparent instability of their lives.*

*And at worst, a way of reducing expectations so that the instability seems totally normal, even desirable. (p. 41)*

In short, the notion of boundaryless careers works if an individual is in a position to take advantage of the possibilities it offers (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999; Defillippi and Arthur 1996) but individuals must be within organisational networks; women taking maternity leave and then career breaks are outwith organisational networks.

### **2.5.3.1 Protean careers**

The idea of protean<sup>2</sup> careers (Hall 2004) developed from boundaryless careers. As before, emphasis in the following discussion will be placed on whether the concept accommodates women's experiences of taking maternity leave and career breaks and therefore notions of transition and agency remain salient. Whereas boundaryless careers place emphasis on the organisational, arguably physical boundaries, the protean career directs interest to the psychological boundaries and dimension of agency, the latter is driven by individual values (Briscoe et al. 2006). Comparisons can be drawn here with Hakim's aim to accommodate different values but this time without pigeon-holing individuals into typologies. As such, Lips-Wiersma (2006) discusses the idea that protean careers offer a better work-life balance option. Also, evidence suggests, more female managers, following protean career trajectories, reach top positions as compared to their traditional trajectory equivalents (Reitmann and Schneer, 2003). Further support comes from Cabrera (2009) who used semi-structured interviews with graduates. Cabrera found that those who had previously left their jobs returned if they had been previously categorised as following a protean career. So transition according to changing values is feasible under this concept. It should be pointed out however, that attempts to measure protean careers (for example: Briscoe et al. 2006) have been met with criticism. The disquiet follows a similar path to that of the debate over the measurement of emotional intelligence (see for example Mathews, Zeidner and Roberts 2004). Attempts at refining validity and reliability result in such a narrow concept as to arguably render it arguably useless. In the case of protean careers, Arthur and Cohen argue, without an organisational perspective, the concept lacks boundaries. If this is a valid point, there is little left of the protean career concept. Lips-Wiersma and McMorland (2006) suggest a very harmonious resolution to organisational and individual working life aspirations:

*the fulfilment of self through the expression and experience of living authentically and sharing in the (re)creation of organisations and society. (Lips-Wiersma and McMorland 2006 p.148)*

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<sup>2</sup> Proteus was a Greek deity who was a 'shape-shifter'.

Once again, the notion of agency needs to be raised whether women are really free to choose and freely express and experience the full range of paid employment and beyond. Hall (2004) points out that in fact the organisation, and not the individual, is in charge. However, it should be remembered that 'success' is dependent on whether considered from an objective (position, status, wage etc.) or subjective perspective, thus returning to the discussion of what constitutes a career and career success (see section 2.2). Arthur and Cohen (2007) offer the mythological background of Proteus and direct the debate to the work-life balance consideration:

*Eventually, if his pursuer was able to withstand Proteus' transformations and hold on, the sea monster would eventually give up, go back to his original shape, and submit to the will of his captor. In career terms, there is no personal development in the myth of Proteus, as at best, he returns to just where he started. And the captor wins the day. (Arthur and Cohen 2007 p.14)*

Using this story to consider maternity leave and career breaks, the woman, Proteus, certainly does undergo some transformations during pregnancy – physical and psychological. The extent of the latter is dependent on the psychological perspective taken (for example the trigger of Jung's archetype in motherhood). Alternatively, the additional networks gained might be seen as facilitating cognitive development and understanding (after Belenky et al 1997) a point which will be returned to in the work-life balance discussion below. Organisations, through their policies and culture, do attempt to hold onto the status quo. It is therefore assumed that transformations have not and will not affect values and work-life priorities by not sanctioning invisibility and part/flexible options with lower expectations and pay. Many women, it is argued do not 'end up where they started' – the sea monster lives. Such negativity, as in the reinterpretation of the Proteus story above to career breaks, is justified. This makes it worthy of inclusion in career theory. The gender specific problems women face, are universal. For example Geber (2000) reports a South African study which supports the cross-cultural nature of problems described, albeit in different social contexts. Huang (2006) considers the fact that those who have career interruptions are correlated with lower income. This would seem to be because career breaks taken by women specifically, are viewed as negative. This conclusion does not explain what is it about not working for an organisation that does not allow this time to sit comfortably with working life trajectory to the point of being ignored by organisations and career theories. Even when transition and the agency - or lack of it - are taken into account, the theories are uncomfortably extended to non-paid times, out-of-work periods for women. Conscriptio, which is similarly non-paid out of work time for men is seen as a great opportunity to develop transferable skills, especially ones associated with equality, and welcomed (Hart 2009) although this is contested by some as a myth, (Krebs 2006). Typically

however, the following extreme (contradictory) stance captures American and arguably organisations' attitude to time off work, within countries where conscription is on-going:

*Conscripts learn how to work hard, discipline themselves, follow orders, think on their feet and lead their peers. Most importantly they come away from the military with the skills that benefit society, the workplace and the family.* (Williams 2006 [online])

Career trajectories, as has been demonstrated up to this point, can be linked to many perspectives and the concept is multi-disciplinary, attracting attention of economists, psychologists, and business and management scholars. The negativity associated with transition to career breaks or maternity leave is strong. Yet career management is increasingly focusing on the individual, not organisational representatives, such as line managers. Sideways, as well as upwards movements are becoming acceptable for development purposes (Herriot 1992). The question is whether maternity leave and career breaks taken by mothers can be considered developmental too. There follows an exploration of the linked topic: work-life balance taking into consideration evidence and on-going debates. It appears that the incongruence between organisational and individual perceptions is equally evident between some researchers' assumptions of women's experiences of motherhood.

### **2.5.3.2 Learning from work in the community**

Super (1980) suggests that both family and community play a role in career management decisions; this seemingly obvious fact was stated over 30 years ago. Baruch (2006) echoes the individualistic nature of working life trajectories but concedes that organisations still play the pivotal role in development of individuals. Mallon and Cohen (2001) also conclude that when an individual leaves an organisation to pursue their own projects, training and development needs are neglected. All three theorists thus refer to the importance of organisations to acknowledge learning endeavours and experiences beyond paid employment. Such arguments hark back to the days when face-to-face formal training was deemed to be the only way in which to learn new skills relevant to the workplace. It ignores all other non-formal, now widely accepted forms of learning, such as observational learning, coaching, learning by doing – in short experiential learning. The whole notion of experiential learning and for example the now-dated Kolb's (Kolb and Fry 1975) learning cycle is disregarded with this belief that learning and development cannot take place unless managed through training by an organisation. Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (2003) offer the case study of "Isabel", which demonstrates the above argument well. Isabel left paid employment after her second pregnancy and she is quoted as saying that she wanted to do something that was "*of direct benefit to people*" (p. 72). The authors refer to Marshall's

(1989) regeneration, to move towards better work-life balance but no comment is made of subsequent on-going skill development or how this transition might be part of an on-going working history trajectory. In fact, the story is interpreted as one of inferred failure:

*she moved around to some extent in her work as a nurse, but it seems that her career took second place to her husband's and was focused around notions of community service rather than personal advancement or fulfilment.* (Marshall 1989 p. 277)

It is noted that a preference for non-hierarchical and non-organisational working history is preceded with the word 'but' in the quotation above. The two paths, her husband's traditional career path and her community work, appear to be mutually exclusive in terms of personal advancement and her is not assumed to offer fulfilment. Cabrera (2007) says of case study replies:

*They mentioned wanting to help others, contribute to positive social change, make a difference in the world, and work for a cause about which they were passionate.* (Cabrera 2007 p. 230)

This level of self-reflection would, even by some classical psychologists, be considered as a sign of increased self-awareness and development (for example: Maslow 1968). It is however common as demonstrated above, to see that transferable skills used outside of the workplace and/or developed in the community, are described as being of limited value. Arthur, Inkson and Pringle (2003) refer to increased self-confidence and administrative skills acquisition as "apparently serendipitous rather than planned". To balance this they admit that community work does contribute to women's work experiences positively. The crossing of home and work boundaries clearly needs more research (Pringle and Mallon 2003) and it is actually Arthur who suggests there should be less preoccupation with paid work. Indeed, with the acquisition of transferable skills, Wood (2000) argues that women are in fact better placed than men to manage demands. This leads to a consideration of what community work involves. Essentially, it would appear that researchers are referring to two forms. Firstly, work which is taken on board *instead* of paid work, as a conscious move away from traditional organisational paths. These women are often represented in Hewlett's 'off ramps' examples. Women, who ostensibly take a pay-cut and work below their qualification level to gain a better work-life balance and more meaningful work. Secondly, community work represents work done by the large and unacknowledged group of women, who are on maternity leave and perhaps subsequent career break. The role of the community for parents is also linked to rural communities in particular (Mauthner, McKee and Strell 2001). The work may be for example, as part of a committee of a mother and toddler group, part of a support network for other mothers or carer for relative, previously not possible due to full-time paid employment commitments. These roles and their importance are recognised by

the Chicago School of Sociology, which acknowledges careers as being intrinsically linked to the environment.

Such ideas therefore acknowledge in theory at least, the importance of community work and indeed fits in with protean theory. Sargent and Domberger (2007) found two drivers for protean careers, one of which was the contribution to society and the other was work-life balance. The effects can be felt outwith the organisation too (Vigota-Gadot and Grimland 2008). This does not resolve all criticisms of the protean career concept. Although a work-life balance is accommodated and valued, there is still the incongruent organisational stance, as well as the mixed messages sent out by the media to acknowledge. Grywacz and Marks (2000) used Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) dynamic interactionism and ecological framework to create their own model. These researchers concluded that in fact the timing of role transitions and work-life balance changes were critical. As Huang (2006) summarises, getting the balance right can either have a positive or negative effect on the individual. In summary, the protean career would appear to be more accommodating than the boundaryless career in that the focus is on psychological dimensions, thus reflecting a subjective career perspective, which in turn is less bound by organisational barriers. However, whilst agency is bypassed and transitions implicitly accommodated, more needs to be included to accommodate decision surrounding work-life balance for women. Specifically, it is possible to question how a work-life balance can be managed and what impact multiple roles may have on working life trajectories. The ability to develop transferable skills has already been mentioned. Whether such development is a natural phenomenon of work-life balance transitions is under-researched. Similarly, whether the management of multiple roles are a key contributor to development of skills is unknown. Multiple role management should be considered part of a working life trajectory – and as such, could be perceived as a beneficial addition to working life. Chapter one suggests that organisations do not share this view, even if women might –although these potentially different standpoints are not explored. The protean career is rather restricted in its ability to offer a framework of understanding and hence the inclusion of the next career theory: kaleidoscope careers.

#### **2.5.4 Kaleidoscope<sup>3</sup> ABC careers.**

This theory offers a framework for exploring multiple roles, transition and agency.

*Authenticity is defined as being true to oneself. It leads people to look for work that is compatible with their values. Balance refers to the desire to successfully integrate one's work and non-work lives. Lastly, challenge includes the desire for autonomy*

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<sup>3</sup> In Greek, kaleidoscope means 'looking at beautiful (kalos) images'.

*and responsibility, as well as an interest in learning and growing. These three career motives can be likened to the mirrors in a kaleidoscope. They are always present...*  
(Cabrera 2009 p.190)

This opening quote captures the key themes of critical discussion of career theory discussed so far in this chapter. The idea of authenticity accommodates the 'off-ramps women' for example, who chose, sometimes from a restricted range of options, to change the focus of their working life away from organisations and an upward career trajectory. 'Balance' reflects the work-life balance and 'inconsistent' trajectories. 'Challenge', the last of the three mirrors points to the idea that whatever the trajectory is, there is possibility for on-going development. Notably, the phrase 'desire for autonomy' cleverly ensures the dimension is included without falling into the trap of assuming agency is possible or perceived to be available. The idea of kaleidoscope of mirrors also suggests that whatever is perceived includes a reflection of the culture or context of the viewer and all reflections, within a kaleidoscope are inter-related. Decisions regarding working life are based on shifting variables of importance. Also, the idea that roles are so easily switched and perhaps even run in parallel is the next topic discussed in the context of career theory and maternity leave/career breaks in particular. The theory is effective in accommodating the concerns raised so far and the appeal lies with its accommodation of women's multiple roles. This is the focus of the next section.

## **2.6 Multiple roles**

Arthur (2008) acknowledges that individuals may well have more than one role. He says however: *"if we allow the idea of 'multiple careers' we lose sight of the person who undertakes the variety of jobs in question"* (p. 167) but in apparent contradiction to this, also says: *"to suggest that parallel or successive jobs are unconnected is to interfere with the holistic view of the career, that the definition otherwise allows"* (p. 167). These two quotes must somehow be reconciled. If we consider the variety of meanings of the word 'career', some understanding can be unearthed. Careers in the objective sense do not accommodate unpaid work as in community work as previously described. Yet as shown, work in the community may not only to enhance an individual's skill set but can be engaged in a number of ways – be it during a career break or maternity leave or as an alternative to traditional organisational careers. The kaleidoscope career theory offers a holistic approach, embracing the importance or value of paid work, unpaid community and family roles. Again, use of the term 'working life trajectories' overcomes such presumably unintended contradictions. Ruderman et al (2002) provides an extensive investigation of multiple roles through a mixed method study using 61 managerial level women, of which half had dependent children.



Refreshingly, multiple roles are associated with positive, rather than negative experiences and Ruderman finds supporting evidence for his interpretation:

*Role accumulation perspective that multiple roles can be enriching rather than depleting....they [the women] garnered satisfaction, confidence, esteem and a well rounded perspective that helped them cope with work related issues. (Ruderman 2002 p.380)*

Interestingly, the positive impact of role accumulation is not restricted to women. Male executives similarly benefited from unpaid roles, such as coaching children in sport (McGall, Lombardo and Morrison, 1988). The benefits of multiple roles are made fairly explicit and a convenient categorisation of benefits, found in Ruderman's study has been copied below:

Theme Definitions	Percentage of Sample Demonstrating Theme	Percentage of Rater Agreement
<p><i>Opportunities to enrich interpersonal skills: Understanding, motivating, respecting, and developing others</i>            Motherhood as well as other personal relationships teach managers interpersonal skills. Raising children or participating in other relationships teaches respect for individual differences, and how to understand, motivate, develop, and direct employees.</p>	42.0%	90.2%
<p><i>Psychological benefits</i>            Overcoming obstacles, taking risks and succeeding in personal arenas bolster esteem, confidence, stamina, and courage to do the same professionally. Personal experiences help her develop perspective on her work life.</p>	23.0	75.9
<p><i>Emotional support and advice</i>            Friends and family members act as sounding boards and motivators, provide different advice and insights from their experiences, and allow her to vent emotions, which help temper her reactions to stressful work situations.</p>	19.0	90.9
<p><i>Handling multiple tasks</i>            Juggling personal tasks, setting family goals, planning for the family has helped her to develop her administrative skills and learn to prioritize and plan.</p>	9.7	85.7
<p><i>Personal interests and background</i>            Interests, cross-cultural experiences, characteristics or background (previous experience, nationality, gender, tasks in other roles) provide skills and perspectives valuable in her work.</p>	6.5	72.7
<p><i>Leadership</i>            Leadership opportunities in volunteer, community organizations, or family settings provide leadership lessons (strategy, budgets, organizing, implementing systems, achieving goals through others) and increase her comfort in authority roles.</p>	4.8	66.7

**Figure 8: Ruderman's multiple role synergy themes.**

Whether or not these same themes or examples be found amongst any maternity leave takers – or are these exclusively relevant to managerial women, who work and manage additional roles is unknown. The current research is well placed to answer such questions.

Just as the protean career concept offers a framework for understanding subjective careers and appears to accommodate career breaks, so the kaleidoscope career concept, together with positive evidence on multiple roles, points to an exploration of the interaction of ‘mirrors’ at an individual level. It is argued that the only way to accommodate the interaction of mirrors is indeed to consider the individual level of analysis and take one more step away from generic models of career. Perhaps the only way forward towards meaningful models is at a micro level of understanding placing interest on specific aspects of working life trajectories. Lalande, Crozier and Davey (2000) for example, focus on process, specifically the role of relationships in women’s decision and sense-making processes of their careers. Lee et al. (2011) also consider sense-making of transitions, focusing exclusively on a sample of professionals who opt to work fewer hours to accommodate a more agreeable work-life balance. This finer focus does not mean that the ideas are not contextualised; Lee et al.’s (2011) theoretical framework suggests that the different life strands are entangled, fluid and reactive. Maternity leave could fit into what is described as a ‘break-through’ event, albeit not specifically mentioned. The current research follows this new pattern of micro analysis to help develop a broader understanding.

## 2.7 Final comment on career theory

Together, these career theories, models and evidence lend themselves to directing questions particularly pertinent to the exploration of career breaks and maternity leave. In doing so, the literature review adds a fifth pattern and paradox to the four already identified: (taken from O’Neil, Hopkins and Bilimoria 2008 p.729-733):

Pattern 1:	women’s careers comprise more than ‘work’ they are embedded in women’s larger life contexts.
Paradox 1:	organizational realities demand the separation of career and life.
Pattern 2:	families and careers are central to women’s lives.
Paradox 2:	families are liabilities to women’s career development in organizations.
Pattern 3:	women’s career paths reflect a wide range and variety of patterns.
Paradox 3:	organisations predominantly organize for and reward upwardly mobile career paths.
Pattern 4:	human and social capital are critical factors for women’s career development.
Paradox 4:	women’s human and social capital has not defeated the glass ceiling.

**Pattern 5: maternity leave transitions have a large impact on career trajectory especially when it results in changes in women's working patterns**

**Paradox 5: career theories, legislation and organisations do not distinguish between first and subsequent maternity leave periods.**

(Source: author)

Figure 9: Patterns and paradoxes in career literature.

Questions about women's working lives at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave remain and fit into the patterns and paradoxes above, see the list below:

- Are multiple roles perceived to be beneficial or recognised as potentially being beneficial by the individual? By the organisation?
- Are transitions to and from unpaid work similar in importance and dimension to within paid job transitions?
- Are maternity leave breaks truly full stops or pauses in careers and are they perceived as such by individuals and organisations?
- How much agency do women perceive in their individual trajectories at this time?
- Is the transition from one child to one or more different and what impact does it have on working life trajectory sense-making?
- Does learning take place at such transition point? Is this learning transferable?
- Do individuals accept the negativity associated with maternity leave and how does this affect working life trajectory decisions?
- Is community work relevant to women's working life trajectories and transition decisions?

Such questions are simply reflections of the gaps currently in the literature due to the 'black hole' maternity leave represents in much career theory. This ambivalence to leave which is taken by so many women is a reflection of organisational attitudes and mixed media messages about motherhood. To ensure that the notions of transition and agency are contextualised, a biographic narrative approach will be used. This will also permit a deeper understanding of work-life balance. A free associative form of interviewing will allow the women's voice to be privileged. It will be interesting to see, whether examples of unpaid leave are given any weight within their stories and whether any of the questions are indeed

relevant to an understanding of women's careers. In order to challenge academic perceptions and presumed areas of interest, the current research will listen to women's voices of working life at a natural time of reflection.

**What can narrative analysis uncover about women's working life trajectories at the time of women's second or subsequent maternity leave?**

The emphasis and differentiation of women from men with regards both their experience of paid work and perhaps too, their motivation and stance towards end goals in employment positions the current research as falling under the category of 'feminist research'. To better understand the implications of such a label, an exploration of feminism follows. This precedes the methodology chapter as it offers a link between the introduction's facts and figures about women in the workplace, career theory and the methodology this research has adopted. A feminist perspective and the methodology embraced by the current research will be shown to complement each other well as will be described in chapter 4.

## Chapter 3 Feminist psychology and career theory – an exploration

### 3.1 An introduction

Literature searches on women's career paths, transition periods and motherhood frequently make reference to feminism in some form or other. More often than not, writers declare a feminist perspective has been taken. Indeed, a woman only perspective in the area of working life is not new: Horner (1968) explored women's motivation to succeed, while Chodorow (1978) wrote about differences in success, Acker questioned the existence (or lack of) feminism in organisations (1990). More recently, Buzzanell and Liu (2005) tell their readers that they use a post-structuralist feminist analysis to explore women's maternity leave experiences, whilst their findings support the literature review findings to date, a little more is explored about the women's identity too. Exploring what post-structuralist feminist analysis is all about leads more fundamentally, to asking what feminism is in 2012. It is topical concept in academia across psychology as well as sociology (for example Oates and McDonald 2006) management literature and in the current culture. For example Caitlin Moran's book: 'How to be a woman' is currently in non-fiction best seller list; Germaine Greer has on-going celebrity status of writer, following her book: *The Female Eunuch* (1971) and subsequent, extensive academic writing. Explaining what feminism is in 2012 therefore, the catalyst for an exploration into what 'feminism' really means and how a feminist perspective may further understanding of the topics associated with the current research – and the method adopted. Autobiographical research has shifted focus away from an interest in realism to an interest in discursive and reflective aspects of narrative. With this shift in interest comes a natural focus on the perceived role of gender identity, (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilko 2003) whether this is as a carer (O'Dell 2007); engineering student (Kowitz (2010), self-harm researcher (Hunter 2010) or 'good' working mother (Buzzanell et al. 2005) etc. Calas and Smirchich (2009) suggest that by the use of feminist theory in organisational studies as a conceptual lens, everyone who works for an organisation, will ensure inclusion, not just women. It is fair to say that it is not just women who may be negatively affected by organisations if they are not represented by mainstream literature, as shown by 'Third World/post colonial feminism' – see for example the rise of Alice Walker. Nonetheless, with eight versions of feminism identified, (Calas and Smirchich 1992)<sup>4</sup> there is obviously more than one feminist theory/approach to contemplate. The following section does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview; the focus instead is on relevance of a feminist approach to the current research - and proximity to the objectives of the current research. Notably it is

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<sup>4</sup> liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Marxist, socialist, poststructuralist/post modern and Third World/(post) Colonial.

20 years since Calas and Smirchich's (1992) categorisation of feminist approaches and twenty-three years since Alison Jaggar's (1989) influential paper on the same topic.

All feminist approaches have in common a reaction, to some degree, to a male-dominated society. The three approaches chosen here for consideration place their emphasis on different levels of analysis. Some look to organisations and how they might/should change (for example: **liberal feminism**); others focus on a societal level and extend philosophy to legislation (for example: **radical feminism**). In contrast, **post-modern** approaches question the very essence of our knowledge. Each is discussed in more detail below.

### **3.2 Liberal Feminist Theory**

This perspective is one of the oldest approaches and accepts Descartes' dualism (simplistically separating mind and body) in terms of sex, supporting the notion of heteronormativity (Barker 2007). The approach accepts differences between men and women as biologically based but reinforced through the socialisation processes. The approach takes the position that no special privileges are required for women, as men and women are equal, although barriers need to be removed to ensure equality of pay and opportunities. A positivist research approach leads to mainly quantitative methodologies, which liberal feminists can comfortably align with. Whilst this objective simplicity is appealing, the current research aims to look at individual experiences, specifically those unique to women, albeit with the intention of informing organisational policy. This makes the fundamental assumption that men and women are equal. Yet as has been identified, motherhood makes differences extremely salient and therefore the pursuit of sexual equality as espoused by this perspective is not one that can be shared. Historically however, effects on society of this 'new' stance cannot be under-estimated. Early contributors to this approach include Wollstonecraft (1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*); John Mill (1869) and his early defence for women's right to vote (1865), in conjunction with his wife's support and work, Harriet Mill (1807 – 1858) through to modern day writings of Naomi Wolf (1994). If not all quite becoming household names, they have certainly inspired many current writers across the disciplines. It would be fair to conclude that liberal feminism still holds much currency today and importantly has acted as a precursor to more modern approaches.

### **3.3 Radical Feminism**

Historically, the 1960's are more closely aligned with the declaration of a war against the injustice of an 'under-class' of women. Martin (2001), for example, considers how masculinity is perceived by women at work within mainstream organisations. In doing so, she explores the on-going reinforcement of masculinity, the effects of this on work dynamics and the negative effect on women. Her conclusion stresses consciousness-raising through a

better understanding of dynamics at work thus supporting radical feminists' preferred methodological aims. It can be shown with Martin's example how gender differences are perceived not only to be socially constructed but importantly also perceived as oppressive. Parallels can be drawn between both favoured methodological aims of this perspective and the current research: work relationships, (as demonstrated by Martin 2001) as well as internal decision-making processes inevitably affecting maternity leave decisions. Just as Martin suggests masculinity conflates with work dynamics, so must individual abilities to manage maternity leave decisions be inter-twinned with these same work dynamics. The current research begins with the premise that it may not be necessary to lean towards negative interpretation of such experiences, as evidenced by findings of recent role accumulation research evidence (for example, Ruderman et al. 2002).

Two distinct branches of radical feminism have evolved, largely due to a dispute over the anti-pornography stance in the 1980's (the 'Sex Wars'). The first is an extreme view denouncing all men and recommending human reproduction takes place in laboratories, (Shulamith Firestone 1980). The other, is 'radical' only in that the approach urges a women-centred perspective. Bell hooks suggests that the former extreme is a misconception and has led to many incorrectly believing radicals are '*a bunch of angry women who want to be like men*' (bell hooks 2000, p. viii). The hotly debated androgynous 'ideal' represents another one of many splits amongst proponents of this approach. Either way, the perspective's vociferous standpoint (for example: the writings of Andrea Dworkin 1946-2005), no doubt forced a re-think at many different levels of work and society. Of relevance to the current research, the perspective identifies society's norms and values as being firmly rooted in being male and masculinity.

It is a common understanding shared by all feminist writers that much of today's current organisational policy and even career expectations are built on masculine competitiveness for status and money. From a radical feminist perspective, the glass ceiling is thus not so much perceived as a real barrier, as it is simply the top of a male-generated and male value-laden ladder of what is perceived to constitute success. Success in employment does not have on it rungs for women's natural abilities and skills. Radical feminism readdresses this by placing emphasis on non-competitive emotionality and nurturance. Giving women a voice leads to emotive writing, which in itself gives rise to emotive responses from those who support or reject this form of knowledge sharing. An example of such writing is Ribben's (1998) chapter entitled: "*Hearing my feeling voice: an autobiographical discussion of motherhood*". Accepting this perception of the world of work and associated topics of motherhood and its importance in understanding decisions around employment, is a move

away from patriarchal ways of knowing. '*Women's ways of knowing*', offers an excellent introduction to this topic area (Belenky et al. 1997). This opens up a new angle on the current research questions, or perhaps another level of interpretation of pilot interview data. The literature review identified conflict as a common theme. The theme addresses a point raised in earlier chapters: women, who have experienced the effects of masculine organisational policy as well as the reality of taking on another role, appear to be forced into an active resolution to work-life balance concerns to suit their female roles. It might then be argued that conflict resolution might be based on a rejection of patriarchal expectations - or a reflection of a conscious adjustment to fit into the male working environment better. Specifically feminist organisations do exist and in these, it is possible to see a greater emphasis on feminine traits of networking, support and flexible working practices – but these are clearly still in the minority (Corcoran-Nantes and Roberts 1995). Research on female entrepreneurs contains many such examples but feminism is however, often associated with outspoken political motives and as 'islands in a male-dominated, capitalist society'. Little is currently written about entrepreneurs, (Lannello, 1993) but interest is growing (Perrin Moore, Moore and Moore 2011). Nonetheless, small grass-roots opposition to large supermarket monopolies are beginning to have their voice heard and community-based, shared leadership, business ventures are encouraged by trends in 'healthy eating', buying local produce. For example the launches of community projects are popular in the media for example, one such launch of an internet local produce network was reported in the national press (*The Times*, 18/08/07). Such organisations could arguably be moving towards typically feminist core values and ways of working, or at least be support women who do wish to work this way. Radical feminism could be argued to be at the root of the inspiration for scholars exploring this community-based movement thereby allowing a continued development of organisational theory from a women centred perspective.

Radical feminism, to summarise, has arguably been diluted somewhat by the Sex Wars and to date, there is academic inconsistency as to what radical feminists' over-arching aim is. Legal battles over legislation against pornography have been well documented and certainly achieved one aim: consciousness-raising. The approach still attracts organisational theorists looking for alternative stances and explanations: feminist organisational practices provide one possibility for exploration. In terms of the current research, the analysis of women's stories of their work histories contributes to consciousness-raising aim but more importantly intends to provide insight into how woman manage their work experiences and how this affects their working life.



### 3.4 Post-modern/post-structuralist approach.

Fundamentally, the difference between this approach and the two approaches discussed so far, lies with the conception of human nature and the notion of 'truth'. Post-modernists place their 'lens' in 'subjectivity' and therefore multiple 'truths'. This is linked conceptually to Foucauldian genealogies (Diamond and Quinby 1998) - although Foucauld did not associate himself with post-modernists. For Foucauld, power is intrinsically linked to knowledge. Crucially, gender, for post-modernists, is purely constructed through language. So whilst both Foucauld and post-modernists shy away from the notion of a single truth, their conception of 'reality' is quite different. For example Butler (1999) uses the idea of '*grand narratives*' to demonstrate how a utopian clear-cut definition of gender "gives a *false sense of legitimacy and universality to a culturally specific and, in some cases, culturally oppressive version of gender identity.* (Butler 1999 p. 329) So, whereas other feminists believe gender is socially constructed on the basis of biological difference, Butler (1995) suggests that gender is a 'performance' and in fact there are no universals such as 'women'. This supports Sandra Bem's ideas (1994) who similarly highlights the cultural lens through which gender is perceived. The deconstruction of discourses - and the power relations that keep these in place - has attracted a wide range of organisational theory and 'classic' academic writing, for example: Haraway (1991).

On the surface, parallels can be drawn between the current research and the discourses of gender within organisations. Where does that position career and the common theme of women's role conflict? If the modified definition of career accepts conflict as part of a process of transitions within a working life, there is a tension between the definition and post-modernist views. A post-modernist would view the conflict paradigm '*as one that has grown out of a male-centred approach to political conflict....*', (personal communication by email with Wendy Hollway, 2008) *subjectivity is multiple, conflict is in-built.* (Hollway et al, 2007, p.150). Post-modernists would therefore argue that there are as many different women's experiences as there are types of women (Harding, 1986). Searching for universal truths is therefore a fruitless task. The post-modernist approach cannot be dismissed as it is undoubtedly a new way forward. It does not however, provide a solid foundation for the answers sought to the research questions asked. The perspective is one, which seeks more depth in a direction which is too far away from an organisational psychology stance. Similarly, it is argued to be incompatible with methodology which seeks to find over-arching themes between women's case studies through listening to their narratives. The end goal is to consider these themes in the language of current organisational theory, policies and career path expectations and research evidence presented to date. A move away from this

stance embedded within organisational psychology, would be a move too far from the secure base of the current research's aims. Acknowledgement of this stance is only possible through an understanding of what this current research is not.

### 3.5 Social constructionism – a complementary perspective

Feminism therefore has an important contribution to make and presents the foundation of understanding for the current research. It is argued that a social constructionist stance can be accommodated alongside a feminist perspective. In part, this section serves as a convenient link to the next chapter on methodology but it also demonstrates the comfortable relationship a moderate feminist perspective has with social constructionism as described by Gergen (2007). From a social constructionist perspective definitions by their very nature 'flexible' and core features of social constructionism are described in the figure below.

- Sense-making of the world is based on people sharing a language – reality is socially constructed. This also means that facts, such as biological differences, are useful in so far as they help the process of perceiving ourselves and our worlds and this inform our socially constructed 'truths'. This is pertinent to the study of women's experiences of motherhood within the context of their working lives. It is how women are perceived to 'leak' their motherhood into employment spheres for example, which feminists draw attention to.
- Linked to this is that the way an individual uses words - meaning is open to both question and reconstruction. As such there can be no single 'right' way of defining or describing something. bell hooks' writing highlights the need to move away from one way of perceiving women, specifically African Americans (1990) and she does so in a distinctive style not usually tolerated by mainstream academia - starting with not using capital letters for her name.
- Historical and cultural differences are acknowledged and embraced. Furthermore, Gergen adds: "*From this position, it is possible to acknowledge the multiplicity of world views, and to work towards creating conditions of mutuality, tolerance and compromise.*" (Gergen 2007 p. 7).
- Social constructionism considers ethics to be tightly bound up within individual communities' values. The current research is guided by the content of the women's narratives and their understanding of their working life, this may or may not include community work, although recent research does incorporate community life as one strand of an individual's life trajectory (Lee et al. 2011).

- Everything we perceive, including scientific ‘facts’ about the world for example, perceived by our sense is mediated by language. Our language is embedded in our cultural community. Gergen and Davis (1997) thus argue that we “*can ask questions about the world but we cannot claim to have discovered the truth*” (p. 7).

**Figure 10: Social constructionism in perspective.**

The final quote sums up the position the current research takes, which is one based in social constructionism. In doing so, it is distanced from realism. This stance has developed in part from a feminist perspective which shares dissatisfaction with empiricists exploring women’s lives.

*The best one can expect is that a new interpretation, a different perspective or an interesting slant can be created. In this sense social constructionism invites creativity, new interpretations and an openness to other fields of knowledge. Whether a new interpretation becomes acceptable depends importantly upon others in the linguistic community. (Gergen and Davis 1997 p.7)*

### **3.6 Conclusions**

The current research uses a women only sample and as such implicitly acknowledges that women's experiences of work are different to those of men. At the simplest level, this is a feminist piece of research. The intention however, is not to politicise interpretations as seems inevitable with any feminist stance. However, the sample, topic and methodology, favoured by feminists, will undoubtedly be pulled towards paths that cross with feminist epistemologies. Some aspects of radical feminism may well enhance interpretations of data. It is only right therefore that this exploration listens to the different approaches and gives them due credit where relevant – or questions them when there is incongruence in understanding or positioning. An understanding of these perspectives and in which camp the current research lies must be made transparent, as befits a qualitative piece of research. Furthermore each approach and stance contributes to a greater understanding. Liberal feminism, with its didactic views on equality appears to still inform legislation regarding maternity leave and consequently organisational policy towards working mothers in many organisations. Feminist organisations, as championed by radicals, are not yet mainstream and realistically, unlikely to be represented by any of my sample of Scottish women in non city locations. Radical feminism does however, point to a perspective which may be useful in understanding woman's stories of conflict resolution. Certainly, in the current research, regardless of what the findings may be, the end result will raise consciousness. Finally, post modernism/post structuralism is highly regarded by leading academics (for example: Hollway) and clearly, a path forward but does not sit comfortably with the methodology of the current research. The aim is to better understand women's reflections of perceptions of work experiences. Incompatibility is especially resonant when a successful outcome for the current research would be identification of a different perspective on knowledge that might eventually help individuals, and perhaps eventually inform organisational theory. An informed, open, feminist social constructionist perspective therefore forms the foundation for the current research.

## Chapter 4 Methodology

*It is frequently pointed out throughout academic texts on qualitative analysis that this is no 'one' right way to analyse or interpret data and there is no single approach in qualitative analysis that is widely accepted (Neuman, 2006, p.457). In agreement with this, Smith and Osborne (2008, p.67) reiterate that qualitative analysis is a 'personal process' and as such the methods used here reflect the personal style of the researcher while following general guidelines advocated by Smith and Osborn, (2008). (Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh 2008 p.164)*

### 4.1 Introduction to chapter

The following conceptual discussion precedes the more practical, procedural outline of the research. The intention is to offer justification and rationale for the methodology chosen, or the methodological decisions which evolved, through the course of the current research. This then lays for the foundation on which a description of the process, with added reflection is built in. The overall aim is for the research philosophy to provide structural support for descriptive, interpretative and theoretical levels of analysis and subsequent discussion. This methodological level of transparency is necessary – although often omitted, is much needed - as pointed out by a critical review of papers using similar methodology (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006; Hollway and Todres 2003).

There are clear overlaps with the researcher's decision making and findings from extensive reading including feminist epistemology and qualitative research methods (for example: Mauthner and Doucet 1998), where researchers in related disciplines similarly listen and preserve women's voices (for example Belenky et al. 1997). The literature review offers an insight into the various paths taken to collate a complete picture of the relevant writing – a task, which proved to be one of boundary setting above all else. The knowledge gained from the literature review, despite its complex and at times serendipitous finds, established an appreciation of what needed to be done and why. A clear path in this chapter, the outcome of extensive reading, is subsequently easier to signpost. A theoretical construction of the foundations for the current research and the tools used helps position the researcher's interest and so results in becoming the backbone to the whole project, reflecting the researcher's journey, the project's direction and the parameters of the research discussion. The chapter begins with an overview of layout.

## 4.2 An overview

The driving force behind the methodological decisions made was a strong belief in the value of narrative and this facilitated early decisions regarding interview design. For a researcher from a psychological discipline, there is inevitably an intrinsic interest at the *individual* level of understanding. This level of insight can then inform organisational understanding and subsequent decision-making at management and strategic levels. The links between findings and implications are explored in the Discussion (chapter 8). The path from individual level understanding to useful, informed decision making is a well-trodden one in psychological disciplines (for example : Smith, 1999) and now also increasingly used in business management , for example: Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008).

The interview design reflects the value placed on individuals' narratives and the design aimed to draw out the participants' stories. This privileges the interviewees' voices (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005) which describe and make sense of their perceptions. The sampling strategy arguably helps ensure credible accounts as they are built on experience and time to reflect on this experience. Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM, Wengraf 2007) interview techniques were adopted to capture the participant's narratives. Sampling strategy notes are included in the chapter.

As will be demonstrated, there is a range of narrative analysis techniques available once a transcription process of the interview is complete, (for example: Bruner, 1997, Polkinghorne 1995, Reissman 1997) but transcription of a narrative style interview is, in fact, also analysed from different perspectives. For example: a researcher can quantitatively use content analysis method; linguistically and then more holistically – accommodating historical and social facts and social position of researcher and interviewee (Gergen, 2001, Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Different levels of interest and focus of interest also become identifiable. For example: feminist approaches may turn to 'voice centred relational analysis' (Mauthner and Doucet 1998). In doing so, the feminist researchers ensure a woman centred perspective is accommodated as the starting point. Research by Broverman et al. (1971) offered clear cut evidence as to the extent of the problem of sexism in research yet over 20 years later, Hyde (1994) was justified in calling for guidelines for non-sexist research publications. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, feminist perspectives still have a role to play in understanding findings in 2012. Complementing these influences, this chapter offers support for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a technique developed from a Heideggerian and hermeneutic viewpoint (Smith, 1996; Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). Importantly for this discussion, this type of idiographic analysis offers a solid theoretical

framework from which to conduct cross-case comparison. The inclusion of specific procedural decisions - both data collection and analytical - contextualises the methodological discussion. For example, the inevitable double hermeneutic associated with IPA is moderated through transparency, for example: a diary was kept, with entries made after each interview. The chapter carries the reader to an exploration of IPA, which begins with a comparison with BNIM and later incorporates reference to other options available for analysing the interviews.

Finally, remaining true to the interpretative, reflective nature of the current research, the researcher's own thoughts and comments are inserted in italics in the procedural description. The thoughts and reactions to the actual interviews are captured in reflective comments and the Reflexive Analysis. Both the running commentary and the reflexive analysis mirror the understanding that the researcher is positioned in the centrality of the analysis. Brocki and Weardon (2006) reinforce this:

*a clear acknowledgement of an author's particular perspectives (perhaps including research interests) theoretical groundings and why they should undertake this particular research) might assist this.* (Brocki and Weardon 2006 p. 99)

#### **4.3 Listening to stories**

*My earnest hope is that the book may serve to give the rich a more intimate knowledge of the sufferings, and frequent heroism under those sufferings of the poor – that it may teach those who are beyond temptation to look with charity of the frailties of their less fortunate brethren – and cause those in high places and those of whom much is expected, to bestir themselves to improve the conditions of a class of people whose misery, ignorance and vice, amidst all the immense wealth and great knowledge of the “first city of the world” is, to say the least, a national disgrace to us.* (Mayhew Vol. 1, p. xv, cited in Gubrium and Holstein 2009)

Stories are powerful and have been used through the generations to pass on historical information, offer warnings, teach morals, pass on religion, soothe tragedy, share happiness or convey sadness, form friendships and reinforce enemies. The impact of stories – true, entirely fabricated, misunderstood or misrepresented – depending on one's epistemological position (for example, social constructionist as opposed to objective realist) can be felt at all levels of our society – as so perfectly and readily demonstrated by today's media. Gabriel (1998) in a chapter on the 'use of stories' in organisations, underlines how easy it is for a story to be misrepresented by the analyst to become the researcher's collection of pre-

conceived ideas and assumptions. The following discussion aims to explain how stories can also be used a rich source of data.

As regards a research tool, narrative as the earliest work found comes from Henry Mayhew, writing on the mid-nineteenth century who believed that London's "humbler classes" could offer realistic accounts of their lives in their own 'unvarnished' language (see opening quote). The stories he collected vividly described and thus informed the readers of for example, the real lives of London's beggars, thieves and prostitutes (volume 1), privileging their own voices and giving them power to tell otherwise untold stories. As Mayhew comments above, these stories can or in his case should, be acted on. Over a hundred years later, Belenky and her colleagues wrote in the introduction about their book:

*It is also a book about "the roar which lies on the other side of silence" when ordinary women find their voice and use it to gain control over their lives. (Belenky et al. 1987 p.4)*

Appreciating the value of stories is then not just about telling the story to a listener. There is a symbiotic relationship, in that the researcher gives power to the storyteller by taking on board the storyteller's context – and their reality – from a social constructionist perspective. As for the theoretical position, the narrative approach has been associated with diametrically opposed views of relativism (essentially narratives as fiction) through to post-modernism (acknowledging many realities). Gabriel (2008) offers a grounded explanation of postmodernism from a social and organisational perspective, suggesting that perhaps the methods associated with attempts to accommodate or critique the position, are as valuable as postmodern theories themselves. Before exploring the phenomenological position, what constitutes a story (important also to postmodernists) must be defined before methodological consideration is given to analysis.

#### **4.4 Researcher interest in narrative and links to methodology**

Stories are "*essential meaning-making structures, narratives must be preserved and **not** fractured*". (Reissman 1993) The current research adopts the narrative approach methodology in so far as it uses participants' naturally formed narratives on aspects of their working life, permitting them to choose which important experiences to date, they talk about. To justify this approach, the following is offered to help contextualise the value of free associative interview method.

Labov and Waletzky (1967) offered a simple descriptive of narrative: all narratives are about past events and follow a chronological sequence. This might be argued to be an over-



simplification as the telling of an event often triggers other memories; recall is affected by state and context and meaning is unclear, 'facts' are inserted. The latter was demonstrated as far back as 1932, Bartlett's 'war of the ghosts' story, which listeners unconsciously altered to help it make sense and more coherent). In reality, stories rarely follow a strict linear sequence and as such, Czarniawska's (1998) definition is accepted instead:

*A narrative in its basic form requires at least three elements: an original state of affairs, an action or event and the consequent state of affairs. (Czarniawska 1998 p.2).*

From this point on however, the researcher needs to acknowledge a direction of interest or a perspective, although as Denzin suggests, there is a degree of reciprocity between new ideas and new method development in society (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) This is captured in the current research through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the exact usage of which over the duration of this study (5 years) has evolved. The rise of the popularity of narrative research can be traced back to the 1960's, a time when there was increasing criticism of positivism for example: Maslow 1968 and the development of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Force<sup>5</sup> in psychology, reacting to behaviourism and psychoanalytic thinking - and a more recent thirst for memoirs (Arnold 2005). This complemented an acceptability of previously silenced minority groups. Good examples come from gays and lesbians - the desire of gay and lesbian researchers to tell their story is evidenced in the BPS Psychology of Women section. Articles and conferences also highlight topics considered taboo or 'difficult' for example, women suffering infertility (Atta and Lawthom 2009) and Pinto's 2009 eye-catching article on the sex industry. Technological advancement permits easier vocal recordings and together circumstances all directly fed and eased the popularity and access to narrative research interest. Initially this was largely reflected in psychology disciplines and now stretches beyond. The development of interest has not only increased the topic areas but also developed and refined the different levels of narrative analysis available to the researchers.

At the socio-linguistic level, Labov and Waletzky (1967) began a debate on the structure of narratives (see Reissman, 1993). They proposed six elements: abstract; orientation; complicating action (CA); evaluation (EV) and finally a coda, which returns the story to the present. This seminal work has stood the test of time and recent attempts at structural analysis still make reference to this categorisation (for example: Reissman, 1997). However, it is important to note that not all stories demonstrate all six elements and whilst the order

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<sup>5</sup> The first force in psychology is considered to be the behaviourist influence, which focused exclusively on observable behaviour. The second force is represented in Freud's concepts of an unconscious which drives our behaviour. The 'Third Force' was a reaction against previous stances and emphasised individuality, free-will and a holistic, non-judgemental understanding of humans.

offered above suggests a logical linearity, the order is not always followed. This structural level interest, as described above can be complemented with a focus on the entrance and exit talk (Jefferson 1979); pitch, pauses and other non verbal speech elements (Gee 1986, p.135 cited in Reissman 1993). It might be argued that Wengraf in his three stage analysis of narratives accommodates this level of interest in what he describes as microanalysis, as described later in this chapter in the biographic narrative interpretative method section (section 4.6).

Whilst the narratives are the 'unit of analysis', they can also serve as a vehicle to interpretation rather than solely the focus of interpretation. Boje's (2001) work is interesting to consider at this point as it incorporates another level of analysis – the concept of sense-making as manifested in story-telling. Boje suggests there is more than one dimension to sense-making – not just retrospective as the story is told - but also suggests sense-making is 'in the moment', as well as future and past. In this way, there are clear links to a phenomenological perspective. As is the case with many examples of cross-disciplinary research, the same concept is described using different discourse and examples, relevant to the discipline. Boje offers Disney and Wal-Mart case studies – as befits his organisational level research. In the current research, examples will be from the world of a mother on maternity leave, having just left organisational life. Boje's (2001) concept of antenarrative is described as aspects of the story-telling which are unconstructed and not yet captured by sense-making processes. This lack of resolution to stories happens, Boje hypothesises, because the storyteller is still in conflict and so there is not yet an 'ending' to the story. In accommodating antenarrative, the analyst can embrace conflicting stories and he suggests, takes the analyst away from traditional hypothetical-deductive spirals – as is typical in quantitative research. At the same level of analysis, Wengraf (2006), within his description of a textual level of analysis suggests an analyst does not restrict him/herself to complete stories, too. Rather than interpret why stories may be incomplete, Wengraf offers categories for the purposes of labelling incomplete stories, i.e.: segments of narratives, which are not 'PIN's' (particular incident narratives). PINS are of specific interest to biographic narrative interpretative method. This categorisation is done in a similar way to Gabriel (2000), who offers the categories of: reports, opinions and proto-stories. Importantly, the common assumption that a narrative is recounting a past event remains, whether considering the structural units as phrases for analysis or whether considering their category of a complete or incomplete story. Another example of a specific interest area informing the researcher's collection of the narrative is offered by Gee. Gee's interest in non verbal level of analysis illustrates his aim to "*interfere as little as possible in the creation of the narrative*" (Gee 1986, p.135 cited in Reissman 1993). Other researchers (Smith and Osbourn 2003) privilege the

interviewees' words and story formation by suggesting minimal probing for example: "how did you feel about that?" This is similar to the way Wengraf recommends the development of a semi-structured interview. From socio-linguistic structural levels through to the consideration of stories within the narrative, there is strong support for the use of an interview format which encourages story-telling. In the current research, a free-associative narrative technique as described by Wengraf is adopted. Reissman reflects how this acceptance must also be followed through to the analysis stage:

*Narrative form can incorporate expectations of neatness, linearity and singularity of plot line, coherence between past, present and future. I suggest we need sometimes to recognise lives as more fittingly reflected by incongruence, multiplicity or discontinuity of action and rationale and not seek to tidy this up.* (Reissman p.8)

There is a large body of research which has adopted narrative analysis and associated levels of analysis which considers the whole narrative, beyond the internal organisation of the story. This may be in, for example, the form of discourse analysis or ethnography, writing about the narrative approach to organisational studies, Czarniawska (1998 p.19) suggests that researchers acknowledge the anthropologically inspired nature of such work. A common factor of narrative analysis is the acknowledgement of the context within which the individual finds themselves. This is, perhaps, most notable when adopting a social constructionist framework. The perspective takes the position that an individual's perception and essentially experiences are constructed through the medium of language. As such, social constructionists place emphasis on the co-construction of the story, as the story may well be different according to whom the interviewer is. The power of the listener cannot be underestimated. Gergen comments on the effect of the perceived story, and links can be made to an anti-psychiatry stance in the late 1960's, (for example Szasz, 1970; Crossley, 1998). If reality is co-constructed, the understanding of mental illness should not be restricted to a diagnostic label based on perceived 'symptoms'. Gergen also implicitly criticises the 'neutral' position, adopted by positivists, which he states may be an equally political and ethical stance. Acceptance of a co-construction of a narrative and with it, subjectivity in analysis, requires reflexivity. The biographic narrative interpretive method (BNIM) interview framework recommends the researcher's use of a diary and this is supplemented with the Reflexive Analysis section. The researcher's role and validity of the research more generally is discussed at the end of the Findings section.

In conclusion, this section demonstrates that the field of narrative analysis is now very broad and diverse, offering different levels of analysis and accommodating different perspectives. Justification for borrowing the approach for the purpose of *eliciting* participant's whole, uninterrupted stories has a very robust historical foundation, captured in the current research

in a free associative or biographic interview technique. Whether this moves us towards arguments about how to avoid the hermeneutic circle in interpretation (Denzin, cited by Hollway and Jefferson, 2005, p.3) or towards the acceptance of it and how this is manifested in analytical approaches is considered next.

#### **4.5 Theoretical position of narrative analysis - introduction**

Narrative analysis takes the position that the story itself is of interest. As explained, the current research supports the notion of the importance of a narrative to be developed freely, using a semi-structured interview afterwards to clarify and extend stories, using prompts rather than full questions to facilitate the telling of stories. The biographic-narrative-interpretative method (BNIM) framework serves this purpose very well. However, the research is interested in the *experiences* of the women's working lives up to and including a particular point – their second or subsequent maternity leave. At this point then, after borrowing narrative approaches to *collect* the data and understand the individual's context (lived story), the methodological justification moves away from a purely narrative based rationale towards a more phenomenological direction. Firstly then, an overview of BNIM is offered. Then, a case will be made for the adoption of Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (Smith, 1996), which it will be proven has many shared underlying assumptions, not previously made explicit. As mentioned at the start of the chapter, a methodological discussion is necessary to make known assumptions that have been made - and values adopted - otherwise foolishly avoided and '*smuggled into decisions without the decision-maker being aware of the process*' (p.1 Easton, cited in Cope 2003). This arguable naivety is explored explicitly in Karami, Rowley and Analoui's (2006) paper and whilst a general qualitative approach is taken, more often, Karami et al suggest, this is not fully explored and defined.

#### **4.6 What is Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM)?**

Biographic narrative research has a history within qualitative research in its own right (for example: Bruner, 2003 and Bamberg, 2006). Furthermore it has established links to exploration of specific gender researcher (Jarviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkio 2003). Wengraf's (2001) BNIM too, offers a complete set of definitions, as well as methodology and analysis drawn from academic writing and research experience. It could be argued that an extreme version of positivism neglects the 'told story' (the experiences an individual has from their subjective, perspective) and what is termed the 'lived life' story, (events, which could be factually verified, for example: date of birth, date employment at an organisation began etc) BNIM data collection and analysis offers both as the first level of analysis compares a 'thematic field' analysis of the *told* story with a chronological time line of the *lived* story.

Socio-linguistic level of analysis is incorporated as mentioned earlier and the design of the data collection is focused on the collection of particular incident narratives (PINS). Although segments of PINs are labelled and taken into account at analysis stages, the BNIM approach is based on an epistemology which assumes that PINS are clues to an individuals' perspective at the time of the interview. In addition, PINS can give an insight into the past and indeed perhaps the future, and interest lies in the evolution and succession of such orientation. This is an evolution in itself of BNIM from its original incarnations, (Wengraf, 2006). BNIM offers the current research a means by which to capture the biographies and the 'content' of the biographies. The distinction between narrative analysis and a thematic field analysis is small. The former considers how the story is told, the latter, considers the content only, (Reissman 2008). The textual level of BNIM analysis is the stage at which the current research shies away from BNIM and instead turns to IPA, for a framework which offers a focus on the *experience* of the 'told story', rather than narrative categories.

#### **4.7.1 What is Interpretative *Phenomenological* Analysis (IPA)?**

It might be said that IPA has attracted as much research as it has confusion and this is captured by Eatough and Smith's (2010) journal article. The following hopes to unscramble and neutralise negative associations with phenomenological analysis. IPA has been described as being phenomenological as it is interested in subjective reports (Flowers, Hart and Marriott, 1999), not the micro-analysis of the narrative. It acknowledges that access is only possible through the researcher's interpretation of the participant's story and therefore also bound by the researcher's skill to analyse and interpret (Brocki and Weardon, 2006). This requires some unpacking.

#### **4.7.2 Philosophical and methodological foundations and links**

Larkin et al (2006) explain Heidegger's idea that a person can only be a 'person-in-context' and is considered an essential building block for this methodological discussion. This view however, can lead to complex arguments regarding whether such a position is essentially a relativist one (no single truth, depends on context) or realism (an objective world exists regardless of whether it can be proven). Drefus' (1995) description of Heidegger as a 'minimal hermeneutic realist' is accepted for the current research. The position is summarised as such: "*What is real is not dependent on us but the exact meaning and nature of reality is*" (cited in Larkin et al. 2007, p. 107). This means that the existence of a phenomenon does not depend on our acknowledgement of it, but the meaning and perception of the phenomena *is* dependent on us. This position, from a methodological perspective, means that analysis can and should acknowledge the context in which the interviewer and interviewee find themselves in. It also identifies the difference from grounded

theory, which is more interested in the social processes rather than an individual experiences (Willig, 2008). The lack of distinction between grounded theory and IPA is the focus of a paper by Baker, Wuest and Noerager Stern (1992) which clearly identifies differences in roots, purpose, sources of data, sampling, data collection as well as analysis and conceptualisation of validity. The goals of grounded theory and phenomenology are quite distinct however: grounded theory aims to “*develop a theory of how particular concepts and activities fit together and can explain what happens*” (p. 248 Holloway and Todres, 2003). In contrast, phenomenology “*describes, interprets and understands the meanings of experiences*” (p.248 Holloway and Todres, 2003). This is further supported by Larkin et al. (2006) who argue that it is especially important in phenomenological research for the researcher’s position to be made explicit and not assumed. The narrative design adopted is with the approaches belief that a “*central goal of phenomenology is to allow maximum opportunity to show itself as itself*” (Larkin, et al. p.108). Participants, in other words, storytellers, often offer ‘orientation’ statements (Labov and Waletzky cited in Bruner 1997b) naturally in their narratives and this helps position the participant in relation to their perception of the interviewer’s knowledge of the narrative context. In fact, since IPA is flexible in its approach to data collection, although semi-structured interviews are the norm, there are examples of the use of completely unstructured interviews (Robson, 2002) as used in part 1 of the research interviews conducted for this research. Crucially, theory generation is not an end goal any more than generalisation is an end goal. Critical reflection might result in commonalities to emerge and be inductively derived, and these idiographic accounts will offer insight (Caldwell, 2008). Notably, with IPA being relatively ‘new’ on the qualitative scene, it is constantly evolving (see Tomkins, Lean and Eatough, 2010). The method encourages flexible interpretation within the boundaries set by the perspective’s aims. This permits creativity and on-going development. It also, however, can lead to ‘method slurring’ (Baker et al). Again, this reinforces the need for transparency. Willig (2008) draws a further comparison between grounded theory and IPA: the latter is better suited to understanding reflections of women’s working life experiences, as opposed to the social processes, which create the experiences (for example: Buzzanell et al. 2005). In this respect IPA is particularly effective at “*illuminating processes within models*” (Brocki and Weardon 2006 p.101). IPA permits emphasis on the importance of a participant-led interview. The current research acknowledges the potential weaknesses and avoids ‘shades of grey’ or method slurring through the explanations offered by this chapter.

### 4.7.3 What is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis?

Here too, there is a philosophical debate to recognise, since the interpretative, analytical aspect of the method results in an insider's account, which is then reported by the analyst – a 'double hermeneutic' (Giddens, 1987):

*the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.* (p. 51 Smith and Osborn 2003)

This attempt to understand the human experience, be it from for example, an objective, cognitive perspective, or more interactionist, social constructionist perspective is a common element of any social sciences research and to take this one stage further – a *triple* hermeneutic – has been proposed by Weed (2005) in his paper proposing the feasibility of a meta-analytic approach for qualitative methods. Of relevance to the current research, both Smith and Weed agree that an audit trail of analysis becomes even more important whether double or triple hermeneutic approach is used to help ensure validity and reliability. In doing so, they offer support to Yardley's (2008) four principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence and finally, impact and importance. The researcher continues to position the individual within the frame of central interest when using the IPA method. In practical terms, this translates as keeping the individuality of the case study unique, for example, emphasising the use of quotes to support thematic interpretation. (More on specific details of practical application of this follow in the Analysis section of this chapter - sections 5.9 onwards). Dyke and Murphy (2006) explain how their interpretation of IPA moves them away from what is essentially a template analysis and privileges the participant's own words as new themes emerge when moving from case to case; thereby, they claim, allowing the reader to "assess the evidence themselves" (p.361). This transparency is arguably good practice for all qualitative research.

### 4.8 Traditional thematic analysis and IPA - the difference

Smith et al (1999) argue that there is more ability for the unique stories to re-emerge when writing up IPA research, which would therefore be supportive to Reissman's (2003) call to preserve narratives. Of specific interest to the current research is Warwick et al.'s (2004) paper, which describes how both thematic analysis and IPA on data was used to explore experiences of chronic pelvic pain. Results suggested that IPA was "*the more informative in terms of clinical implications*" (p.132). It is argued that in a similar way, that organisational implications of this samples' reflections of working lives are too, better served by IPA. This benefit should however, be balanced against Collins and Nicolson's evaluation of IPA, which suggests IPA loses the sequential unfolding, that a single interview captures, in its cross

case comparisons. In the current research, the use of a comparison of ‘lived life’ versus ‘told life’ stories and individual thematic analysis of the ‘lived life’ story helps counter this criticism. In conclusion, IPA offers a structured, inductive transition from the case-by-case thematic analysis without pre-existing ties to theory through to meaningful theoretical interpretation. Importantly for this discussion, IPA facilitates cross-case comparison in an arguably structurally valid and reliable manner, with a tried and tested approach. Whilst being a relatively new approach, IPA’s evolution benefits from a robustly, historically evolved methodological framework, which has been the subject of supportive critical discussion at a methodological level (for example: Larking et al, Chanail, 2009). It also means there is “more room for creativity and freedom” (Willig 2001). This adaption of methods (BNIM for data collection and IPA for analysis) is not new and can be linked to Miles and Huberman’s (1994) shifting boundaries ideas whereby each researcher will inevitably modify method and analysis according to need. Furthermore, as mentioned, there are unclear boundaries between methods, as illustrated below:

*The distinctions outlined below are not intended to be fixed, finite, or discrete but should be understood as relating to points on a spectrum. It is almost as if there are flavours, colours or modal responses associated with each of the approaches. As such the colours should merge within the columns in the table below, so there should be an orange and a green bit..... There are a variety of different kinds of Grounded theory, IPA and discourse analysis. If we looked at individual papers in detail we might well find that some IPA papers have more in common with DA papers, for example, than other IPA studies. (Flowers, 2008 online).*

**Table 2: Comparison between grounded theory, IPA and discourse analysis.**

<b>Aspect of method</b>	<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<b>IPA</b>	<b>Discourse Analysis</b>
<b>Methodology</b>			
<b>Sampling</b>	Large samples Theoretic sampling Heterogeneous Stratified sampling	Case studies Small group studies Occasional large studies Purposive sampling Homogenous	Any number Text based
<b>Interview style</b>	Structured or semi structured Researcher focus	Unstructured interviews or semi structured Participant focus	Naturally occurring data



	<p>Long or short interviews</p> <p>One off interviews or first person accounts or third person accounts</p> <p>Generalised accounts</p>	<p>Lengthy- in-depth interviews (for example usually at least one hour long)</p> <p>First person accounts of specific thoughts, feelings and experiences</p> <p>One off interviews or repeat interviews</p> <p>Autobiographic interviews</p>	
<b>Timing of analysis to interview</b>	Simultaneous data collection and analysis	Data analysis can be simultaneous or delayed or staged	Post data collection
<b>Transcription</b>	No recording of interviews or general transcription if recordings made	Detailed verbatim account with some attention to non verbal material	Some DA is detailed and concerned with micro-detail
<b>Recipes for doing</b>	<p>Rigorous</p> <p>Very detailed</p> <p>Prescriptive</p>	<p>Rigorous</p> <p>Not-prescriptive</p> <p>Tailored to the individual analyst</p>	Multiple
<b>Data Analysis</b>			
<b>Unit of analysis</b>	<p>'Incidents'</p> <p>Employ individual as unit of data collection but social process as unit of analysis</p> <p>Experience</p> <p>Social Processes</p>	<p>Embrace and maintain the individual as a coherent mode of data collection and unit of analysis</p> <p>Experience</p> <p>Agency</p> <p>Thought/intentionality</p> <p>Emotions</p>	<p>Linguistic repertoire</p> <p>Subject position (within a discourse)</p>
<b>Scope of analysis</b>	<p>Description</p> <p>Reflexivity</p>	<p>Interpretation</p> <p>Description</p> <p>Narrative</p> <p>Autobiographical</p> <p>Reflexivity</p>	
<b>Inductive/deductive</b>	Strives to be purely	Overall inductive	Inductive/deductive

<b>balance</b>	inductive (bottom up)  'epoche'	(bottom up) but acknowledges deductive processes at work throughout research process (the joint activity of IPA)	balance
<b>Degree of analysis</b>	Exhaustive  Constant Comparison  Deviant case analysis  Analysis is finite	Balance between the unique and the group (but always focussed upon the individual)  Analysis is infinite	
<b>Background</b>			
<b>Time frame</b>	1960s	1990s	1960s
<b>Ontology</b>	Experiential  Social	Experiential  Meaning  Critical realist	Textual
<b>Epistemology</b>	Nomothetic    Objective   Generalisability	Ideographic  Cautious truth claims  Relativist  Contextualised  Subjective  Specificity  Limited generalisability	Absolute relativist      Generalisability
<b>Discipline</b>	Sociology  Social Sciences  Applied Social Sciences	Psychology  Social Sciences  Applied Social Sciences  Emerged as third way in opposition to Social Cognition and Discourse Analysis  Recently management and feminist	Psychology  Social Sciences  Arts and humanities  Post Modern  Post-Structuralist

#### 4.9 Validity of IPA to the research question

*How do women make sense of their working life at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave?*

The contextual aspect of the method acknowledges multiplicity in this case of working life, as described in terms of 'career', multiple roles and the like. This individuality of experience sits neatly with current career theory, for example boundaryless careers (Arthur, 2001) and kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). The hermeneutic strand of a 'minimal hermeneutic realist' approach is perhaps evident in current thinking amongst women focused career writing. For example:

*In this chapter I have been seeking to hear the women's stories presented within their own registers, resisting temptations (internalised academic injunctions) to frame them from within well established or emerging career theorising....How we can theorise may be 'right' in its time but it is always a construction. Women's manager's stories are still trapped in a web of frames of meaning underpinned by notions of male-female differences.....so what we say may be considered true (against appropriate warrants of judgement) within a systemic, evolving process, rather than as definite 'truth'. (Marshall 1989 pp. 202-227)*

In summary, the broad umbrella term of narrative analysis, specifically BNIM, offers a supporting framework for data collection methodology. The BNIM approach is extended to further capture the women's lives in the form of a twin-track analysis: their told lives and their lived lives. BNIM is used across different disciplines, notably sociology and psychology. In contrast, a specific approach, IPA, provides the framework for analysis with the overall aim of furthering the understanding of the sense-making of their working lives of women at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave. This draws it to a psychological level of understanding, a fact underlined by the Brocki and Weardon 2006 review, which included 52 IPA studies, all clearly grounded in medicine, psychology and therapeutic journals. IPA or an acknowledgement of the phenomenological perspectives is now used being outside of these fields, including business and management specifically, for example: Cope 2010; Millward, 2006, Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh, 2008; Murtagh, Lopes and Lyons, 2001, Sandberg, 2000. The next half of the chapter explains the method used, detailing participants and interview design and transcription process, followed by the 'audit trail' of analysis.

*It is now time to explore the creative potential of interrupted and conflicted lives, where energies are not narrowly focussed or permanently pointed towards a single ambition. (Bateson 1989, p.9)*

## Chapter 5 Method

### 5.1 Sampling strategy

A snowballing strategy was adopted to attract six interviewees. This sampling strategy is common in qualitative research, (for example Miller, 2000) although not without its drawbacks for example: Birch and Miller (2010) explain how this process can be more time-consuming than expected. The rationale for the sample criteria follows.

Although the snowballing approach is ideal for a hard to reach sample, a sample of women on second or subsequent maternity leave does not appear to fall into this category. In fact, the justification for this approach requires more careful scrutiny. Research literature often focuses on categories of women who are either clearly on maternity leave from paid employment; on a 'career break' from their paid employment; 'off-ramps' women or 'high flyers', past or current. (Hewlett 2007). Importantly for many, a decision has already been made regarding their future employment plans and any review of their decision-making process looks back at the transition point or looks forward to the next identified transition point. Smith (1999) for example focused on the first transition to motherhood. His study of identity development used four interviewees who met the following criteria: first pregnancy; within the first trimester; no previous miscarriage or termination; not an unwanted pregnancy and a woman in a long term relationship.

A second or subsequent maternity leave in itself is not adequate to set the criteria for a sample, although married couples represents 68% of family units in the UK in 2010 (Beaumont 2010). The women for this research were not entrepreneurs, high-flying business women, from an ethnic minority or indeed any other minority group found in the UK. They represent the majority, albeit a majority of middle-class professional or semi-professional women from an area of Scotland associated with a higher than average gross disposable household income per head than other parts of the UK (Carrera and Beaumont 2010). The rationale for more specific defining characteristics was based on location, self-selected definition of maternity leave and previous experience of return to work following maternity leave:

- i. Second or subsequent 'maternity leave': women who consider themselves in be on their 'maternity leave' for a second or subsequent time, are automatically in a position to revisit their future plans. They may not have immediate plans regarding return to paid employment or are in the process of deciding their future working life - or indeed already have set ideas about how , when or whether to return to paid employment. As discussed

in the literature review, whilst there is clear legislative and organisational support for women returning after one child, returning after two or more, results in more testing of Human Resource policy and exposes on-going conflicts in popular media's support for working mothers. It is important to note that of the 63% of married women in the UK, 48.9% have two or more children (Beaumont 2010). Despite the large percentages of women with two or more children, ambiguous, 'in-transition' periods are usually actively avoided in studies, which instead seek to reflect easily identifiable groups. Researchers adopt approaches to reduce and remove these potentially blurry boundaries which may occur as a consequence of multiple maternity leave periods. For example Millward (2006) recruited 10 women, so as to be sure to still have the recommended 4-5 meeting her sampling criteria for an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study at the time of a second interview. The women who *returned* to paid employment following maternity leave were the focus of her research. Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008) interviewed women based in the Cayman who had similarly been through the transition period and associated decision-making processes and the outcome, one year on, formed the inclusion criteria. Lee et al (2011) focused their study of 87 women who had negotiated a reduced working time strategy, again, therefore, looking retrospectively at the transition time once a decision had been clearly made, post maternity leave. The women in this study similarly had past maternity leave experience to draw on but at the point of first contact still considered themselves 'on maternity leave' again. The interest in this study is to capture the narratives of women who had once made a decision regarding their paid employment and now, with the arrival of a second or subsequent child, were in a position to revisit that decision with the hindsight of past outcomes of their first maternity leave decision. A decision regarding whether or not to return was not sought.

- ii. This study is unique in its focus on *self-categorised* 'on maternity leave' status. Research sampling strategies by their very nature also impose categorisation reflecting legal and organisational terminology. Self-categorisation was important. In doing so, this allowed women's voices to be heard, over and above the definitions imposed through state benefits or organisational maternity leave payments, which legally categorises women as being on maternity leave or not. It is unlikely that women really swap terminology on the exact date of change in status. A simple example is that of the distinction between career break and maternity leave. It is therefore argued that the acceptance of legal and organisational discourse, if not explicit, is inferred through sampling strategies which may not reflect discourse the participants use. 'Maternity leave' is a term linked to the payment of benefits and salary whilst 'incapacitated' due to

childbirth. In the UK, a woman is legally entitled to take 52 weeks' maternity leave (see section 1.4) . The assumption therefore follows that women who consider themselves to be on 'maternity leave' are either on ordinary or additional maternity leave. However, this assumption comes from a legal perspective, on which organisations base their human resource policy. If women are contemplating extending their leave; or are already well beyond the 52 weeks, they may not fall within the strictly defined boundaries but still consider themselves 'on maternity leave' regardless of the exact date of the 52 week cut off. Specifically, it is argued that it is valid to reject the legal/organisational use of the term 'maternity leave' in favour of a self categorised definition, reflecting consistency with efforts to adopt a methodology to hear women's voices. The self-categorisation ensures the sampling strategy is open to the following women:

- the mothers are in the process of disassociating themselves with their work identity;
- have already cut ties with their work or had ties cut through lack of communication with the organisation and/or
- perceive new family roles as stronger than work and/or benefit focused identities and labels.

Furthermore, it is not known at what stage mothers change their categorisation from 'maternity leave' to 'career break'. Indeed, there is no one shared term for the break from paid employment if the mother has no plans in the immediate future to return to paid employment, .i.e.: no career continuation plans, other than a broad 'stay-at-home mum' – although this includes women in paid employment working from home. There appears to be no uniformly agreed discourse for this blurry edged transition time, once a work identity is removed from the equation. A 'not working' category neither pays tribute to the previous employment status nor to their motherhood. This study therefore leaves the maternity leave status as a category open to the mother's interpretation. In this way, the sample embraces a group of mothers whose self-categorisation is not necessarily work-centred and reflects *their* discourse and not the study's from the outset. The analysis will identify which if any of the sample do reflect the organisational discourse and use the strict boundaries of the term.

- iii. The sample, with the benefit of hearing the women's stories also reflected a largely middle-class, stable family dynamic and socio-economic status of the six interviewed.
- iv. The final element of homogeneity is location. Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh (2008) focused on the experiences of six self-initiated female, professional expatriates on the Cayman

Islands who had been on the island for at least a year. The snowballing technique facilitated the inclusion of mothers from a similar geographic location. As such, all were likely to have access to similar levels of facilities, services and share - or were exposed to - common cultural norms. The exact catchment area is not reported to facilitate anonymity. In the current research, all participants were however, within 30 miles of a major Scottish city and all in, or close to village or small town, rather than close to city centres. This therefore includes a distinct rural sample (Mauthner, McKee and Stress, 2001).

The following criteria were therefore established for this study:

- i. Prior to starting a family the women were in a permanent, full- time paid employment position and had returned to paid employment after their first child.
- ii. The women describe themselves as being on their second or subsequent maternity leave.
- iii. They were in a stable, married relationship with the father of their youngest child or children.
- iv. Women lived within a 30 mile radius of a major city, sharing a similar cultural and socio-economic setting; none of the participants lived in the city.

These criteria were set to offer a degree of homogeneity as befits an in-depth qualitative, specifically BNIM and IPA study.

## **5.2 Sample size:**

Small sample sizes are the norm in narrative analysis more generally, as described by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998). The current research is idiographic in focus. A small number of cases permit an in-depth examination and is usual for both BNIM and IPA studies. It is only with a small sample can a truly in-depth analysis be undertaken. Smith, Flowers and Larkin provide a bridge to theory generating research in their suggestion that the individual cases can '*shed light on existing nomothetic research*', (2009 p.38). Detailed analysis of individual cases is now well supported (Smith and Osborne 2008). A review found that participant numbers for IPA studies range from one (Robson 2002) through to thirty, (Collins and Nicolson 2002) however, authors such as Collins and Nicolson concede that only one interviewee underwent a full IPA. Smith (2004) argues the case that the number of participants depends on the level of analysis conducted and as such a small number is possible. An example is cited of a PhD, which uses a sample of five, which were superficially examined followed by one in-depth case study, i.e. three analytic chapters worth (Larkin 2007). This study's use of six participants, then repeat interviews with five of them would appear to be at the larger end of the scale, as befits a project at this level of study.

With regards to BNIM PhDs, Wengraf reports that participant numbers range between three and seven with an average of four interviewees per research project, (Wengraf 2008). The adoption of IPA analysis moves the research firmly away from notions of seeking 'saturation'. It is interesting nonetheless to note that Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) suggest that six participants are likely to lead to thematic saturation. Others argue double this number is required (Turner et al. 2002).

Each interviewee was asked whether they knew of anyone who was similarly on maternity leave and met the criteria. A request was made to pass on my contact details. Once contact was made, potential interviewees were given information about the nature of the proposed interviews. Nobody was turned down and sampling strategy was stopped with the identification of the sixth interviewee.

### **5.3 Participants**

The women were all aged in their thirties or early forties and only one, the mobile beautician, was previously known to the researcher (as a customer) to the researcher. From the table it can be seen that all women had between 2 and 4 children, were all in full time employment in jobs which could be construed as 'careers'. Despite their original intention to continue working with a family, at T2, it can be seen that none were in the work roles they had planned to be in. See table overleaf.



Table 3 Summary of participants.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>No. of children at T1 (T2)</b>	<b>Employment area before first child</b>	<b>Employment status at T1</b>	<b>Employment status at T2</b>	<b>With partner and father of all or youngest two children (T1 and T2)</b>
<b>Summer</b>	2 (2)	Self employed mobile beautician	State maternity leave	Part-time, same role	Yes
<b>Sasha</b>	4 (4)	Medical professional	State maternity leave	Part- time, similar role	Yes
<b>Heather</b>	4 (4)	Engineering consultant	Organisation's maternity leave	Organisation's career break scheme	Yes
<b>Tina</b>	3 (3)	Private school senior teacher	Organisation's maternity leave	No paid employment	Yes
<b>Martha*</b>	3(4)	IT professional	State maternity leave	No paid employment	Yes
<b>Connie</b> <b>NOT RE-INTERVIEWED at T2*</b>	2(3)	Sales consultant	Organisation's maternity leave	-	Yes

\* Connie had hoped, she had fallen pregnant again with her third child.

Participants were invited to offer a pseudonym. Not all felt this was necessary but all names were nonetheless changed to ensure anonymity of the others. In addition, professions were slightly changed for the same reason. This was especially necessary due to the snowballing strategy which implicated all six participants if one participant was identified.

#### **5.4 Mayer, Salovey and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test**

The research study set out initially to explore what narrative analysis could uncover about second or subsequent maternity leave, with specific interest in the role of emotional intelligence (EI). EI transpired to be the wrong route for the current research but it was

nonetheless part of the research process. Comment is therefore, included here. It was sensible then, to offer an objective measure of participant's EI. Permission was sought to use the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) for research purposes to measure levels of emotional intelligence. The researcher's Level A and B psychometric qualification and experience of test use in professional settings was offered as reassurance to the test publishers that the test would be administered and interpreted professionally. Furthermore, test results were stored in accordance with Data Protection Acts. Membership of the British Psychological Society's PTC (and membership of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations, EFPA) reinforced the guarantee of relevant best practice guidelines would be adhered to. This was particularly important as the test had not yet had its marketing launch in the UK. Assurances were given to the test publisher and supervisory team within the university. It was similarly imperative also, under the membership guidelines of the British Psychological Society, that Ethical Guidelines, as was Equal Opportunities legislation, (subsequently merged into the Equality Acts, 2010) were followed. To this end, participants were given full information regarding test use separately before the interview explaining the purpose, offered full feedback and correct norms were applied for test interpretation. Only two tests of emotional intelligence were carried out, neither participant was interested in the results after the interview.

*Reflection: Initially, a comparison between the psychometric findings and the narrative analysis findings in response to the research question was of interest to me. However, the supervisory team was sceptical as their belief was that the project was simply going to be too large. The belief was that the EI side would form a separate research project in its own right. The EI side, did however, offer me a psychological 'comfort zone' as a trained occupational psychologist. Psychometrics were home territory, the qualitative methodology was a step into a world of theory with no practical work or research experience to support it. Furthermore, acknowledgement of qualitative work in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology did not come until December 2011, although Millward did publish an IPA study of maternity leave in the journal earlier. The 2011 journal edition uncovered a combination of lack of experience and/or negativity and comparison to a quantitative research for validity and reliability criteria (Cassell and Symon, 2011). Eventually, after much reading around the topic of EI (and soul searching) the decision to discontinue the EI part of the study was taken. In doing so, a feminist perspective, which embraces a relational ontology, could be more comfortably adopted without reservation or compromise. This meant specifically, that the focus was positioned firmly on the women as interdependent and interacting beings with a degree of*

*agency within social structures, (Gilligan 1982) - in (and out) organisational frameworks.*

**Figure 11 Reflection on method and emotional intelligence**

The academic reasoning was in fact threefold. Firstly, at the start of the research, there were three leading models of EI. The MSCEIT test was chosen, supporting the Mayer-Salovey and Caruso model of EI. This tri-model of EI offered a test which had most validity and reliability, although it captured a comparatively narrow construct domain. Secondly, it became clear after the first two interviews that the interview style, together with the topic and timing of the interview, resulted in extensive and very rich interview data. Furthermore, the process transpired to be one which was clearly both emotive and very meaningful to the interviewees. After retelling their story, neither participant was interested in the test results, which they perceived to have low face validity. Thirdly, the epistemology and methodology, which formed the backbone of the qualitative methodology part of the research, conflicted with the positivist and psychometric perspective associated with the testing of EI. The decision was confirmed at the transfer viva and EI angle was dropped so as to focus on the narrative analysis.

### **5.5 Rationale and procedure at T1 - part 1 of the first interviews**

*Reflection: This decision-making described above also promoted the shift in the way the analysis was conducted. The chosen approach to capture the women's narratives was through the use of BNIM. The initial exploration intended to understand the experience of second or subsequent maternity leave periods through the analysis of free associative narratives, (for example: Hollway and Jefferson, 2005). BNIM was chosen in the first instance as it offered a tried and tested interview method, with which the researcher had experience through an intensive workshop - and was known to offer a means by which to both conduct interviews and analyse narrative data. However, the experience of listening to the vocalisation of sense-making of their life histories directed the interest and analysis to a phenomenological level and away from a textual analysis of the narrative structure as discussed in part one of this chapter.*

**Figure 12 Reflection on sense-making in narratives**

On first contact, the preferred informal, open structure of the interview was explained. This was reinforced through the request that the interviewees choose where the interview took place. Giving the choice of location was also intrinsic to the aim of giving the interviewees control of the interview. There is some disagreement between researchers (specifically Jones and Wengraf) as to the purpose of ceding control to the interviewee. Jones (2009)

argues that the power dynamics can influence the story told on that day. Wengraf (2004) argues that context does matter and surface differences may be evident between two reiterations of the same life histories. Deeper structures, he argues are less likely to vary. This disagreement is essentially a difference, which has its roots in epistemology and the current research leans towards social constructionist rather than post-modernist perspectives.

Presence of children, it was stressed to the interviewees, was not a barrier to the interview process. The focus of the interview was described as being on 'their perceptions of their working life' for a very small sample investigation, as part of a PhD research. Based on this minimal knowledge, all six participants agreed to take part and asked the interview to take place in their home.

*Reflection: I asked interviewees to choose the location rather than set a so-called neutral location - and invited the presence of young children or babies. I hoped this would help me to be perceived as someone who was neither interrogating them, nor causing an inconvenient intrusion into their daily life. I was keen to ensure that this did not come across as a formal interview, which may have led to assumptions of my interest in purely paid work experiences. Instead, I was keen to be perceived as a 'mum' who was doing some research of 'working life' leaving them to interpret what this meant to them. This thinking further reinforced my decision to move away from the psychometric perspective and accept and recognise the socio-cultural frame and social constructionist perspective of the research process. Perhaps fortunately, all made efforts to choose a time when their children were asleep or otherwise entertained. The few interruptions that did occur and the mother's management of these added to the rich material collected.*

**Figure 13 Reflection interview locations**

The interviewees were given consent forms (see appendix 1) in advance of the interview and the content of these were explained at the first meeting. Two copies were signed so that one copy could be left with the interviewee. Each woman had considered in advance which room was to be used and usually even a specific chair/sofa. The digital recorder was started as soon as possible after the explanation of the ethical considerations through reference to the consent form. The recorder was left to run for the duration of the interview and pen and paper notes were taken throughout. The content of the notes varied in focus from notable non-verbal behaviour, which reinforced spoken words; explanations of gaps, pauses or interruptions or seemingly incongruent body language and spoken words. Notes were taken

on the first part of the first interviews to explore specific areas further to elicit Particular Incident Narratives (PINs).

The first part of the interview with the women requested a (free-associative) narrative. Following BNIM, the invitation to tell 'their story' is triggered by a carefully worded question. Efforts are made to avoid value laden terms and the question designed to be ambiguous in its request so that it is open to interpretation. Although the notion of 'career paths' were of interest to the women, it was decided not to include the word 'career' in the question as this word is particularly weighted towards certain types of paid employment paths and professions. Instead, the word career was replaced with the phrase 'working life'. The research question therefore became adjusted to the following BNIM opening question:

*"Can you please tell me all the experiences and all events which are personally important to you up to now? Start wherever you want, I won't interrupt you. I'll listen first and take notes for later. Please begin and tell me your personal story of how your working life has developed".*

Importantly, this approach allows the interviewee to choose the exact starting point of their narrative and the path it takes. The emphasis is placed on the woman's power to control the story with a guarantee of no interruption and no questions until she had finished. Women were encouraged throughout their narrative through nods but otherwise, and at this stage interaction was kept to a minimum. An effort was made not to draw attention to any particular aspect of what was being said other than muted facial expressions mirroring emotion as appropriate.

The interview ended when the storyline end had been reached and since this did not necessarily end at a chronological end point, a prolonged silence and/or an indication from the participant that they had finished was used as the point at which to turn the recorder off. Once the women indicated they had finished, they were thanked. Many needed reassurance that their story was very valuable and interesting.

*Reflection (taken from diary): The strength of emotion [felt at T1 and T2 interviews] was intense! [This is discussed in section 9.1] These women lack confidence in their story....why do they feel their story is not worth hearing? Is it really a gender thing? Would a man feel the same after telling his story?*

Figure 14 Reflection on emotional content

## 5.6 Rationale and procedure at T1 – part 2 of interviews

The next stage of the interview consists of picking up aspects of the women's narrative and asking questions to further explore salient aspects of the stories told. This approach has been used in other qualitative research, for example: McDonald, Daniels and Harris (2006). At this stage of the research, the framework adopted aimed to elicit Particular Incident Narratives (PINS). These questions are not pre-determined and follow the same story line of the first narrative. The format of these questions comes from a pre-determined list of optional opening styles; the choice of question style was made to reflect the intention of getting a 'PIN'. The format would be as follows:

*"You said [insert quote] do you remember any situation/time/occasion/example/event/incident /moment of how that happened/all came about?"*

The choice of question areas is guided by the researcher's interest and research question. In this case, the interest was to capture the woman's perception of her working life before and after first and subsequent maternity leave periods. In order to prepare the next set of questions a request was made to the interviewee for a few minutes to "finish my notes" before moving onto the next stage of the interview.

*Reflection: The women's ability to respond helpfully to my request for five minutes to 'gather my thoughts' to ask the questions for the second phase of the interview varied. Some were happy to leave the room to make a fresh cup of tea, others mulled over their stories out loud and began to comment on them. As far as was possible, these reflections were discouraged although for five out of six [T1] interviews, the second stage of the interviews began sooner than had hoped as much rich commentary and insights would have otherwise had been missed! With confidence and a greater appreciation and understanding of what the end aim was, I relaxed my specific search for PINS in the T2 interviews, using Wengraf's framework as a helpful guide, rather than letting it restrict my questioning approach.*

**Figure 15 Reflection on two stage interview approach**

The second stage of the interview always began with a question about their starting point. Once the opening wording of the question was chosen, probing questions were used until a PIN was complete. Occasionally, the PIN would result in a jump forward in the story line. In accordance with Wengraf's recommendation (2005), the storyline was continued rather than going back to earlier points of the story. To be sure of a natural end, participants were given

a final opportunity to add any other comments or thoughts when all questions exhausted. Interviewees were thanked for sharing their stories and for their time.

After the first two interviewees, it was clear that much useful reflection of the process happened at this point of the interview and so the design was altered to leave the recorder on while it was explained that all the recording would be transcribed as the first part of the analysis. Participants often made vocal reflections on the process of telling their story and interviewees were asked to expand where appropriate. As much of the whole event was recorded as possible and all were happy for the material captured to be used.

*Reflection: This represented a learning curve for me. The first two interviews left me fumbling to turn the recorder on and off a couple of times as the interviewees musings took a relevant turn - which it did at unexpected moments [see Findings]. For the third T1 interview and thereafter, I therefore revised my plan and made a point of saying: "I'll leave the recorder running until I leave and it will act as a reminder of what was discussed". When I finally did turn the recorder off, I always checked that the interviewees were still happy for me to use **all** the material.*

**Figure 16 Reflection on knowing when the interview ends**

Interviewees were reminded that anonymity was assured and to this end a pseudonym would be used. They were asked to offer an alternative name. This along with any organisation/company names and other details such as family members' names and village/town names were changed for the same purposes of preserving anonymity of the individual and group. Finally, the opportunity was taken to ask whether it would be easier to contact them via phone or email to clarify any details. The possibility of a return interview was a possibility due to the wording of the consent form and participants were reminded of this provisional plan, should a longitudinal study become a viable option.

*Reflection: In reality, my paid work became a priority and once the interviews had been conducted and initial analysis complete, further data collection was put on hold with only reading around the topic possible. This cloud had a silver lining as it gave lots of thinking time; an opportunity to collate articles and listen to changing opinions of 'good mother/bad mother' discourse portrayed in popular culture. In addition to this, anecdotal evidence was also collected as friends and family went on maternity leave and discussed their options and experiences. Radio 4's Women's Hour became a readily available source of opinions as I worked (and recovered from illness) largely from home. The theoretical understanding of this has been largely*

*captured in the Literature Review and fed my interpretations at T2. Importantly, the time offered much reinforcement to the understanding and implication of initial findings, which at first seemed to complement but also contradict some existing research – and offer insight into areas previously under-represented.*

**Figure 17 Reflection on the benefit of time to think**

All participants were thanked for their time, reminded of contact details on the Consent Form (appendix 1) and invited to get in touch with me or my supervisor should they wish to discuss the research, my conduct or any aspect of their narrative or interview responses again.

Immediately after leaving the interviewee's home, a note of thoughts, feelings and reactions of the interview were recorded in a diary. The concept of counter-transference was used to help explain the level of emotion felt at this point and this is discussed in the section 9.1.

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety and sections not relevant to the interview topic were removed, for example: full conversation details between interviewee and husband when he entered to update his wife of his whereabouts for the next couple of hours. The extraction was however noted as the relationship dynamics inevitably fed into perceptions of the woman's life. The transcription was verbatim. Pauses were included and marked with .... (four dots). Longer pauses were noted in square brackets. Attempts to insert punctuation to ensure grammatical correctness were avoided. If punctuation was included, more often than not this was done so as to capture the way in which the words were spoken.

*Reflection: This insertion of punctuation was difficult. Standing (1998) reflects on this. She discusses how adding punctuation and generally tidying up women's language "becomes one of the ways in which, hierarchies of knowledge are reproduced" (p.192). The acknowledgement of this discomfort and the recognition of this issue made me conscious of how I might easily change the words and meaning inadvertently. I resolved this by adopting frequent use of paragraph breaks. These were inserted into the IPA transcript where naturally forming breaks in ideas reflecting how the vocalisation occurred. This seemed to better capture the woman's telling of the story, if not grammatical correctness. Issues of different styles of coding (Saldana, 2009) were considered but this IPA approach circumvented any need to adopt different coding strategies.*

**Figure 18 Reflection on transcribing the interviews**

## **5.7 Kick-start panel**

Following BNIM style separation of the T1 'lived story' from the 'told story', a kick-start panel (Wengraf, 2005) was set up at the start of each analysis. This involved the recruitment of two



un-related individuals. No previous knowledge of the method, topic or interviewees was required. In preparation for each kick-start panel, a large selection of phrases or sentences were chosen by the researcher from the transcribed interview (for example: see appendix 2). The panel members were then shown quotes in chronological order and asked to offer hypotheses on the individual, their choices and their motivation as appropriate. This future blind, chunk-by-chunk analysis resulted in hypotheses and counter-hypotheses, which were recorded on a flip chart so as to share and bounce ideas. Hypotheses which were refuted by the next 'chunk' were disregarded and new counter-hypotheses proposed (Wengraf 2007). Drawing on experiences and assumptions of three individuals forces the researcher to go beyond their own social representations, accommodating the, (albeit disputed), interaction between individuals and their situations. A classic example is discussed by Blass, (1991). Either way social schemas are acknowledged as often narrowing perceptions (for example Darley and Gross 2002). Using this psychodynamic framework, the panel helps identify any unconscious assumptions and subjectivity, which is brought to the surface and supports transparency. Consciously exploring the unconscious processes before interpreting the raw material is not unique to BNIM. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2002) illustrate this in the following overview of part of their analysis:

*The second level of analysis moved towards an initial exploration of the unconscious processes at play by paying attention to words, images and metaphors. Inconsistencies and contradictions, beginnings, fade-outs, connections, absences and silences were also noted in the narrative. Here we looked at the interview alongside the researcher's recorded emotional responses to the interview.*  
(Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2002 p.280)

The panel resembles a clinical supervision meeting and although developed from a psychosocietal framework, can be relevant to many qualitative standpoints. Even Popper (1968), who wrote that scientific theory is better the more it can be tested, acknowledged the value of a sharing of knowledge amongst peers, which it could be argued, the kick-start panel in essence represents. Any set ideas developed through the interview process are, through the process, challenged – or at least brought to the surface - thus helping the self-reflexive process and also led to more diary entries. Traditionally, this type of peer consultation occurs at the end of the research process, when a paper is reviewed. Cross-checking of themes is recommended for purposes of validity, a form of peer categorisation notably *after* initial analysis. The kick-start panel brings forward peer input, to the start of the analysis process. Three hours on the two tracks (lived life and told story) and no more than a maximum of four half days is recommended by Wengraf.

*Reflection: At both the BNIM workshop and each kick-start panel, I was always surprised at the speed of which the panel members captured the individual's character and 'story' with minimal information. The process proved to be a very helpful inclusion to the process of analysis. There were times, when I found myself thinking: 'I never thought of it that way'. Often, the panel members themselves would reflect on what they would have done in similar circumstances and how the interviewee's decision making differed from their own. The kick-start panel forced me to consider the interview findings within the context of the interviewee's perceived options – and not base it on my own biography and set of experiences. The participant's reality - and mine - was clearly different to the kick-start panel's perception of options available at various stages of their lives. This had a twofold effect: firstly, it reinforced the value of the BNIM interview technique as it captured the women's voices in a way, which even others not present at the interview, could engage with. Secondly, it again reinforced to me that to understand the decisions and perceptions the women had of their working lives at this moment in time, the analysis had to focus on their sense-making and mine - as both were clearly intertwined. This is perhaps ironic as the realisation of subjectivity came from the very tool Wengraf flags up as a tool to help ensure objectivity (2010 correspondence). Nonetheless, BNIM offered a neat way of capturing an objective summary of what their stories contained and the themes which lay beneath the surface of their story. Simultaneously, the process made it very clear to me that my sense-making of their sense-making had already begun and therefore, I was grateful for the input of parties who were not interested in my research question and ensured the women's stories were kept in focus. The kick-start panel was followed by the 'told story' analysis.*

**Figure 19 Reflection on the kick-start panel process**

## **5.8 T2 Interviews – interviews three years later**

Re-interviewing the women after an extended break of approximately three years became a possibility.

*Reflection: This gap was not planned and occurred due to department lecturing needs and the type of contract held. With hindsight, the additional time reading and thinking, combined with informal collecting of anecdotal reactions to my topic area, feminism and the increasing media coverage of women in the workplace and inequality of pay was a turning point. The breathing space, was in fact useful and further fed into a new understanding of 'slow time' as described by Eriksen (2001).*

*The eventual decision to end my face-to-face lecturing commitment allowed me to complete the research – again time to think represented a transition time for me.*

**Figure 20 Reflection on time gap between interviews**

The study was able to remain true to its original aim of being a longitudinal study. Contact with the women was established through phone call or email (see appendix 5).

One participant, Connie, had moved home and although eventually tracked down, had just had another baby and was not able to be re-interviewed, (see participant summary - table 3). Five of the six participants were however, keen to continue to support the research.

The process was largely the same as at T1 time. Once contact was established, interviewees were given the choice of interview location. Two women asked the interview to take place in a local cafe, close to the school/nursery where their children would be dropped off before meeting with the researcher. The remaining three asked the interview to take place in their home.

As before, the interview began by going through the consent form they had initially signed. This acted as a reminder of the details regarding anonymity, the right to withdraw from the research at any time and of the study's aim. Where questions were asked about findings, the interviewees were told that this would be covered after the interview. This ensured the stories were not affected by expectations and interpretations to date.

The design of the interview was the same as at T1: one question was asked, similar in style to the first BNIM interview question with the additional phrase "*since we last spoke*".

*Can you please tell me all the experiences and all events which are personally important to you up to now? Start wherever you want, I won't interrupt you. I'll listen first and take notes for later. Please begin and tell me your personal story of how your working life has developed since we last spoke"*

The length of time the answer to this question varied as women interpreted the question in different ways. When their story had finished, the interview moved straight onto a list of questions, asking further probing questions whenever possible. The questions were chosen to reflect the areas of interest which had emerged from the first analysis. These were divided into three areas, reflecting both the literature review and the master theme findings from T1:

- *Level One: Individual level - reflections of own maternity leave and working life.*

1a. In hindsight, do you feel that maternity leave was a positive or negative experience for you?

1b. Do you feel you learned anything valuable from your break away from paid work?

1c. Do you consider the skills/knowledge/attitude transferable, valued?

These questions checked for any change in women's previous perceptions of the maternity leave experience, and question 1a begins deliberately ambiguously. In this way, it is interesting to see whether participants automatically refer to it in terms of paid work or a life experience as a mother or unpaid community worker more generally. Personal development and specific skill development was clearly evident in the maternity leave period at T1. These questions also probe the women's perceptions of this, without reference to the findings at this point of the interview.

2. Do you think maternity leave has impacted on your working life negatively or positively?

This question hones into 'working life' perceptions acting as a direct comparison to comments above. Research shows maternity has a negative impact. The initial findings suggest at T1, most of the women viewed their maternity leave as a positive time.

3. What would you say were the key variables that helped you decide whether or not to go back to work – and when you went back..... and to what kind of job...?

Were there variables which forced them to return to paid employment? What sort of variables were taken into consideration in the decision making process? Again research demonstrates negative decisions from an organisational perspective and in terms of pay and status with regards seniority.

4: Maternity leave is written about in a way which assumes a very tightly bounded construct, with set first start and finishing times. Do you see maternity leave in this way?

This questions were looking to see whether the maternity leave self-categorisation approach was justified.

5. What does the term 'career' mean to you now – has it changed?

The questions sought to understand whether career would be described as a progression, more responsibility, higher salary etc. as organisational policies and traditional theories suggest. Or whether a feminist interpretation, accommodating roles outwith paid employment were described.

6a: What would you like to be doing, work-wise, in five years time?  
6b. In ten years time?  
6c. When your children grow up?  
6d. Think back to before you had kids; did your plans change after the first? Most recent child?

This essentially was digging deeper regarding notions of 'career paths' and working life expectations. Again, research clumps together all maternity leave periods as though the same. The current research suggests there is a distinct difference between first and subsequent maternity leave plans.

7. A lot has been written about role conflict – between a mother role and paid employment. Do you feel a conflict exists for you (now)?

This question ties in with role conflict ideas common in feminist writing and again, reflects the T1 findings.

- *Level Two: Working mothers in organisations.*

8: From your experience and/or what you've heard, do you think organisations help women who take career breaks? What if anything, should they be doing?

These questions aimed to give women a voice. The interest lay in how different organisational policies and rhetoric is to what the women with two or more children say they would like.

9. What would an ideal organisation to work for be like for a working mother?

Further probing according to responses.

- *Level Three: The value of mothers' work in our society*

10. There is a lot in the media about gender inequality with regards for example, pay. What are your views on this. Why do you think there is a difference between men and women's pay, despite legislation?

At the time of the second interviews, there was much press coverage on the latest figures on pay differences between men and women (see chapter 1). This was therefore used as a lever with which to probe into the interviewees' sense-making of this disparity.

11. Can you place the following in order these are valued?  
[A set of four cards is given to the women. Each had one of the following descriptors: woman working - no kids; working mother - one child; working mother two or more children].

A discussion was then started as to whether the order would change if the question is about value to organisations, society or the community. The question was then repeated with another set of cards, which are exactly the same but the word 'mother' is replaced with 'father'. This question was especially important as there was an unexpected emphasis on unpaid work in the community at T1. To support earlier questions on personal value of maternity leave time off, this question permitted an exploration of their views of organisations and society's perception of their time off paid employment, bearing in mind the unpaid work they all did, to varying degrees, for their community. This also offers insight into "how participants are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith and Osborn 2003, p. 51).

12. Would you consider yourself to be a feminist?

This question arose as again, in the media at the time of the interviews, there was much press publicity around the subject of feminism, reflecting the (re)marketing and launch of a new genre of books such as Moran (2012) and the researcher's reading of Germaine Greer's original and more recent essays and publications (1971, 1986). Here, the research questions acknowledge the importance of the two-track analysis (Wengraf 2007) accommodating historically situated subjectivity - at different moments of their *told* story and different moments of their *lived* life.

*Reflection: This time, I felt much more comfortable with a more relaxed questioning style and rather than stop and formally adopt the BNIM PIN search; a more interactive approach was adopted. The participants appeared very relaxed generally and digressions were common. The list of questions however, helped bring the interview back on track when necessary. The digressions in fact, helped to understand what was salient in the women's minds about the work they did and so equally important. For example Martha had a lot to say about Facebook and her various attempts to use it with mixed results to manage her family's needs. The analysis helped uncover why this IT based solution - and the conflict it caused - was completely in line with both her 'core' themes and her sense-making. Had I stuck more rigidly to the line of questioning, this social networking digressions would have been curbed to focus on the line of pre-determined line of questioning.*

**Figure 21 Reflection - questioning style development**

The final stage of the interview involved revisiting the women's original (T1) interview material. Since these were emotive encounters, each interviewee's reaction was gauged carefully. The first step was to ask whether a few minutes could be spared cross-checking factual details (for example: age of children) and interviewees were shown the objective 'lived life' summary. Any factual errors were amended - a simple form of validation (Smith, 1994). The master themes from all six interviews were then described. The level of discussion of these findings was participant-led. The interview ended with the question: "Is there anything else at all, you feel you would like to add before I turn off the recorder?" Interviewees were thanked for their time and thanks was repeated via email and/or thank-you card, reminding participants of my contact details should they wish to get in touch regarding any aspect of the interview. As before, a diary entry captured thoughts and feelings immediately after the interview.

## **5.9 T1 Method of analysis overview**

*It is frequently pointed out throughout academic texts on qualitative analysis that this is no 'one' right way to analyse or interpret data and there is no single approach in qualitative analysis that is widely accepted (Neuman, 2006, p.457). In agreement with this, Smith and Osborne (2008 p. 67) reiterate that qualitative analysis is a 'personal process' and as such the methods used here reflect the personal style of the researcher while following general guidelines advocated by Smith and Osborn, (2008). (Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh 2008 p.164)*

Wengraf is keen to avoid a purely case-by-case analysis:

*Once the specificity of the case-dynamics treated in relative abstraction 'from within' have become relatively clear, then, at a certain point, research emphasis shifts to case comparison and theory-construction in which thorough historical and sociological contextualisation then becomes a critical lever of insight. (Wengraf 2007 p.63).*

Importantly, the cross-case comparison needs to be delayed, supporting Reissman's (2003) belief that stories should be kept intact for as long as possible. In the case of the current research, the 'lived life' chronology and 'told life' thematic analysis was pursued to understand the woman's working life (biography) in context. Thereafter, an IPA analysis was undertaken to extract sense-making understanding, first on a case-by-case level, then brought together in the form of master themes. Each case study is therefore subjected to a twin-track (BNIM) analysis and then the IPA analysis. Firstly the BNIM identifies the context and lived experience and then the IPA helps uncover the sense-making processes. One analysis informs the other, see also reflexive comments section 10.6.

### **5.9.1 T1 process of BNIM lived life – told story analysis**

The women's biographic narratives often began at the earliest salient paid employment memory, then at times back-tracked, as another memory of working life surfaced. The stories told in response to the first question did not always follow a chronological order. The first task was therefore to 'straighten the story out' into a chronologically correct time line omitting evaluative or subjective commentary. This represented the 'lived life' story.

Next, the interview script was analysed for common themes in the telling of the 'told story' and the kick-start panel notes were referred to, thus ensuring a focus on capturing the twin-track analysis of biographic details and offering some reassurance that reflections of women's voices and experiences remained true. This 'thematic field analysis' (Wengraf, 2006) was not focused on the research question; instead it ensured a firm foundation of understanding of the women's lives from their perspective and in context of their reality. Thematic analysis is much used in qualitative research and has been described as a "foundational method" (Braun and Clark, 2006). As might be expected with any tool/process which is widely used, there is debate as to its definition and whether it should be identified as a tool, a claim supported by Ryan and Bernard (as cited in Braun and Clark 2006) whereas Braun and Clark argue it exists as a method in its own right, open to a range of epistemological frameworks. The current research uses thematic analysis in both ways – as a method to capture the women's stories in BNIM analysis - and as part of a method, within the IPA process. In the first, the aim is to 'unravel the surface of reality' (Braun and Clarke, p.81)



At this point it was also possible to link the narrative and PINS to notions of Gabriel's poetic attribution, as well as see evidence of Boje's (2001) antenarrative. The twin-track analysis was summarised in six individual tables, one per case study (see chapter 6). With this objective interpretation, the case study overviews were subjected to a full IPA analysis.

*Reflection: The next stage of analysis required a different mindset - a time break between BNIM and IPA analysis was required. The BNIM analysis aimed to capture the essence of the story and the reality of the story, as heard through the women's voices. I tried to remain objective and understand the world they lived in and the world they perceived they lived in. The next stage of the analysis required a shift in ontology. IPA tries to understand their sense-making of the world they perceive. It acknowledges that I, as the analyst, will be adding my layer of sense-making to the process. In part, this was managed by remembering that the emphasis was to understand their sense-making of their working life experiences as a result of their second or subsequent maternity leave. This narrowing of focus from their biography to their sense-making of the effects of their maternity leave helped make the shift possible - although it was cognitively challenging. Comfort was sought from previous researcher's comments, for example: "Writing about data analysis is exposing ourselves to scrutiny" (p.123 Mauthner and Doucet 1998) and I felt I had to frequently stop and scrutinise what I was doing, and the outcomes as they emerged. The challenge was the greatest one I faced during the course of the research and various attempts were made to manage the analysis including taking photos of huge 'jigsaws' of carefully arranged groupings of evolving master themes; lots of discussions with peers, including a conference paper – and generally much reassurance seeking!*

**Figure 22 Reflection on changing methodological tools (part 1)**

The 'field' thematic analysis is different to the search for IPA themes described below; the difference was explicitly explored by Warwick et al. (2004) on chronic pelvic pain (CPP) as this study too, used two forms of thematic analysis. They concluded:

*The development of new and more useful explanatory frameworks for CPP will be informed by a better understanding of the subjective perspective gained from further idiographic research of this type. (Warwick et al. 2004 p.132)*

It is clear that the current research does not set a precedent for the use of different forms of thematic analysis to explore different aspects of the same interview data. The value of the analysis of the 'told story' against the 'lived story' did offer a concise biography from an outsider and insider perspective from which to delve deeper into sense-making through IPA frameworks.

### 5.9.2 T1 process of IPA analysis: case subordinate themes

Transcripts were copied and pasted in landscape pages of three columns, with the transcript occupying the middle column. Scripts were read and re-read several times, with the focus on the women's sense-making of their working life experiences from the current point in their lives.

*Reflection: The re-positioning of the transcript and re-numbering of the lines further helped the shift in analysis approach. Whilst I felt strongly that a solid understanding of the woman's life and the way she described it helped, I was now delving deeper to understand how she made sense of one different life events and the consequences on her perception of working life. It felt more natural to acknowledge my emotional reactions, which were both positive and negative. The natural process was to reflect on this and IPA gave permission for me to acknowledge and use this reflection within a given framework.*

Figure 23 Reflection on changing tools (part 2)

The right hand column was used to comment on how stories were told - language, contradictions, paraphrasing, questions and so on. In short, linguistic attributes adding a further dimension to her spoken words and story. The left hand column drafted initial ideas for themes, which characterised sections of the text. The theme labels were drawn from psychological or career theory terminology. Importantly, whilst concept names were used, this was for ease of description, rather than trying to find a fit between existing theoretical viewpoints, (Smith 1999). This leaning towards 'open-coding' (ironically from Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory, 1990) helped ensure the focus remained on sense-making gained from the transcript and the researcher rather than sense-making through a theoretical lens. This involved a systematic, line-by-line consideration of what the meaning was and how it came across of each described experience.

*Reflection: At this stage, it was clear just how different IPA was at a 'cerebral level'. It was not possible to 'go through the motions' as is possible when entering data into SPSS, or even when conducting a 'normal' thematic analysis. The term 'the centrality of researcher subjectivity' (Brocki and Weardon, 2006, p.97) was a term I had, up to this point understood in principle only. I revisited much of my IPA reading before and during analyses with a new and growing sense of understanding. The following example captured the difference for me: Langdridge (2007) talks about an analysis where the participant talks about the huge expanse of the sea and the sky whilst living in the countryside. The clear spatial aspect of the experience was noted and*

*later linked to reference to an overwhelming, and engulfing, life in a house the interviewee had lived in, in London. The phenomenological concept of space was one therefore, the participant experienced herself. It was also one which was interpreted as being linked to her sense of self, which was not regained until the participant had moved back to a less urban life-style. This had particular resonance for me, having similarly lived in London and later moved to the countryside, re-experiencing the long summer holidays I had enjoyed throughout my childhood on a farm in Poland. I could understand the participant's experience of spatiality through my own experiences and this therefore illustrated the role of my sense-making of her sense-making. Furthermore, the phenomenological nature of the analysis encouraged me to reflect on this insight, as would be the case if I was analysing the transcript. After my reflection on spatiality, I concluded my experience would have resulted in the same or at least similar interpretation of the transcript, even if I had felt the spatiality in a polar opposite way i.e. if I found the openness of the countryside over-exposing and disturbing. The subjectivity is therefore transparent and obvious but not to the point of losing the interviewee's sense-making as the central focus – and offered reassurance of the integrity of the method.*

**Figure 24 Reflection on changing tools (part 3)**

Where emerging themes appeared more than once, the theme label was similarly repeated. Once the process had been repeated for each of the six participants, each of the emerging theme descriptors was typed up - each participant's emerging themes was printed in a different colour font with a note made as to whether the theme were specific to first, second or subsequent maternity leave. This resulted in a total of 151 emerging themes.

### **5.9.3 T1 process of IPA analysis: master themes**

Each of the emerging themes were cut out on paper and spread across a table. Several attempts were made to capture as many emerging themes as possible and photographs taken in an attempt to reconstruct previous groupings. The themes were clustered together through the use of abstraction or polarisation. Names for these 'superlative' or master themes' were considered. The master themes are described in the next chapter: Findings. Each transcript is then revisited to ensure the master theme captures the emerging themes as related to the individual case study. It was acceptable to have a master theme which clearly was represented in the opposite way and this was highlighted in the Discussion. Connections between themes and the transcripts are made through the use of quotations and reference to page numbers in the transcript facilitating an audit trail for validity purposes. Finally, each theme is translated into a narrative account (Smith, 2003), which can be found after the six case study biographic twin track analyses.

## 5.10 T2 - BNIM analysis

Since the interview question was specifically asking about what had happened to the interviewee 'since we last spoke' there was only approximately three years additional biographic information to add to the lived life story recorded at T1. A full field, thematic analysis was not possible in each case as some interviewees felt they had done 'nothing much' summarising as much in a sentence of two. In these instances, the responses to the questions were used to elicit the biographic input instead.

## 5.11 T2 - IPA analysis

The same process as at T1 was followed but this time, identification of case-by-case subordinate themes was largely based on the semi-structured interview, rather than the biographic narrative. Collation of emerging themes to form master themes was conducted and findings summarised in table 23, again offering an audit trail. This second set of master themes represents the content of BNIM question for on-going twin track analysis. In addition, the IPA master themes demonstrate the shift in sense-making focus. Chapter 8 discusses comparisons between the two sets of interviews findings to assess the level of change, if any, in the interviewees plans, beliefs and sense-making of their experiences.

*Reflection: The use of the same style BNIM opening question positions the power of what to include with the participant, The questions subsequently posed gave me back the reigns, which I was not entirely comfortable with. To resolve my cognitive dissonance, I gave room for the interviewee to digress to topics that became salient to her through the questions posed. As Mauthner and Doucet (1998) acknowledge: "In analysing data, we are confronted with ourselves and with our own central role in shaping the outcome" (p.122). See also section on Reflexivity below.*

Figure 25 Reflection on power dynamics in interviews

## 5.12 Validity and reflexivity

Issues of validity, reliability and reflexivity are important for any qualitative research but arguably more so for qualitative research which uses tools such as BNIM and IPA. This is because these tools rely on in-depth analyses of interviews with individuals and interpretation is open to criticism of subjectivity, contrasting starkly with positivist research. There are well-known criteria set for ensuring critics are responded to, (for example Yardley, 2004). A discussion of how validity is incorporated into methodology chapter of the current research follows as some consideration needs to be given the overlaps with reflexivity. It is possible to argue that because of the way in which IPA embraces subjectivity and makes it

part of the analytical process, it becomes impossible to avoid researcher 'bias'. Goldsworth and Coyle (2001) question the affect such 'bias' has on development of themes. Cresswell and Miller (2000) suggest there are three types of validity, historically evolved paradigms associated with the understanding of each. All three will be considered here from the perspective of the current research:

### 5.12.1 Post-positivist validity

This is the standpoint of early qualitative researchers, who seek 'equivalence' to their quantitative counterparts. Rigour and systematic protocols distinguish this approach and the example given by the authors who promotes this standpoint is Maxwell (1996). The quote here, taken from a chapter written by Maxwell, captures the uncomfortable and potentially restricting position in terms of accepting validity from the post-positivist standpoint:

*Likewise, your research questions need to be ones that are answerable by the kind of study you can actually conduct. There is no value to posing questions that no feasible study could answer, either because the data that could answer them could not be obtained, or because any conclusions you might draw from these data would be subject to serious validity threats. (Maxwell 1996 p.230)*

Maxwell's (1996) standpoint is one which emphasises validity 'threats' and he offers a checklist of recommendations, which may or may not all be appropriate depending on the nature of the study.(see overleaf)

1. Intensive, long-term involvement.
2. "Rich" data – in so far as the more data that is collected, the less possible it is for the researcher's bias' to shine through.
3. Respondent validation – a recommendation picked up by Guba and Lincoln, see below. Maxwell concedes that this is simply a means by which to control for researcher bias, as it is also not 'inherently valid' to ask participants' their comments on the findings (p. 244).
4. Searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases.
5. Triangulation – here he appears to be referring to the sampling strategy.
6. Quasi-statistics –the use of terms such as 'rare' or 'common' infers – and demands – a degree of quantitative support. (This point in particular shows how much equivalence is sought. Quantitative research is clearly seen as setting a bench mark and qualitative research must strive to equal it!)
7. Comparison – not in the form of strict control groups, but comparison in terms of reasoning.

Figure 26 Maxwell's recommendations

If qualitative research were to be placed on a continuum with quantitative research, IPA sits a long way from the quantitative end. It is neither comparable nor seeks to be equivalent to quantitative research. Also rich data is sought; it does not aim to 'hide' subjectivity. Respondent validation will be discussed below, discrepant evidence is identified, where a master theme may not fit all stories but this is not perceived as a problem and triangulation is not important. Comparison is considered an integral part of analysis but not as a means by which to find flaws. None of the above recommendations are tenable with the current research's methodology.

### **5.12.2 Constructivist or interpretive validity**

Those adopting this position accept the pluralistic nature of reality. Here then, Guba and Lincoln's (1985) ideas come to the fore with concepts for example of trustworthiness and authenticity instead. The former is made up of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria sit more comfortably with IPA research, although are still not entirely compatible. Guba and Lincoln's views of confirmability for example, lead to their recommendation of an "inquiry audit" (p.317) This mirrors IPA method's insistence on an 'audit trail'. However, Guba and Lincoln's aim is to demonstrate neutrality of research interpretations. The double hermeneutic of IPA is clearly in conflict with this. That said, the audit trail of tables of emerging themes to master themes will be included to offer transparency and a form of internal confirmability.

Maxwell's (1996) third recommendation "respondent checks" complement the interpretive validity's recommendations for what Lincoln and Guba refer to as "member checks" (pp.313-316). Put simply, the interviewee reads and confirms samples of the researchers' transcript and/or interpretation. This links to the notion of credibility and represents another potential conflict with IPA method. Member checks appear to be another name for 'participant validity'. Smith's study on pregnancy and identity did include participant validation, but this process attracts heated debate within IPA circles (for example, JISC, IPA October 2011). The argument stems from the potential that in the case of longitudinal study, disclosure of findings to participants means that the *double* hermeneutic becomes a *triple* hermeneutic. In other words, the researcher's sense-making of the participant's sense-making is confounded by the participant's sense-making of the researcher's sense-making! Some of the concerns were voiced by clinical psychologists, who understandably, are concerned with their clients' ability to deal with being confronted with an interpretation of their experience, or even being forced to revisit details of unpleasant experiences from their past recounted during interviews such as physical abuse, rape etc. Ethical considerations are plausible in these

circumstances and professional codes of conduct must prioritise methodological purity. In the current research, the researcher will feedback collated master themes of the T1 interviews *after* T2 interviews. In doing so, the stories women tell at either T1 or T2 time will not be affected. The reaction to the master themes will be recorded and as such, potentially offer further insights into women's sense-making processes and so add value and depth of understanding to the analysis. It is debateable as to whether this affects the researcher's sense-making of the T2 interviews. The position adopted for the current research is that the aim of the T2 interviews is to understand the outcome of decision-making and reflection at T1 time. As such, a follow-up interview is adding depth to the understanding of this time and validity of the research is enhanced by this form of respondent validation to group level findings. Since the findings are at a group level, ethical concerns of repeating individual disclosures are minimised.

### **5.12.3 Critical perspective:**

This position is the one adopted by the current research and is characterised by the following quote, taken from Cresswell and Miller's (2000) paper:

*the critical perspective holds that researchers should uncover the hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed, read and interpreted....researcher's need to be reflexive and disclose what they bring to a narrative. (Cresswell and Miller 2000 p.126)*

This incorporates historical, social and cultural context and may be managed in a number of ways. Collins and Nicolson (2002) kept a reflective diary during their research process. This helped bring to the fore, and record, any pre-existing assumptions. A diary approach to encourage reflexivity was adopted in the current research process. The researcher captured all thoughts, feelings and reactions after each interview at both T1 and T2 stage. Flowers et al. (1998) write about how the analyst should try and 'acknowledge and suspend' pre-existing knowledge so as to focus on participant's perceptions– which appears to be a nod to Husserl's 'epoché'. The current research attempts to bracket the researcher out at early stages of the analysis by separating out the 'lived story' from the 'told story'. Wengraf's (2007) kick-start panel after T1 interviews further helps focus on the participants' perceptions not the reactions as recorded in the diary.

The relevance of reliability (and generalisability) in contrast to the multi-level concepts of validity are clear cut – both are rejected as irrelevant to qualitative research as any interview will be different if repeated at a different time be it with the same researcher or a different researcher.

#### 5.12.4 Yardley's principles

Yardley's (2008) four principles: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence and finally, impact and importance would appear to be congruent with both the critical and the feminist perspective the current research takes. It cannot however, be known until the analysis is complete, whether all the criteria have been met. Yardley's criteria will be revisited to address this question specifically (see section 10.6). In the meantime, to summarise, the following tools and processes have been built into the design to facilitate and support the goal of validity from a critical perspective:

a. Adherence to BPS code of human research ethics (2011).

This means the researcher has ensured respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons (for example, through informed consent and anonymity); scientific value (facilitated through the supervisory team and progress through a transfer viva); social responsibility (the feminist stance of the current research positions the research here); maximising benefit and minimising harm. Principles of assessing risk, valid consent and confidentiality are incorporated into the design and in part explored in this section on validity and the section on reflexivity which follows.

b. Kick-start panel as part of the interview analysis process at T1.

c. Audit trail (extensive tables of themes and master themes have been included).

d. Feedback of T1 master themes after T2 interview to interviewees.

e. Reflective diary and comments (excerpts have been included throughout from the literature review onwards).

The notion of offering feedback to interviewees and the keeping of a reflective diary led to some further examination of reflective practice and where the distinction between interpretation and analysis starts and ends. Smith (2004) writes that the interpretation should be informed by psychological theory but be "*clearly distinguishable from the interpretation in the analysis*" (Brocki and Weardon, p.90). Stories, according to Sims (2005) are:

*not told only for their content, but also for the effect they have on the relationship between teller and the hearer. (p.1628)*

It is of interest to this research to consider whether this holds true for narrative interviews. Sims' research is about indignation and as such, the emotive content is energised. The reflexive diary, together with the analysis may offer some insight in the current research – or



in the very least, offer some transparency with regards the perception of the narrative and story-teller.

The relevance of the interviewer (listener) and interviewee (storyteller) both being women is arguably important bearing in mind the social constructionist stance taken. Hyde (1994) however, suggests that differences between genders are overemphasised and this was the conclusion of a robust meta-analysis involving many studies. Furthermore, when the focus of sexual differences is on language and communication, Cameron (2009) writes convincingly that the differences are minimal, citing a further array of robust research. This included the use of judges to interpret minimal responses from men and women to explore possible different meanings between genders (Reid-Thomas, 1993) through to a three-year study which supported hierarchy amongst girls aged 9-12 years (Goodwin, 2006) and then again in teenager girls (Baxter, 2006). These studies have a different object of knowledge. It is the *experience* of being a female employee, then a mother, then, with the hindsight of returning to work, making a decision on whether or not to return, which is important to this analysis, not whether real, objective, measurable, even observable differences exist. Whether behaviour manifestations are due to sexual dimorphism, evolutionary predispositions or hormonal based biological differences is not relevant. The literature review clearly demonstrates, promotion, wages, part-time work, unpaid household roles etc. result in measurable gender differences. The current research asks how this might be manifested in a woman's sense-making of her working life. The reflexivity, as part of validity processes asks: what emotions and reactions will the interviews surface for the researcher? The chosen method of interpretation allows consideration of how will this affect the research outcomes.

Finally, the researcher comes to the current research knowing the territory of paid employment for women and conflict with motherhood is not new – as explored in the Introduction. Research on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis specifically and transition to motherhood has already been published (Miller, 2000) albeit all studies to date focusing on first maternity leave experiences or not distinguished between first and subsequent leave. This knowledge together with training in occupational psychology is brought to the interviews and is intertwined with the researcher's experience as a mother of two children and someone who never returned to traditional full-time paid employment after the birth of her first child. To fail to acknowledge this, would not only call into question the reason for keeping a reflexive diary and thus diminish validity of the research, but also represent a disservice to the participants. The latter is difficult to explain but captured in part by Josselson (1996) who reflected on writing about other people's lives and the surprising

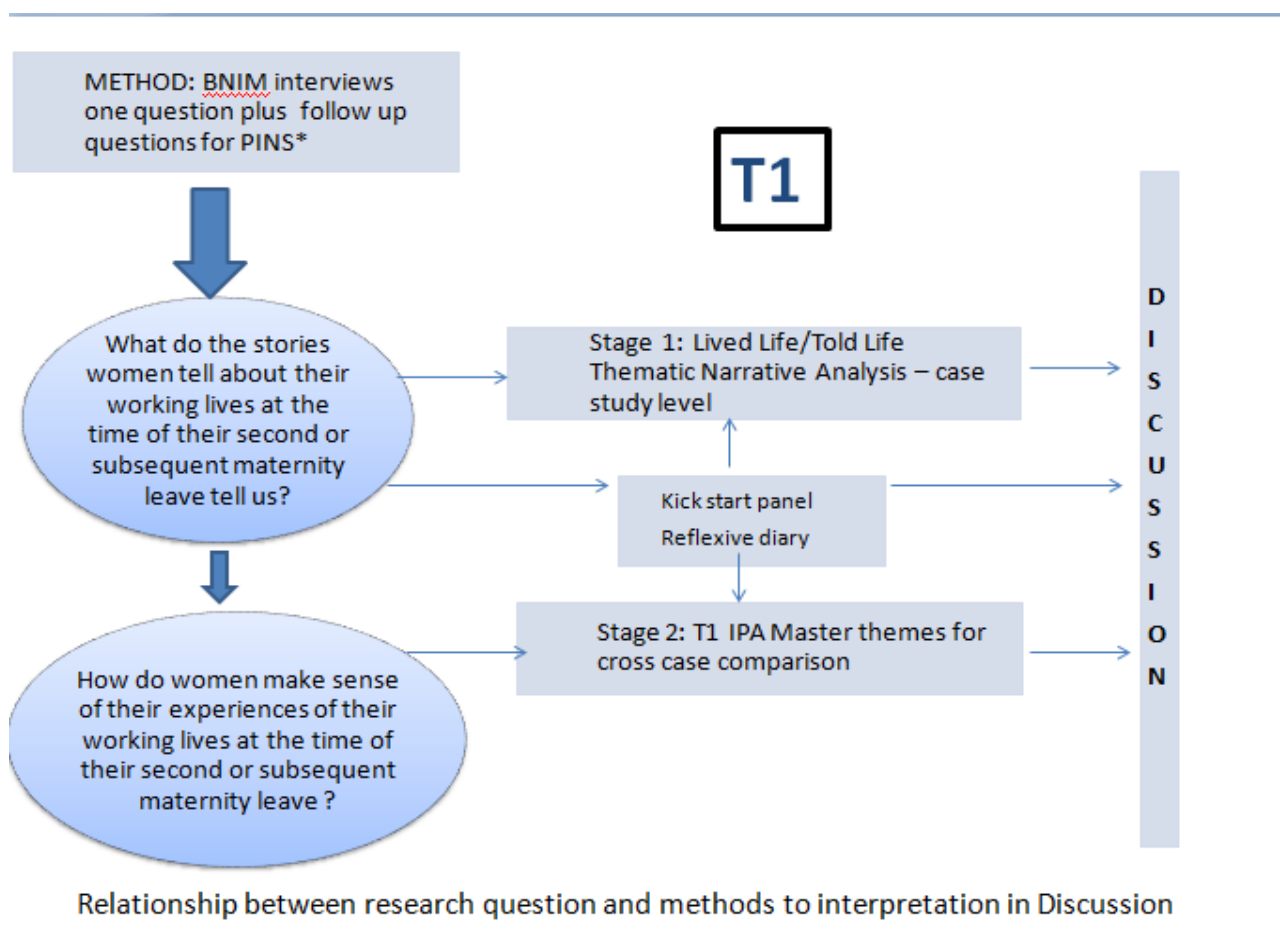
discomfort felt talking about the interview and findings with the interviewees. An explanation for this, due to framing of the narrative research was thus:

*[the] intrusiveness of the experiences of being writ down, fixed in print, formulated, summed up, encapsulated in language, reduced to .....to what the words contain. Language can never contain a whole person, so every act of writing a person's life is inevitably a violation. (Josselson 1996 p.62)*

Miller and Birch (2006) further explore their reactions to intimate interviews and conclude that such interviews can be framed in therapeutic frameworks by the interviewees, regardless of the training of the interviewers. Their research took a very unstructured approach, the current research is dissimilar and the assumption therefore, is that the interview will have a different dynamic. It is commentary nonetheless, which belongs in a reflexive diary (see sections 9.1 and 10.6).

Ensuring reflexivity at all stages of the research is unquestionably imperative for the purposes of validity to the research and the specific methodology chosen. At an individual level, reflexivity is also needed to help preserve the women's stories with as much dignity and sensitivity as possible. This can only be achieved with on-going reflection of researcher's emotional response, which intertwines to become part of sense-making processes of her past and future academic journey.

*“And what of my sense of audience here and now: have I decided what to include in my writing here, and how, to you? How have I arranged the pieces to develop an overall story? And what do you, dear reader, make of this present discussion? Does it resonate with Brown and Gilligan's argument (1992) about the suppression of women's authentic (albeit 'polyphonic and complex', 1992:23) voices and Mauthner's (1994) linking of this with depression of mothers? Or does it resonate more with Davis's suggestion (1994) contra Brown and Gilligan, that women deal with multitudinous, contradictory and fragmented voices? Perhaps you think I am neurotic and anxiety- ridden, deeply lacking in self-confidence as a mother. Perhaps you think just the opposite, that I must be quite fundamentally confident to be able to write all of this down for a public audience, or that I am a wise fool who knows she is one. I sit here at my computer in my bedroom in suburban England, quietly typing, constructing and refining this textual version of my voice at this period in time, but very aware that, once written and published, this account will take a life of its own, quite separate from me. I hope you will hear me kindly, and make of this what you will. (Ribbens 1998 p.36)*



\*PINS = Particular Incident Narratives

Source: Author

Figure 27: Relationship between research questions and methods of analysis.

### 6.1 Introduction to findings

Each case study is presented individually. These studies offer findings for discussion based on the content of the story. Consequently, analysis of the findings can offer an answer into the research question:

*“What does narrative analysis tell us about women’s career paths at the time of the second or subsequent maternity leave?”*

The findings from each of the case studies and associated thematic analysis are presented with the following four elements:

- an introduction to the participants and the context of the interview;
- tabulated summary of the participants ‘lived life’ versus ‘told life’ narrative;
- description of themes identified through narrative analysis of told stories;

- reflective comment on the interview – excerpts from the researcher’s diary.

The approach adopted here follows the principles of Husserlian reduction whereby the researcher attempts to bracket off their experiences, in other words, attempts to minimise personal feelings influencing analysis. To this end, the ‘kick-start’ panel at the start of each thematic analysis helped surface researcher attitudes.

The understanding of the ‘lived story’ was collated from reference points given in the stories and presented linearly. Then, as Wengraf (2007) recommends, the following issues were considered when first analysing the ‘told story’:

- What events/topics do the respondents talk about...how do they present themselves?
- What moral of the (biographical) story do they want us to draw?
- What moral of the story does their story point away from, might they NOT want us to draw?
- Why?

In order to explore the ‘why’ aspect fully, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is adopted to address the meaning-making process the women’s stories capture – in other words IPA is used to explore how the women make sense of their working life. The IPA permits the added layers of understanding gained from the experiences of the kick-start panels to be included (see appendix 6 which include kick-start panel member comments prior to Heather’s analysis) as well as the mini-participant observation (see appendix 3 - observation of Summer’s case study).

The T1 findings end with presentation of IPA master themes. The second stage of the analysis required a shift in researcher position to embrace a phenomenological approach. Following Heideggerian philosophy, (Inwood 1997) the reflexivity is permitted and the diary excerpts used to help draw out the emerging themes. The research question is thus modified to:

*How do women make sense of their working life histories at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave?*

## 6.2 Case study 1: Tina – three halves of a life

Tina qualified as a teacher and was currently on maternity leave having had twins. She already has a 5 year old daughter. She worked part-time in private education for small organisation which has a number of sites. She had a management role.

Tina was helpful when asked to participate in the research. The interview started by going through the consent form and repeated the brief explanation, previously given on the phone ensuring BPS code of ethics was adhered to (see Methods chapter 4). Tina declined the opportunity to be 'anonymised' and choose a pseudonym, preferring that the research used her real name instead. The logic here was based on two reasons. Firstly, she felt proud of her working life choices and secondly, she felt her story was an important one to share, which linked with her much later revelation of writing a book. After further reflection and discussion with the supervisory team, her name, along with identifying features of her life (for example location and organisational descriptions) has been changed, to help preserve the anonymity of the rest of the sample.

The interview took place at Tina's kitchen table. While she made tea, she pointed out a buzzard in the field, which she suspected was injured. She decided that she would call someone out to check it after the interview - if it had still not flown away. Tina immediately presented as someone very much in control of her environment, almost business-like, despite the informal setting. Her response to my opening question was relatively short, although she permitted herself some limited digression. Her control extended to her gesturing to the Dictaphone to stop when she got to the end of her story.

The second part of the interview helped get Tina to open up a little more but she still spoke very fast and the transcription failed to convey the lightening speed of her commentary and responses, which often came before I completed asking the question. The transcript captures the full one hour of her story.

As mentioned, throughout the interview, Tina offered a professional, controlled presence. The word 'professional' was used to reflect her perception of the culmination of her qualifications and training. There was little body movement, Tina talked **very** rapidly and her face was animated, with emotion evident through her tone of voice and through her frequent laughs. As she described herself as this fire-fighter, she used her hands to help emphasise her words - a rare addition to her speech.

Towards the end of the interview Tina brought the toddlers into the kitchen. She put them in their high chairs between us slightly set back from the kitchen table and gave them a large amount of trifle each, which they contentedly ate/played with. Her 'in control' professionalism was apparent throughout; the recording uninterrupted with their presence and the flow of her responses continuous despite the presence of two potentially disruptive children. Furthermore, the kitchen was returned to an exceptionally tidy and clean state, with the toddlers happily returning to their play before the interview had finished.

(Additional description included her to help convey the control Tina aimed to have over the environment - as well as the interview process).

## 6.2.1 Summary of Tina’s Lived and Told Story.

Table 4: Tina - summary of lived story and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Born in Scotland 1973</p> <p>Waitressing whilst at school – age 15</p> <p>Starts teacher training – age 17</p> <p>Married – age 20</p> <p>Completes degree age 21</p> <p>Starts work for nursery in private sector nursery as primary teacher</p> <p>Takes on management role which grows and continues to change</p> <p>Has son at age 29 (aged 5 at T1)</p> <p>Returns to work after 6 months, changes of work time and role</p> <p>Mother has cancer – survives treatment</p> <p>Husband expands business and the family relocate for several months to set it up.</p> <p>Returns to previous employer</p> <p>Has twins (aged 15 months at T1)</p> <p>Takes on a variety of ‘home helpers’ (cleaner, au-pair, gardener)</p> <p>Currently in process of ending maternity leave after 15 month break.</p> <p>New management role with same employer - age 34</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Status, commitment and expectations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “I was only a student...” and “scummy”</li> <li>- “well-to-do fancy people ....”</li> <li>- parents feeling guilty about leaving their children at nursery</li> <li>- lack of psychological contracts: other people have ...”no work ethic”</li> <li>- motherhood, work and wife role balance</li> </ul> <p><u>Theme 2: Conflicting needs: managing self</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “to start with you take everything to heart”</li> <li>- Post-graduation decisions</li> <li>- “I can breast-feed two babies...while playing fuzzy felt” (mother role example)</li> <li>- “I get quite a buzz from multi-tasking”</li> </ul> <p><u>Theme 3: Resolving conflicting needs at work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- example of dealing with new legislation</li> <li>- spot checks at work</li> <li>- minimum wage and loss of clients</li> <li>- ‘What I do has changed so many times...’</li> <li>- ‘Fire fighter’</li> <li>- Mother’s cancer</li> <li>- Orange juice and fever example</li> </ul>
<p>Overall struggle for balance/fairness/control in both home and work-life.</p> <p>“half the mum job, half the housework job and half the actual job...”</p>	

## 6.2.2 Narrative themes from Tina's told story

### Theme 1: Status, commitment and expectations

This theme reflects Tina's emphasis on social status and her frequent inferred commentary on social expectations, both in work and beyond. The thread is a constant one and appears throughout both parts of the T1 interview in different guises.

Tina started her story with a job she held as a teenager, a waitress at a *"high quality restaurant"* which attracted *"incredibly wealthy people"*. Tina suspected the waitress role was perceived as *"just"* serving people, reinforcing the point through the use of the word *"scummy"* – representing how she felt the clients probably perceived the staff. She commented on how the behaviour of the restaurant patrons reinforced this difference between them, with clients blowing *"cigar smoke right in your face"*. It was interesting then, how she ended by offering a positive slant on the experience: *"It's a fantastic job"*. She explained that she learned lots about different types of people. Critically, Tina felt she learned not to react aggressively to confrontation behaviour as *"some situations are completely out of our control"*. The final story in this section about her waitressing role seemed to suggest that she was relaxed and was not angry about these experiences. The story of the steak dish looking like a giant penis supported a perception that she enjoyed this part of the interview. It seemed a little incongruent with her controlled, professional persona reflected up to this point. It was not surprising that she then snapped back, clearly signified the end of her answer with the hearty laugh and a firm nod to my exercise book, a sign to move onto the next question. She clearly wanted to ensure her professionalism was the stronger dynamic as she attempted to control the interview. Returning to the social expectations part of the theme, Tina considered her current role as one which over the years has helped her to learn the different needs of the parents of children entrusted in her organisation's care. Just as with the restaurant clientele, she associated poor emotional management and extreme (poor) behaviour as a reflection on those manifesting the behaviour and not a slur on her. Further, it could be argued that the difficulties she witnessed are socially expected:

*We deal with those parents who are suffering from guilt and anxiety from leaving their child" ....can be really quite aggressive or confrontational and when you actually speak to these people they're just .... jealous and anxious....*

Her choice of words *"those parents"* suggests the parent's guilt and anxiety is not only acceptable but understandable.



Tina inferred her end of university years as the point at which her marriage set her on a different path to her peers: *"I got married at 20 and had **responsibilities**".* There was no further comment on what Tina felt her responsibilities were at home. This appeared to be a result of the interview asking about her working life and so reflected her decision to focus (albeit not exclusively) on topics of *paid* work. The derogatory comment regarding her husband's inability to manage domestic tasks suggested she runs the house on a day-to-day basis. It is therefore assumed that she followed social expectations and took on traditional housework responsibilities, as well as the part-time work as a teacher, whilst managing the three children. On asking about her decision to enter the private sector after university, the answer provided centred on the different social needs and expectations she had compared to her unmarried peers. The emphasis on responsibilities in her story grew to include status as discusses her early days in the organisation: *"I used to say my job was like the director of a theatrical production"* and her role title at the time of the interview: *"which is a quite a fancy title for someone who just wanders about..."*

Social status as a theme cropped up throughout the interview in various guises throughout her story of her working life. It is unclear whether she was entirely comfortable with positioning herself as someone with high status within the organisation and as such someone with considerable responsibility. Her analogy relating to role to the acting profession (theatre production) was reinforced by way in which she couched the description in a pseudo-mocking tone (line 88). Also turns of phrases such as: *"Yeah, it's erm, a difficult one ... 'cause it's so sort of relatively big headed"* and *"we get quite skilled at our job."* So although status and responsibility are valued, it was not an area Tina felt comfortable expressing in terms of herself. She was however, vocal about her levels of commitment. Commitment in her story is closely interlinked status and responsibility. Commitment is manifested in three ways:

a. Tina has demonstrated commitment with her choice of partners – an early and enduring marriage to date, even following her husband to set up a new home for a year with a young family to support a new business start up.

b. Tina described her manager's commitment to her by keeping her position open for her to return to. Furthermore, when her first maternity leave return was unsuccessful, her manager was willing to demonstrate on-going commitment to Tina, by then a long-serving member of staff, to accommodate a different pattern of work. This, she felt was the expected reward for her commitment to the organisation.

c. Two-way commitment reflected such a strong norm for Tina, that she expected the same from her other staff: “*but I’m always surprised how other people have absolutely no work ethic [laughs] and expect the world...*” and later: “*if you’re good with your employers you expect them to be good back.*” This contrasts with the psychological contract (Argyris 1960) that others who have not shown commitment feel they nonetheless they are still entitled to. Commitment however, takes a long time to prove as demonstrated by the following comment she made to one of her staff whom she clearly felt empathy for: “*Morag you’ve had **no days off in 10 years** and now you reap the benefit you go home with your sick child.*” The fact that Tina felt justified in being treated with such fairness is an expectation which she linked to her achievement of her position her higher up the hierarchy in her organisation.

This theme therefore is a multi-faceted one. Tina clearly placed importance on status and high levels of responsibility both to her family and at work, although work responsibility was focused on in the interview. Her commitment is another theme which surfaces supporting the two key themes. Whilst she was not keen to promote herself on either of the theme areas, she used commitment as a vehicle to express both and infer her status as a professional and one who is valued through her commitment to her job. Her reward was not only her perceived status in the organisation but also reciprocal commitment – a social expectation not always valued in the same way by her staff and peers. Her professional identity, which embraced the values which make up this theme is salient for most of the interview, despite the way in which she sometimes attempted to play down her role.

*Reflexive comment: The interpretation is further supported by my comments capturing my immediate reaction on leaving Tina’s home. I felt somewhat frustrated that it had been difficult to get her to offer anything more than ‘politically correct’ responses while the tape was on. Once the tape was off, she opened up a little more saying she had at times for example, when her mother had been very ill asked herself what was the point of a ‘fancy car and huge house’. It made me feel that she gave answers as a child-care professional and her control of her life and work had extended to controlling the interview. The thematic analysis helped me consider that the need for control was part bound up with her strong belief in social status and her work identity offered this much valued status. I wondered about the extent of the conflict with her family life this commitment might lead to. She clearly used her working life decisions to demonstrate her successful management of work and family. The control of the interview and her image was part of her coping strategy, which encompassed her work and home life, as the next two themes demonstrated.*

**Figure 28 Reflection on using reflexive commentary to support interpretations**

## Theme 2: Conflicting needs: managing self

Tina suggested that her confidence had grown over time and was linked to her professional identity: *“And I suppose in my, early on in my career, I wasn’t nearly so blunt”* (line 388). Also, *“I used to sort of justify my choices but I no longer feel the need to justify my choices to people”* (line 209). Her confidence was always framed within her role as a professional and as a working mother: *“I suppose when you’re a mother of three yourself and worked there for thirteen years”* and in a comment about jealous parents, she says: *“I am a working parent I know”*. Her self-management was bound up in her confidence as a professional and again, her motherhood. In terms of coping, she said: *“I can multi-task to the nth degree”* in fact she goes on to decide she is *“the world’s best multi-tasker”*. Someone who can: *“breast feed two babies at a time while playing fuzzy felt”*.

She used her husband as a comparison with someone who cannot multi-task and is *“painful to watch”*. Talking about her husband seemed to move her into an uncomfortable subject area and again Tina signified the end of the answer with clear non-verbal communication (NVC) to move onto the next question as before. This time, the hint was ignored and, following a short pause, Tina provided another example of her multi-tasking skill, this time in a work setting. In this story, she used a powerful image of herself as a *“theatre director”*. Prior to her professional identity, the drive to remain in control steered her decision-making: straight after university, she explained she would rather work in Asda than wait for supply work. Here too, she described her decision to go into the private education as *“lowering”* herself – another covert reference to the on-going thread of the first theme: status and social expectations. But in fact, she described her decision-making as working in her favour:

*...so I stated to work as a primary teacher erm not so well paid as if I’d gone straight to the state sector but then I’m totally reaping the benefit now I have children so I can take I now work part-time flexi-hours, ahm in fact it it’s now the situation if don’t want to go to work for a week I don’t actually **have** to.*

During the interview, one of the toddlers entered the kitchen and dropped a toy. Tina immediately stopped in mid sentence, changed her voice to a very babyish one and kindly said: *“Oh no”* to the child. The body language and voice change was instant and dramatic – almost theatrical in its change from interviewee to an adult with an excellent rapport with the child. With hindsight, the theatre director may in fact be a very telling analogy and led to the question: how much of her behaviour is an act? It would seem that Tina felt she was managing herself professionally very well as evidenced in the theme above and by

comments such as her recollection of her manager's comment to Tina: "*I'd rather have your fingers in my pie....*"

A dramatic admission came unexpectedly at the end of the interview. The whole interview offered evidence of her professional management of her work, acknowledged success and avoidance of conflict in roles due to the nature of her work. Furthermore, with the exception of the waitressing example at the start of her life Tina provided evidence of complete control in her life - and even of the interview. The hint of a major crack in her ability to keep control and manage all her roles, began with the statement: "*you **try** to be this stunning wife and mother and you **try** to be really good at your job.*" This 'admission' led onto her 'confession':

*I do half the mum job, half the housework job and half the actual job so... no, it's not the best of best of both worlds at all [laughs] .... because one person suffers and it's me...so....no...." [long pause]*

Tina clearly dropped her professional stance to offer this insight to what was behind the professional worker but would not be drawn in any further. Despite attempts to encourage her to continue, Tina was unwilling to expand on her response. Instead, she curtly ended the interview with a nod to the recorder, sitting upright and the incongruous comment: "*Not sure if it's answered your question?*"

### Theme 3: Resolving conflicting needs at work

A request for specific examples of conflict in the interview led Tina to tell the story of other education managers who effectively 'cheated' the system to ensure a good social work report. Tina set the scene explaining how the regulatory body works. She strongly identified with her boss's decisions to take control of the situation presented when new rules were introduced: "*we just knuckled down and put the systems in place*". From that point on in this narrative, she used 'we' rather than 'I'. This appeared to suggest a 'them and us' situation – a strong identification with the in-group (Tajfel et al. 1978) caused by the conflict between her organisation's acceptance of the new rules and the other organisation's dislike/avoidance of them. She suggested that there was a fundamental difference between end goals of the different educational organisations causing the conflict at the meeting with the unfinished comment: "*You can make money out of children but....*" Tina seemed to take a step back and offered an evaluation of her story by providing her image of children as: "*wonderfully, relatively empty vessels*". It was offered in a change of tone and rare slowing down of pace. She continued this reflection by suggesting there is a responsibility

associated with resolving this conflict of money over meeting set governing body requirements: *“if you don’t look after this generation, you have a whole load of problems in the next.”* Tina then seemed to return to the present and offered the professional in control portrayal where she offered an example where she, notably using the pronoun ‘I’ not ‘we’ took control of an unexpected spot-check situation. It was clear that she was driven in part at least by the belief that she was working in the best interests of the children. At the end of this ‘particular incident narrative’ (PIN), she made it clear it was time for the next question, the signs went unheeded and another question was not forthcoming. Tina responded to this lack of control with the return of the pronoun ‘we’ in her next part of her story, which again described successful conflict resolution. Focus on the significance of the changing use of pronoun is perhaps validated as the evaluative comment of the narrative: *“it was just well, you know, I employ good staff; if they think they need that to do their job, then they’ll get it.”* Another example to support his theme came with Tina’s self description of being a *“fire-fighter”*. It was unclear where the term originated with her manager or Tina. Her fire-fighter image related to Tina’s return to work as and when required, regardless of whether or not she it was a designated day off, or in fact, during her maternity leave. This blurring of boundaries was Tina’s way of resolving conflicting needs – by reflecting her commitment to her organisation. She was quick to soften this and offered the example of a potential conflict between time spent with her seriously ill mother and work. The conflict in fact did not exist as it was part of the psychological contract that she would be entitled to time off in such circumstances.

Tina’s story was therefore full of conflict stories (Gladys and her sick daughter; unexpected spot checks; new legislation; confrontations with occasional angry parents and so forth) and whilst at pains not to appear too *“big-headed”*, Tina always portrayed herself as the professional problem-solver who could overcome all, rationally and pragmatically. Furthermore, this skill was valued – and needed by her employer. A clear link to the theme of managing self emerges here with a repetition of a story involving parental guilt and jealousy causing conflict situation between parents and staff. An example offered was the PIN about orange juice where a mother appeared to over-react to a decision made regarding feeding her child orange juice without her express permission to do so beforehand. Tina, after attempting to calmly put the situation into perspective, suggested she removed her child from the nursery. This would resolve the situation as the mother could then seek one-to-one nanny which would permit the level of control the mother clearly desired.

### 6.2.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Tina's story

The fact that Tina decided to go ahead with the interview despite the twins being unexpectedly awake, was in hindsight, a clear signal that she was in control. Being interviewed whilst taking care of toddler twins was potentially a conflict of needs situation, yet Tina strongly declined the offer of postponing the interview saying that "it would be fine". The toddlers entertained each other and Tina was able to largely ignore them – and let it be known that I should follow suit. This turned out to be the first example of themes 1 and 2. During the interview, Tina gave the impression of oscillating between 'rehearsed' answers and 'off-guard' answers. She gave descriptions of organisational detail in a very confident, professional manner, as though I was a prospective parent (theme 1 and 2). The first two themes were evident as distinct themes too, specifically when Tina stepped out of her professional role, for example when offering evaluative comment on why parents behaved in the way they did at the time of the abuse accusation (theme 2). These different types of stories were mirrored in a change in tone, fluency and even volume, which is further explored in stage 2 (IPA) of the analysis. The conflict of needs theme was consistent and so it was surprisingly that the undercurrent of the conflict theme was manifested as spilling outside of her working life, contradicting her previous narrative. This conflict she clearly failed to resolve (theme 2). So despite the various success stories she describes in both her personal life (ability to multi-task to the "nth degree") and managing her work-life around her family needs, Tina was struggling. Furthermore, the conflict, she felt was one which she alone suffered. This is perhaps reinforced by the lack of mention of any support she receives from her family or husband (theme 1).

To summarise, Tina's narrative offered in response to a question about her working life was one which portrayed her development of skills, mostly conflict resolution skills, that has led her to feel she is a proud professional in a position to manage both her family through her choice of career. Importantly, her working life decisions entitled her to flexibility to respond to her family's needs - and free childcare/education. This she successfully managed after her first child. Her role after her second maternity leave has now become one of specifically identifying other people's conflicts of needs and delight in resolving these. This is the latest part-time role within the same organisation she took on as she ended her second period of maternity leave. The concluding comment of the narrative was most revealing, despite her success story, reaching its pinnacle at the time of the interview, the reality was that she struggled to manage a balance between motherhood, working life and wife: *"no, it's not the best of both worlds at all...because only one person suffers and it's me..."* Tina was approached in the first instance as she had three children and was working. Despite her own explicit story of success with both family life and career, carved out to enable her to manage

a family, the reality was that Tina, the conflict-resolver, has yet to resolve the biggest conflict she faced as she officially neared the end of her second maternity leave period.

#### **6.2.4 TINA: reflexive comments – excerpts from diary**

*I can identify with Tina's conflict of needs theme as I am a mother of two myself and the impact of this identification may well be tempered with the kick-start panel.*

*The extent to which the data was 'rich' and multi-layered frankly surprised me. For example the tension between Tina and me, was barely noticeable at the time I spoke to her and bar one comment in my notebook saying 'she's trying to control the interview!' would have been forgotten. I can clearly hear it now I have listened to sections in the car en route home. I was also drawn to the visual analogies, or metaphors Tina used.*

*I left the interview with mixed feelings, some anger and some regret. I can only point to her end comment as the reason. I would have like to have fully explored this but this was not an option! Tina was far too controlling of interview parameters and when I fumbled with my new Dictaphone, there was barely concealed impatience.*

*Interestingly she considers herself on maternity leave - and legally is - yet happily has gone in to work if and when required with a new position.....the boundary between a 'legal definition' and her definition is blurred. Is this going to be a problem? I did, after all purposefully allow the women to self categorise. I will ensure that future participants are asked explicitly if they are on maternity leave – although I did this with Tina. Note to self: find out if each participant is officially on leave.*

*Did my naivety – this being the first interview - allow me to be exploited more, than I had at the time realised?*

### **6.3 Case Study 2: Martha – the ‘wise, old bird’ – eventually.**

Martha's paid work was focused in IT. She regarded herself to be on maternity leave awaiting the birth of her fourth child. She did not return to work in an organisational setting after her second. Instead she started a childminding business from home – and was winding this down now to a bare minimum.

The interview took place in Martha's house. The interview began by going through the consent form and a brief explanation was given again, (previously given on the phone when interview arrangements were being finalised) to check that she had no questions or concerns about the research. A pseudonym was not asked for so an email was sent afterwards to ask for a name. The opportunity was taken to ask if she was happy with how the interview went then too (she was).

Martha's narrative style was a slow and leisurely one, which naturally incorporated much unprompted self reflection. It appeared at times she forgot my presence as she sat back and told her story. This prompted her to apologise at times, when she remembered the purpose of her musings and my presence. This was a complete contrast to Tina's controlled and largely clipped and speedy style of responses.



## 6.2.1 Summary of Martha’s Lived and Told Story.

Table 5: Martha - summary of lived story and narrative themes

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>1974. Born in Scotland</p> <p>Enjoyed small primary school Moved onto large secondary school</p> <p>1990. Left school, persuaded to return – few if any exams passed</p> <p>Went to College to do Media Studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Met now husband</li> <li>- Started work in shop to make ends meet – studies suffered</li> </ul> <p>1992. Left college continued in shop</p> <p>Joined small design company on temporary contract, left within 6 months.</p> <p>Joined IT team in College; started a series of temporary contracts.</p> <p>2000. Started work at another small design company.</p> <p>2002. Started work in large corporation</p> <p>2002. Pregnant with 1st child (now aged 5)</p> <p>2002. Takes five months off.</p> <p>2003. Returns part-time</p> <p>2004. Pregnant with 2<sup>nd</sup> child (now 4)</p> <p>2004. Voluntary committee work</p> <p>2004. Pregnant with 3<sup>rd</sup> child (22 months at T1), starts child minding business.</p> <p>2006. Pregnant with 4<sup>th</sup> child.</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Agency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- move to big secondary</li> <li>- college</li> <li>- temporary contracts</li> <li>- pregnancies</li> </ul> <p><u>Theme 2: Negativity, Fairness and Conflict</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job vs. new relationship conflict</li> <li>- Negative codas</li> <li>- Unfair contracts</li> <li>- Unfair pay deal</li> <li>- motherhood vs. paid work</li> <li>- motherhood vs. unpaid work</li> </ul> <p><u>Theme 3: Resolution through motherhood</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- voluntary work</li> <li>- childminding</li> <li>- village life</li> <li>- parenting skills</li> <li>- proactive planning</li> </ul>
<p>Overall theme of gaining control through learning “...so I’ll be this wise old bird”</p>	

### 6.3.2 Narrative themes from Martha's told story

#### Theme 1: Agency

Martha chose to start her story with her very unhappy transition from primary to secondary school, described as leading to rebellious teenager years. The conflict at school left her out of control of future decisions about whether to return to school: after she left in fifth year: *"And this was deemed a bad move by the family"* and with regards her then move out of her home to go to college: *"so it was deemed a good idea to move to the city.....which was supposed to be good for me."*

There followed two short-term jobs in shops, one of which she was asked to leave. It is unclear whether the lack of control associated with this period of her life was due to immaturity and/or the youthful abandon brought on by a first romance. The first hint of a sense of control came with the first job she took on after officially leaving college with no qualifications. Her employer offered a grossly unfair contract after probation, which she rejected. This did however, seem to set her off on a run of work, where she perceived she has some control by only taking on work on a contract basis, for example at the college:

*"then you didn't have to be looking at to stay there forever and ever and ever."* In fact, she reinforced the point of the strong focus in her narrative she placed on agency, specifically, her ability to control what happens to her and her ability to be free to make decisions: *"I'm terrified of being stuck somewhere forever"*. This comment reflects a contradiction to how she described her enjoyment of stability and routine. This supports the idea that she was re-living the story in her memory and her body language suggests she was visualising past events, looking up and away and only occasionally returning to the interview with a evaluative comment: *"so erm, a distinct lack of planning in this whole story; I feel ashamed."* Returning to the aspect of agency through contract work, she was actually drawn to positions in which she felt unvalued and lower than what she was capable of doing. For example, she described her college IT job as *"another dead end job as usual"*. Her success at moving from one job to another, which she wryly puts down to being an *"adept bull-shitter"* but gave her a sense of agency and with this, confidence.

Another manifestation of her need to try and control was linked to her dislike of inefficiency. Her reaction to being part of an inefficient team in one of her contract roles was frustration: *"They're always reinventing the wheel in the office. I can't seem to put up with it, I have to go and change it."* The frustration of not being able to control what she perceived was not

working was strongly expressed again describing her income as compared to a college lecturer:

*I just remember thinking I was the lowest person. **God**, all these people above me are doing it all wrong! It's not a good place to think that from. Doesn't get you **on**, I've noticed But I did, I did have a nightmare all these things, so I did, he was earning **all this money**.*

In another attempt to gain agency over the direction of her life, she applied successfully to work in an organisation which is known for its pay, training opportunities, stability and career progression. She commented on the much needed decent salary and training. Control, however, was brought to an abrupt end with an unplanned pregnancy before the minimum time for maternity leave. The margin was small and ignored so she was allowed maternity leave. Control over her career move seemed to have been taken away at this point: "*But the training, any training that I had received up to that point sort of stopped dead.*"

Another indication of loss of agency comes with her maternity leave arrangements: "*they were most keen that I came back full-time, err, I'm, not knowing any better, I'd sort of made plans to that effect.*" As she later expands: "*They were more interested in proving the case that you had to be there full-time*" On return after a 6 month break, she attempted to regain control: "*I'd negotiated a **trial** three day week.*" This did not resolve the work-mother conflict. On top of this, another unplanned pregnancy occurred within months of the first, which she welcomed as:

*...a sort of relief to stop working*" as she describes the early starts and long journey to and from work as "*hellish days..... two days were sort of spent catching up and trying to get ready for the **next** three days again.*

This marked the end of her short-lived agency. The theme was then manifested through failed attempts to regain agency. For example whilst on maternity leave the second time, Martha showed the characteristic lack of control again and over-commits herself to three voluntary committees, such as toddler groups: "*I ended up being on three, stupid, stupidly, where I thought I needed an interest....*" It was whilst on these committees, that Marsha demonstrated her attempts to gain some agency whilst on the voluntary committee work. She would delegate but not before she had drafted or prepared the work first. The same lack of full control is described in her business venture - to run a childminding business. In her self-deprecatory style, Martha describes trying to act on her plans. She had mixed results:

*And my bright idea was to become a registered **child minder** which took me [laugh] about a **year** because I went to the classes when I was still feeding my second.*

And later, “*it was good to get out of the house as well it was something else to be doing*”. But taking on far too many children and hours she has to concede “*I’ve cut the child minding just to the hours that I feel I can do*”. By the end of her story, Martha suggested her battle to keep control is on-going, although she was getting better at it, despite all the lessons learned (theme 3):

*....do something day in day out you’re bound to get better at it. People say how do you manage with three kids, well, I have no choice just to carry on.*

Martha appeared by the end of the interview to reframe her concept of agency. The interview ended with a strongly voiced soliloquy about how she had now re-gained control through a number of stories and examples, all of which ended with strong control related codas: “*You take the reins...*” and “*I’ll take charge....I’ll say they won’t work....I’m gonna plan things that suit me better*” and a final example: “*I’m not going to take on anything that I haven’t got time to do.*” Gaining of control was very much part of the resolution and redemption theme, which began soon after her romance with her partner, now husband. This is explored further in the next theme.

## Theme 2: Negativity, fairness and conflict

This theme is qualitatively different from the first as it captures much of the emotional side of the narrative – the sense of not fitting; “*confusion*” in and being a “*loner*” and “*rebel*”. Her “*dark days*” contrasted with the rosy picture of a small primary school, described at the start of the interview. Here she was popular and clever, as compared to her small peer group. She recalls how she developed into a confident and very able school-girl. Both confidence and happiness were however, lost in the transition to secondary school. From this time on, she reported conflict between her parents, the school and herself. The change was from receiving a prize in the first year; good grades in the third through to ripping up her qualification sheet in fourth year: “[*I*] *sort of rebelled against everything....I couldn’t give a damn.....I hated the people, I hated the school.*” Unfortunately, her desire to work whilst studying at college, conflicted amongst other things with her wish to pursue a new romance. Her employment was terminated due to “*too much larking about*” and “*too much fun with Paul*”.

Her next job at a branch of a large retail organisation only temporarily resolved Martha's conflict between the need to earn money, her relationship and her studies. She opted to continue to earn money but the offer of additional hours: "*killed my college course*". Martha was left with no qualifications and was in a job that did not have any prospect for a career path. On the plus side, she did have a partner who she eventually married. Martha places the focus was on the negative aspects of the story, the lack of direction: "*as was my pattern at that stage.....so I still didn't have any choice.*" Her next job, in a small company, seemed to have captured her interest more than the retail work. This time, the conflict which ended this job appeared to be largely due to unfair terms of contract. After a probationary period, Marsha confronted her manager/owners seeking a permanent contract, which she was eventually offered – but with much reduced wages. No emotion is expressed at this unfairness, Marsha simply said: "*So it was time to leave,*" accepting the negative story end.

In contrast, her description of the IT college job was more emotionally described. She was angry at being unfairly paid the least in the college, despite seeing in her opinion, the lecturers doing very little for their substantially larger income. This dissatisfaction conflicted with the other positive aspects of the job: social life, interesting work; appreciation from customers. "*You could go in you could be efficient....and you could leave it behind at the end of the day.*" Despite the examples of positive and negative aspects of this job, it was concluded: "*It was another dead end job as usual.*" Her first job on a "*semi-decent wage*" ended abruptly when her first pregnancy was discovered. The organisation seemed to see this as a conflict of interests in that although they "*covered themselves*" (with regards risk assessment and medical checks. Unfairly, all of Martha's training immediately stopped, never to re-start. She was granted a part-time contract on her return from maternity leave. After the designated trial period of these part-time hours, the organisation surprised her with a well prepared formal presentation:

*But the way they approached it was, when I came back for a meeting, about how my trial had gone, which included graphs things that proved how they needed full-time. So instead of seeing how it could work, someone you know working full-time or from home, they were more interested in proving the case that you had to be there full-time.*

This could have been perceived as grossly unfair as it was supposedly an 'informal' discussion regarding how her part-time working trial had worked. Martha following a well-trodden path, appeared to have simply walked away rather than fight the unfairness. This seems to be incongruous with her strong theme of conflict. However, if faced with

unfairness, Martha accepted it, used it to reinforce her negativity and moved away. This response to her return from maternity leave, despite the job representing the pinnacle of her paid employment, illustrates her reaction to conflict perfectly.

The next stage of her working life was as a self employed childminder. Her narrative here placed 'maternity leave' and her management of children in central focus. Her conflicting roles of her voluntary work and her new mother role were reflected on. For example, when on committees, rather than fully delegate or share the workload, she described her negative coping skills in trying to fit it all her roles in. Whilst acting as a treasurer:

*I was up until about 6[am] the day they [the books] were due in. But you know I had a small baby. What was I doing? I was being stupid, yeah.*

### Theme 3: Resolution through motherhood - and redemption

Before children, resolution was sought through attempts at regaining control, albeit at times misguided and short-lived. This pattern was common after a negative outcome. Martha's herself admitted her story illustrates a lack of planning and it is the resolution and action *after* an event, which this theme captured. There was never any forward planning until the reference to it during her fourth maternity leave.

Chronologically, in order to regain some control after her unhappy secondary school experiences perhaps, Marsha took a part-time job in her first retail shop. This represented a failed attempt to resolve her conflict between the need to earn money and maintain her independence and her college course, which she said she began to enjoy. This job was short-lived and after another short-term job. She used the word 'eventually' nine times in the interview capturing how drawn out her working life journey is perceived to be. The next two jobs demonstrated a naturally ability to resolve other people's problems, for example in her college job, although she played this down (another link to theme 2):

*it was just common sense to eliminate it, trouble shoot; bit by bit. If it wasn't one thing, it must be this and you try and go through and eventually I tended to manage to fix thing better than other folk.*

However, she remained the lowest paid employee with no perceived career prospects. Again, she resolved the conflict here by leaving and started again, looking for another job. She played down her success of this resolution to her working life: *"I could talk my way to places, which is not always a good thing."* Whilst she *"wouldn't put any of her children back"*

Martha believed strongly she had learned a lot from her experiences and gave many examples of how she had learned to manage children. She spoke enthusiastically about the skills learned, applied and adapted to suit committee work. Furthermore, skills, such as time-management are transferred to other spheres of life:

*I've been too busy in the past.....I can't go back and do it anymore Basia, I can't do the rushing around anymore and I won't go back."*

She believes that she had learned lessons from mistakes that are common to working mothers:

*Mums can do all sorts of multi-tasking but hello, it's stupid....I'm not going to prove how fantastically organised I am....there's no merit to it.*

And her obvious passion for this newly found control and self management is aptly summarised: "I'll be that ex smoker type that's holier than thou." She offered support for this new redemption: "I didn't rush this morning" and credited her husband for this:

*He's a rock. He's much more down to earth and sees things just as they are and he'll tell you things and first he'll be a little bit offended because you think you're smart git, but then, you get over that and you think, no, you've been right all along. Paul's one smart chap..... I can learn, erm what I'm good at doing is learning. So I've now learned things that he already knew, so that's something, that's, that's a plus.*

This quote was especially useful as it demonstrated her on-going uncomfortable relationship with agency, not able in this instance to take credit fully for what she has achieved – giving credit for her new conflict reduction strategy to her husband. It also demonstrated her natural leaning towards negativity and conflict. The themes of negativity and conflict are however, turned round as she acknowledged her new found strategy as a "plus", to become the "wise old bird."

### **6.3.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Martha's story:**

Three themes were identified:

- Agency – largely lack of it at first then slowly gaining control but never completely acknowledging she had complete agency;

- Negativity, fairness and conflict - conflict begins at school and then surfaced throughout her working life . Her story was punctuated with the theme of unfairness in the world of paid employment;
- Resolution through motherhood - and redemption – she had minor victories throughout her paid life but did not regain control properly until she employed a strategy of reducing conflict in motherhood. This increased her sense of agency.

Martha herself identified the common theme of ‘lack of control’ in her story and reflected on this frequently as she recalled many events (PINS) with little or no prompting. In this sense, although the interview was long, her openness helped cluster narrative themes she, perhaps unusually, herself often identified as she told her story.

The conflict theme overlapped with the agency theme in the first half of the interview. Conflict was brought on by her behaviour and choices, for example, school rebellion. Then as the interview progressed the lack of control dissolved into or, at least began to overlap with the resolution theme. This was most notable in her current pregnancy story. In other words, it was as though her recognition of conflict triggered her into action to resolve the perceived problems. Although the conflict and control themes were often side-by-side, the conflict came from different directions (change of school; peer group at work; relationship choices) and these did not correspond with the common lack of agency her reflection portrayed. Martha’s story explicitly linked the lack of agency to pregnancy and her house move. The themes were therefore clearly identifiable and followed a recurring pattern in her story of her working life:

- Conflict plus lack of control leads to short term solutions (education and first work experiences)
- Conflict plus some control leads to longer term resolution (later work experiences and relationship with partner)
- Active avoidance of conflict and future planning leads to current state (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> maternity leave experiences).

Martha was clear in her resolution that her fourth pregnancy was to be the final one. For her, this marked the end of her protracted maternity leaves stage of her life. With the lessons learned from paid and unpaid work; Martha seemed set to start a new transition point in her working life story. She offered an analogy in describing herself as *“this wise old bird”*, who recommended having children: *“Certainly did me the word of good”*; a final coda with which



she ended the interview. The story clearly points to maternity leave as being the trigger for Martha's self-development and preparation, in her eyes for a path to more successful paid employment.

#### **6.3.4 Martha: reflexive comments – excerpts from diary**

*I left Martha's house with a sense of satisfaction – happy for Martha and happy with the way in which the interview had progressed. Her sense of well-being was infectious. I could relate to a rebellious childhood but not with the idea of four children, all so young! I recall during the interview being a little disappointed that she had such difficulty recalling PINS as requested. Are PINS really that important? Wengraf believed so yet Martha's failure to recall specific events was a source of discomfort to both of us. I had empathy with her plight to simplify things. She seemed to be so much calmer than Tina, yet seemingly had far more demands on her time in the home.*

*I learned this time to keep the tape running and was glad I did so as it captured her belief that it was her husband was so intrinsically associated with her new strategy. She too, has a blurry version of maternity leave – clearly not the same definition that employers use! She has no clear idea of when she is returning to paid work or to what kind of paid work but still considers herself as on maternity leave. Is this more common with the advent of contract work, portfolio careers etc.?*

#### **6.4 Case Study 3: Sasha – determined to do....?**

Sasha trained as a nurse and had taken additional qualifications to develop her specialism. Her training enabled her to enter the private sector and up to her marriage this involved much travel.

Her role has turned into an advisory one since the birth of her first child. At the time of her interview, she was reaching the end of her maternity leave after her second child. The interview took place in Sasha's house. Her two children were with her. The interview started with a run through the consent form and request for a pseudonym.

### 6.4.1 Summary of Sasha's lived and told story.

Table 6: Sasha - summary of lived story and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Age 38 at T1</p> <p>Age 13yrs (part-time) in local Co-op</p> <p>Failed application for Art College</p> <p>Successfully applies for nursing</p> <p>Domestic in local hospital</p> <p>Takes post of auxiliary nurse for one year before nurse training</p> <p>Oct 1990: nurse training starts</p> <p>Post-training difficulty in finding job. Leaves local area but soon returns.</p> <p>Uses time-off to work one day a week to gain experience in specialist branch.</p> <p>Offers deal to rival company: train me.</p> <p>1997 completes specialist training.</p> <p>Changes company; travels with work.</p> <p>2004: marries and changes to 'ad-hoc pattern'</p> <p>2004: changes company</p> <p>2006: No policy on pregnancy for travelling workers. Stops working abroad. Miscarries.</p> <p>2007: first child</p> <p>2008: Five months maternity leave. Now advisor from home</p> <p>2009: has second child.</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Goal-driven determination</u></p> <p>Art college: <i>"that was my only thing I ever wanted to do from school"</i></p> <p>Rejection led to: <i>"I never picked up a pen or pencil or anything again"</i></p> <p>Training negotiations: <i>"I said so here's the deal..."</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: Lack of Goals and determination</u></p> <p><i>"I haven't been in touch with them because (laughs) half of me doesn't want to know..."</i></p> <p><i>"but I'm not ready to give it up, all of it, cause I seem to, I've worked quite hard to get to the position I'm in now...."</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: External drivers/influences and triggers.</u></p> <p>Specialist training idea by chance: <i>"he planted the seed...would never have crossed my mind"</i></p> <p>Belief in fate: <i>"I often think there's a path laid out for you, it just depends which route you take at the time"</i></p> <p>Wedding plans triggers: <i>"we had to plan to get married around a time when we actually had time off together"</i></p> <p><u>Theme 3: Values of variety, independence and financial security</u></p> <p>New role: <i>"but it was busy, quick, quick"</i></p> <p>Pre-marriage: <i>"I was independent, I had my own things"</i></p>
<p>Overall theme of motherhood being a difficult time of change due to lack of new goal formation:</p> <p><i>"Oh god, what am I gonna do, what am I gonna do now?"</i></p>	

## 6.4.2 Narrative themes from Sasha's told story

### Theme 1: Goal-driven Determination

This theme was by far the strongest one, which was very much in evidence in her working life until Sasha took her first maternity leave. Thereafter a distinct transition is noted in her narrative theme, in fact a change in direction into the theme: lack of goals and direction.

Sasha's strong minded determination and perseverance started early in her life, for example, she kept a job at her a local shop from the age of 13 until she left school. Her long-term plan of going to Art College ended abruptly with a rejection letter or call, which she took badly:

*I didn't have a clue, I just, I was, I was in a state of shock because I didn't know what on earth was I going to do, it was so frustrating, Everything on this...I was just devastated.*

This shock at her forced change of goals was a story was returned to on a number of occasions throughout both interviews and she described the change as "a milestone." Her next goal was to train as a nurse. Since she missed a student intake, she had to wait over a year to get onto her course of choice, rather than opt for an alternative nursing qualification route. Her determination helped her persevere with a strict and disciplined training regime, which unfortunately ended in a lack of available jobs once she achieved her qualification. Before she began her nurse training, she did receive notification of a place at Art College but Sasha had made up her mind and never looked back to her long held goal:

*I never looked at my [art] work, I never picked up a pen or a pencil or anything, I just lost, I lost complete, I'd I'd been so disheartened.*

The next goal Sasha identified was to become a trained specialist. This, she was led to believe required four years post-qualification experience involving extensive travelling before she could achieve a high salaried role. Sasha characteristically set about achieving this goal. Illustrating her goal-driven determination very well, when a shortage of available work almost derailed her plan, Sasha simply devised a different strategy to reach her goal. She negotiated a deal with her company's rivals to pay for her training in return for securing her services post-qualification. This was both bold and unique but worked:

*OK, erm, guarantee me a job at the end of it, and I'll pay out of the wages that I get from that job, I'll pay you back, you know and they were like, oh, we've never, never*

*heard of that before, and I said, look it pleases both of us, it means I get a job doing what I'm wanting to do you're getting a trained specialist, so they said, yeah...*

It is perhaps not surprising that the boss she described in very favourable terms appeared to be similarly goal-driven for example, by returning to work just six weeks after the birth of her son:

*and she's erm, old school brilliant, just absolutely, you know, she really is, you know a super, super person, erm and she, when I fell pregnant, she said to me, you know, erm I was back at work [laughs] after six weeks or something, you know, after she had her boys, you know back in the dark ages.*

On achieving her end goal and honouring her agreement, Sasha stayed put for nine years until she started to plan a family. This too, was marked with characteristic determination and although she cited wanting to spend time with her husband, the move to consultancy work to fit in around his rota ties in with this theme. Sasha did not go into any detail about her miscarriage – it can be assumed therefore that it was either a trigger for the work pattern change or reinforcement for the decision to work less - and this leads onto the theme three.

#### Theme 2: Lack of goals, direction and irresolution

Sasha's lack of role model after the birth of her second child, conflicting influences and possibly lack of triggers in home life all appeared to contribute to a lack of longer term goals. The theme is dominant in her story from the onset of her motherhood and clearly contrasts with theme 1. She was most distressed about whether or not to 'end' her second maternity leave. The following section clearly demonstrates her conflict and irresolution:

*but, you know there's, there's always a part of you there thinks that you know it would just be really nice to you know, to do er to be contributing in a full-time [baby cries] ....you know, but, you know, and I mean it's not as though I haven't er, you know I've almost had my whole career, and you know, now, by giving my time to them, erm and just doing a little bit but I just, I'm not ready to give it all up [laughs] you know, all of it, cause I seem to, I've worked quite hard to, you know, to get to the position I'm in now, you know [baby toy noise] so, I'm not, I'm not ready to give it all up yet.....and then there's the opportunities when they go back to school to do other things, and.....and, and also to, although I could never go back into a hospital setting cause I've been out of it for too long, erm I do like clinical hands on side, so perhaps school nursing, or you know, or something that is community based, but I've got a*

*friend who's a health visitor, and she's quite high up, erm, and you know she always fuels my excitement for that again, from somebody speaking to somebody, almost gets you thinking, you know be great to get back into it, and er....*

The segment also captures the style of story-telling Sasha leant towards – a stream of consciousness, which came out very quickly, needed little input and jumped from idea to idea demonstrating her conflicted style of thinking.

On her return from her first maternity leave, she discovered they managed without her:

*I wanted to see what kinda carnage there was going to be, but when I actually got back I realised that they had managed to cope very well without me, and that sort of upsets you a bit, in the way that [laughs], you, you know, you think that in your life that you are indispensable.*

Later she described how she did everything that was required, from additional training to responding to work demands at short notice, a 'girl Friday' after her first maternity leave. This work style did not offer her the security of an identity over and above motherhood she seemed to crave. Her irresolution was bound up in the fact that she values a paid work/professional identity:

*I'm a mum, not that I don't want to be, of course I wanted to be, but I, it's just nice to be able to say I work for a company called [name of organisation] I still work for them.*

This conflict was marked by an active avoidance of going into work during her second maternity leave and a heavily emphasised explanation of how she chose not to take on a full-time job offered to her and emphasis on how now:

*and like I say, now there are four people doing what I originally did because it grew arms and legs, the job, but, it's not that she didn't offer me it, she did but I mean, I, I didn't want to go and do full-time.*

Without a set goal, Sasha was clearly lost:

*I applied for a job erm, something to do with er.....it was weights and measure folk, but it was you know, carrying beasts in lorries.*

Not having a goal therefore is contributed to a destabilising time for Sasha. She was trying to throw herself into the mother role: “so we go out and we do two’s group and we do this group and that group...” but admits:

*I’m here with the two of them er, I would my go off my head, if I didn’t, I had to be in the how more than two days solid with them, just you know, so you’ve got to get out...*

At the end of the interview, I offered an explanation for the interview technique used and she suggested that the analysis will conclude that she is “certifiable”. Did this suggest that she is aware of her irresolution? Sasha tried to put a positive explanation of it suggesting that the interview “fuels her excitement” again, as talking to fellow professionals has done in the past.

### Theme 3: External drivers/influence and triggers

Despite her dogged determination and perseverance, her story suggests she rarely instigated the major changes in her working life. This is seen first, when she is rejected in her application to college. A matron who she works with suggests nurse training and a patient tells her about the work in a specialist area. Each trigger leads to a complete, whole-hearted, unwavering change of direction:

*Well, I’d, he’d just, he sort of planted the seed, cause, I, I didn’t, that was something that would never have crossed my mind, I loved cardiology but...*

Even minor changes whilst clearly on a path to her goal were triggered by external events, which she makes the most of. One nursing post gave unexpected time off, which she used to get her foot in the door:

*you got an extra half, it was almost like an extra half day off a week, so you, you worked longer days and you got more time of, so I used to use one of my days off to work at [name of organisation] to cover in the unit there.”*

After her first maternity leave, when there was no longer a clear goal to strive for, she referred to a number of topics, which in fact, perhaps sway and accentuate her state of irresolution (theme 2). These included her readiness to move abroad should her husband be successful:

*Cause if he wants to go abroad, then obviously we would go and do what he wanted to do, you know, not, just for him for us as well as it would be an experience.*

This is a very different approach to her pre-marriage goal-driven behaviour where nothing would detract her from her paid career. Less conspicuous and attracting less focus was Sasha's influence of her perception of her importance of her role as a mother:

*although I feel it's best for the girls, you know, and I know that, I know that there couldn't be anybody look after them better than me.*

This part of the story conflicted with her desire to return to work and again adds to her sense of conflict as she wanted to stay at home and she wants to work as she values variety.

Finally, another contributing variable to this theme is the sector in which she works, where there were no visible role models of women who take maternity leave and continue in the post:

*because, I'd been in a male-dominated environment, and I've never worked with pregnant women, because nobody I've ever worked with has ever been pregnant, because that's just, you know, people away don't, and I've never actually worked with anybody who had to leave because they were pregnant."*

This was further supported with a story about a pregnant colleague who she heard was paid as though travelling as there was no organisational policy or organisational norms for managing pregnant staff. Sasha inferred this was not unique to the organisation she worked for:

*I didn't work for them at the time, and erm, and asked if they had you know, any information, and er, it turned out company didn't have a clue.*

At the time of her interview, an unwelcome trigger had appeared - a letter which was forcing the issue of whether or not she would return to work. On asking whether she had made a decision yet, she replied: *"I haven't... you see, that's the thing, I don't know what I'm going to do now."* Without a clear goal, Sasha was in an unhappy limbo of role conflict. As a result, she was accepting work whilst on maternity leave to do odd days to help out when crisis hit the organisation. The reason for doing so is explained in the next theme.



#### Theme 4: Importance of variety, independence and financial security

This theme, unlike the other three was constant and did not transform at the start of Sasha's motherhood. Sasha's love of variety and being busy was explicitly referred to several times throughout her story; and if anything, the references intensified and seemed to mediate in her story of conflict between her wish to return to work and her wish to be a full-time mother. Her description of her nurse training reiterated a common love of variety and lack of money:

*I loved the hands on stuff in the hospital if you like, that was the stuff I really did like but the money, you don't do it for the money cause it's rubbish...*

The variety was again referred to as a positive feature of her first role within the sector she was striving for: "it was the most busy, quick, quick, quick...you went in and before you know it, it was time to go home." The need for financial independence featured strongly, perhaps because she suffered on very low student nurse wages:

*I wanted to be, to be able to be ....self-sufficient, erm and not to be relying on anybody, so you know, that was my, erm, I mean I used to struggle on my wages from the hospital.*

This contrasted strongly with her immediate doubling of wages on qualifying as a travelling trained specialist: "I was independent of, you know, I had all my own things" and later "I had lovely stuff, lovely house, you know, all paid for" which contrasted sharply with her version of poverty: "I also know the other side of it where, you know [laughs] you're down to your few thousand in the bank."

There was only one reference to a failed attempt at variety through academic study and it was here, that she explicitly pointed to this potentially being an example of an 'ideal situation':

*I'm in an ideal situation: I can, I've got money to pay for it, and I've got the time to be able to put to it.*

Her description of maternity leave referred to all three elements of the theme. It is noted that she has no paid work but her time was filled with childcare and domestic tasks, which she did not describe in glowingly positive terms as she did when she was busy at work:

*by the time I sit down at like eight o'clock at night you know, I never have time to do anything. So you know, it's just constant, you know, and er, it's was my own fault, cause we're full up with stuff but it's nice for Cathy to have things.....[referring to toddler groups]...especially when John's away"*

The financial security that she gained through hard work and perseverance prior to marriage was (presumably) still there. In theory, she had financial independence but a perceived lack of variety in her day. This seemed also to increase her irresolution regarding returning to work and is perhaps compounded by a lack of goal to strive for, beyond motherhood. Notably, as much as she obviously loves her children, her story clearly described how she missed work and said of talking about work with me: *"it gives you another, erm, you know, another kinda, like a bit of excitement for doing something, where it's not just children."*

#### **6.4.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Sasha's story:**

Sasha's story was one of determination and success in achieving end goals. Furthermore, her strongly held values of independence, financial security and variety are values the organisation appears to have tapped into successfully up until her first maternity leave. Although somewhat incongruous, her past goals were triggered by external events. Her second maternity leave in particular, is correlated with a loss of goal formulation. Her story suggested this was in part due to conflicting values brought on by maternity leave and motherhood, more or less managed at the time of her first maternity leave. This conflict was further reinforced by the organisation at the time of her second maternity leave. (Would better communication regarding her post maternity leave prospects with her organisation helped?) The story Sasha told reflected a lack of outside guidance, which had it been offered may have brought forward her decision-making. This would have offered the trigger that Sasha seemed to need to make a decision – and characteristically perhaps, she would stick to it. At the time of the interview, as her second maternity leave period ends, she was increasingly distressed about her lack of plan.

#### **6.4.4 Sasha: reflective comments – excerpt from diary entry.**

*I feel dissatisfied! \* Sasha was very, very chatty and was able to tell a story that went on and on – and on. And didn't seem to stop for breath! It was very difficult to get, what I felt was a 'true' answer. On the surface, she seemed to be answering the question but I felt there was much hidden beneath her cheery, almost professional level. I didn't feel she 'clicked' with me. She welled up when she started talking about more children but didn't stop to explain why and motored onto the next point not wishing me to ask either.*

*She had a pierced tongue, yet offered no suggestion of anything other than a very conventional life style and life choices – all the way down to her very controlled and pristine new build house on a new estate.*

*After the interview she seemed to loosen up a little and talked honestly about her beliefs about the difference between men and women. What did I miss? Why was I unable to tap in? Was I feeling this way because of something she was hiding or uncomfortable with, or was it a reflection of poor interview skills. I'm keen to conduct a kick-start panel to help separate out my impressions and feelings from the words she spoke.*

\* See also chapter 9.

## **6.5 Case Study 4: Connie – competitive pragmatism and stoicism**

Connie's background is in the equine industry, which led to numerous posts involving stable management and horse-riding lessons. She had moved into the retail industry where she has reverted back to sales rather than a management post due to her husband's re-location. She was currently on maternity leave with her second child.

### 6.5.1 Summary of Connie's Lived and Told Story.

Table 7 Connie - summary of lived story and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Completes Equine Studies course</p> <p>Age 18: 1<sup>st</sup> job in event yard; stays 1 year.</p> <p>Age 19: 2<sup>nd</sup> job at riding school. Met boyfriend; stays 1 year</p> <p>Age 20: Moved with boyfriend; took hotel work (3<sup>rd</sup> job)</p> <p>Changes job to work with horses, forced to leave (4<sup>th</sup> job)</p> <p>Trained as forklift driver and took job in factory (5<sup>th</sup> job).</p> <p>Relationship with partner ended.</p> <p>Met husband, moves and takes job in a hunt yard (6<sup>th</sup> job)</p> <p>Yards-person uses forklift licence, (7<sup>th</sup> job). Stays 2 years.</p> <p>Equine sales advisor, promoted. (8<sup>th</sup> job) Stays 2 years.</p> <p>Country store manager. Stays for 5 years. Gets married.(9<sup>th</sup> job)</p> <p>Moved with husband's work; job in sales. (10<sup>th</sup> job)</p> <p>2006: pregnant with 1<sup>st</sup> child.</p> <p>Turns down promotion.</p> <p>Nine months maternity leave ends; returns part-time.</p> <p>Feb 2007: 1 week back and discovers pregnancy with 2nd child</p> <p>June 2007: Sick leave from end of second trimester; baby is premature.</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Fluidity and flexibility of employment</u></p> <p>10 jobs</p> <p>Pragmatic and stoic despite circumstances</p> <p>Only situation which shook her was her first pregnancy:</p> <p><i>"I took the test about fifty thousand times in the space of twenty four hours."</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: Support at critical times (when stoicism isn't enough)</u></p> <p>Father, boyfriend, work colleague and aunt all described as helping out at extreme times (although not described as such)</p> <p><i>"they sit in the corner and have a chinwag and that's about it, it's like their contribution to the group"</i></p> <p><u>Theme 3: Fairness and competitiveness</u></p> <p>Shop sales: <i>"I like a bit of a challenge"</i></p> <p>Unfair employers: <i>"and I thought 'Bye'"</i></p> <p>Turns down management post: <i>"You've got to be dedicated to your job to drive it"</i></p> <p><i>"I'm quite competitive"</i></p>

Mother moves to help with childcare.  Chair of local toddler group; it grows fivefold.	
Overall theme of development following of a philosophy in life summarised with the following quote:  <i>“you can’t object to anybody wanting to get on with their life and expanding families...it’s all part of life. You just get on with and deal with it”</i>	

## 6.5.2 Narrative Themes for Connie's told story

### Theme 1: Fluidity and flexibility of employment

Connie's early work experiences, in fact covering the time from the completion of her qualification through to her current post, were marked by constant change in employment, location and circumstances. It is only the factual change of work roles that Connie described yet moving across the country must have had repercussions on her social life and any family links. The pace of change had slowed down as witnessed by the length of time she has been in her last but one job (her 9<sup>th</sup>) which she was in for five years. The fact that Connie chose to detail in the correct order each individual job reflected her matter-of-fact approach to life. There appeared to be no one reason for the moves – and there was no self-pity at any stage. The first part of the interview Connie gave a story devoid of detail or digression. The story did contain some humour:

*And then I got back to work and as soon as I got back to work I told them I was .. pregnant so that was a bit of an **oops!***

The fluid nature of her working life was marked by no less than 10 different jobs, each of the first seven lasting a year or less. There were a couple of moves due to partner relocations/relationship break-up; another due to an alcoholic boss who “*wasn't safe to be working with*”. There were employers who treated her “*quite badly*”. Another job ended on return of an original post-holder from his sick leave. It may be that her vocational choice of work with horses was associated with both frequency of moves and poor working conditions. Where work with horses was not an option, she trained as a fork lift driver. At one point, her partner's job meant they lived:

*in the middle of nowhere' ..... He was a dry stone-waller so I just sort of got whatever job was available hotel work anything like that.*

No evaluation of her experience was ever offered. Connie's frequent work changes cannot be attributed to collecting experience so as to develop the foundations for a 'career' either. She explained:

*I wasn't very much a career hunter when I was working with horses cos usually in the equine world you are just more like a 'gopher' really.*

Notably, the choice of her words suggested that this stream of jobs was one phase of her life, which is offered in her story as a different phase to her retail role life. Her story underlined a flexibility and ability in adapting her skills. Her one management level post, which she kept for five years, seemed to represent the first elements of stability in her working life. Yet despite her obvious love of the job, she made no reference to any regret of leaving it – which was necessary due to her husband's work. Her ability to be pragmatic and flexible is therefore clearly established. Once settled into the retail work however, she made explicit reference to flexibility for the first time and offered it as a highly prized value she recognised in her employers. For example, when she announced and describes her organisation's reaction to her first pregnancy she said:

*there was no "get rid of you" type attitude they were very flexible you have the baby they got presents for me and everything and then erm..... went back to work and they were so flexible.*

The emphasis on the staff being 'so' flexible, suggested this was not the reaction her previous work experiences had prepared her for. Her move back to Scotland, back to a 'just' a sales person after managing a country store a step down the career ladder was described from a positive perspective: *"It suited me, less stress just to be to go to work not have the hassles or anything like that."* This ability to accommodate whatever was thrown at her was tested to its limits when she discovered she was pregnant and perhaps, explained her very negative reaction: *"I cried for about two hours"*. This interpretation is robustly supported with her comment: *"I was a bit shell shocked, I think that cos you know your life's going to change completely"*. The story is the longest one – bar the alcoholic horse-keeper – and some detail was offered about how her work colleague helped her through the pregnancy test. Whilst she spent years being flexible adapting and adapting to her fluid working life or moving to better ones, her impending motherhood was perceived at first as an insurmountable challenge to her flexibility: *"I was actually petrified of the whole being a mother, having kids, the whole package so erm..."* Her story quickly returned to the positive interpretation describing the reaction to her first pregnancy. Here she reflected this same flexibility in her goal to find suitable childcare for her first child:

*Basically I went to nursery and said right this is the hours I've got to work what places have you got so I was flexible with nursery so they gave me what was available.*

This led to a "win-win" situation:



*They [her employers] were so flexible cos of problems with the nurseries.....so I was flexible with the nurseries.....so work let me work the hours I could flex around the nursery at the time...*

With the surprise second pregnancy a week after she returned from maternity leave, her employer was “fairly flexible”. Her flexibility had down-sides, for example, it left her in a role in the organisation, where she did not feel entirely comfortable: “cos I’m an outdoor girl, I feel like a wing, eh, a chicken that’d had its wings cut off...” The choice of animal was interesting: a chicken is a practical bird, females kept for their useful eggs (or meat). There was an option of a bird of prey or a grander bird but she naturally opted for a plain, efficient chicken. She comes across as philosophical and similarly pragmatic about her return to work, having put it into context of her fixed for the first time, longer term plans.

#### Theme 2: Support at critical times (when stoicism is not enough)

Despite Connie’s flexibility and pragmatic style, reliance on someone else at times of difficulty was a recurring pattern in her story. She was effectively rescued once by her father and once by her husband – both times from unreasonable employers. Her pragmatism and ability to remain unruffled were described as being congruent with the support she has received at difficult times. For example, Connie told the story of when she was signed off work sick due to concussion after trying unsuccessfully to continue working after an accident with a horse. Her employer “had a bit of a paddy fit over it” and Connie’s reaction was:

*so I thought this job’s not for me.... and I thought ‘Bye’ coz my husband by then my husband who was my boyfriend at the time I went and stayed with him with his family in his family home just to get away so yeah [chuckle]*

When her marriage went through a difficult patch, it was her aunt who stepped in. When she was shocked by the possibility of a pregnancy, it was her friend at work who guided her through the pregnancy test. The story did not refer to any moral support offered by the friend, just the facts that she was an experienced mum and she persuaded Connie to take the test.

The final example of support in Connie’s story came from her mum, who along with a friend, had offered to help out with childcare for the time Connie planned to return to work.

On her second maternity leave, at the time of the interview, for the first time, we see that it was Connie who was offering support to those in the community. For example, she referred to being a chair of a toddler group. It could also be argued that her community role

offered psychological support for her on-going development of skills and self-confidence. On the back of the experience of this community work, Connie explained that she was planning ahead through some (flexible) home-study courses and then have a third child. These qualifications, she surmised will help her move towards a new career:

*Erm ten years time I mean I imagine that I'll probably be working with children cos I've actually doing this toddler thing I've surprised myself how much I enjoy it but then again I used to teach kids when I was working in yards because riding lessons ...*

The theme of receiving support, although not a strong one, was in Connie's story a consistent one, punctuating a happy end to difficult episodes of her story. Importantly, the theme was one, which she turned round at the time of her second maternity leave. It was also during maternity leave, that she reflected on the support that others get, in this instance the mothers from the toddler group: "*they sit in the corner and have a chinwag and that's about it, it's like their contribution to the group.*" This reflection went on to provide a link to the drive that perhaps created competitiveness, the next theme: "*but I'm a bit more, I want to get something out of it..... I'm a bit of a - I like a challenge*".

### Theme 3: Fairness and competitiveness

This rather difficult to define theme emerged quite strongly. It was difficult because fairness was never referred to explicitly by Connie; competitiveness was commented on. The 'told story' however, captured Connie's concept of fairness in a number of instances. Where she was at the receiving end of unfairness, she told the story in a factual concise way (for example unfair employers). The story of how she was left alone and without food on New Year's Eve in a caravan, only to be offered leftover scrap of her employer's New Year party on New Year's Day left her thinking: "*This is not on, so I got a bit upset*". She moved swiftly on to say that her father took her away offering the support at a critical time. Relaxed, she continued the story:

*And then I got another job a week later at another yard up the road and I stayed there for well over a year or so.*

In the second interview, where probing was possible, she offered the reason for not staying with an alcoholic boss as reasons of safety, again offering an extreme example of having to work even though she suffered concussion and tried to continue with her work until a doctor intervened. Even with probing she did not add colour to her story of her perception of this gross unfairness or her work decisions, instead adding colour to the context:

*Well, she'd erm, come down and try and help me on the yard and it's ...be in the morning.....but she wasn't no help and she'd still be absolutely kayleied<sup>6</sup> from the night before. She um, an older woman she was in her fifties, sixties and a lot of money her husband had died about two years previously due to his liver failing due to his drinking problems .*

When she defended fairness or was at the receiving end of fairness, her story was more colourful and included occasional detail. For example, when she returned to work only to discover she was pregnant again a week later, she described this: "as a bit of a 'oops". The evaluative coda reflecting fairness was one, which she applied when negative emotion would have been expected. For example, she trained as a fork lift driver when there was no other work available. The following extract illustrates this stoicism and fairness, despite the fact that the outcome must have been disappointment:

*I worked there for over two years, I loved it. Erm and then the guy, I was actually covering someone on sick leave on that job, the guy came back to work so there wasn't really a job there for me so I went into retail.*

At the time of her first pregnancy, she explained the positive reaction of her co-workers as due to: "I'd been there for over a year I think, we'd built up a good relationship." This could be interpreted as a fair response from colleagues and the interpretation was reinforced with her reference to her discussion with her boss, which tells as she as scenario where she gained the upper hand, albeit in jest. Despite only having returned for one week, she says about the announcement of her second pregnancy: "I felt I should tell that I was pregnant" and although she offered the health and safety reasons, she went on to say: "they were just okay, it's an inconvenience sometimes but you know they weren't ever funny with it so it was fine". Connie clearly did not expect 'fairness' perhaps as a result of previous employers' unfairness. The second part of the theme first emerged when she stopped working with horses and joined the retail industry.

*I actually did better than the bigger stores.....which rattled a few cages [laughing] in the company cos obviously it proved that if you were willing to do the work it could be done.*

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<sup>6</sup> kayleied meaning drunk

This was the first hint of the competitiveness aspect of the theme but cannot be linked to a career driven value as she turned down promotion after her first maternity leave: “*You’ve got to be in it or not.*” This competitiveness surfaced again, much more explicitly in her role as Chair of the toddler group:

*I like to drive.....and I’m quite competitive so I’ll wait and see how well our play-group do it this time and I’ll make sure I’ll do it better next time.*

Her values of fairness at the time of her second maternity leave extended to her work-family balance demonstrated when probed about her willingness to offer additional hours over and beyond that permitted within her maternity leave. She inferred it was only fair: “*cos an extra pair of hands at stocktaking and extra pennies as well*” but this would not extend to longer periods: “*because that’s why I only work part-time anyway cos I don’t want to be missing out on the children.*” So whilst competitive and willing to strive to be the best Chair of the toddler group, there was no hint of conflict – the children come first.

### **6.5.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Connie’s story**

Work transitions were a frequent feature of her working life history and regular job changes only stopped when she left the equine industry. Connie’s first maternity leave was a big transition time both emotionally and with regards her employment pattern. Her story seems to suggest a more important transition however, at the time of this second maternity leave, when her previous experiences and skills seemed to have come together. Her story illustrates a woman who has an ability to be pragmatic, flexible and fair. She was unruffled by circumstances, for example the need to find new work in new locations across the length and breadth of the UK. These skills, coupled with a strong drive to succeed, she appears to be revelling in her new role as Chair of a local toddler group. This had allowed her to make huge strides in developing community based support for other mothers and given her a new goal of setting up her own playgroup. First, she planned to obtain some relevant qualifications. It is clear that this option came as a result of her second maternity leave, specifically her unpaid work in the community had given her the opportunity to contemplate her next steps in her working life trajectory, leading to an exploration of home study options. Since her story emphasised support, the ability to extend this value to help other mothers seems a well-suited goal. The following quote sums up all Connie’s story of her working life and where she, now on her second maternity leave, positions motherhood well:

*You can't object to anybody wanting to get on with their life and expanding families...it's all part of life. You just get on with and deal with it.*

#### **6.5.4 Connie: reflective comment – excerpt from diary entry**

*Connie was another interviewee who spoke very fast but in contrast to Sasha, was much more direct and forthright. She struck me as being a typical down-to-earth 'horsey woman'. There was a 'no frills' stoic approach to life, reflected in the way her summary of her working life rarely included unnecessary detail. She was reticent to give personal accounts of experiences and I had to work hard to get PINS. I was surprised at just how competitive she was, I hadn't anticipated that coming. The competitiveness transpired to develop into a thread through the rest of the interview. Despite the brevity of the interview, I felt she didn't hold back from her working life history. I was however, frustrated by Wengraf's (2007) recommendation that the interview did not return to a point in the story once it had passed by, to retain the original structure of the told story. This left me unable to go back and explore points made, which I felt were relevant. Together with the micro-analysis and various strategies to categorise PINS, reports etc. I am beginning to really doubt the value of some of the BNIM approach in terms of interview strategy - as well as analysis, although the unstructured story with the opening question is proving very informative.*

*I was interested in her reference to the unpaid community work. Her first maternity leave seemed to be a major transition point for her and now at the stage of her second maternity leave, she seems to have changed tack again. She seems settled and confident about where she is heading and how to get there. In this respect, she told her story in a way which supports the lived story details: she seems to be in a much better place than the three previous interviewees.*

*Despite it being one of the shortest interviews to date, I felt this reflected the story telling style of Connie, rather than being a negative aspect of the interview or the richness of the data. It was an 'efficient' interview, where the outcome reflected the interviewee's efficient 'style'. Interesting, the disorganised albeit informative rambling story telling style of Sasha left me feeling the same way – disorganised but informed. Martha's laid back attitude left me feeling relaxed and content with the interview and Tina's tense controlled style left me similarly tense and as unhappy as she was, although this unhappiness wasn't surfaced until the very end of the session. This could probably link into psychodynamic notions of transference and counter-transference – note to self: look up and include in the Reflexive Analysis.*



## **6.6 Case Study 5: Summer - beautician or people manager?**

Summer is a qualified beautician, who runs her own mobile business. She was currently on maternity leave with her second child at the time of the first interview.

The interview with Summer was difficult to organise for two reasons: firstly, she ran her own business and would often take last minute bookings making use of any time which was child-free, i.e.: when her husband was home. She felt that she needed to be child-free to be interviewed. Secondly, Summer was very nervous but willing to be interviewed. It is unclear which of the two reasons was a stronger driver for cancelling the first interview, although she explained that one of the girls did not seem well on the day. The unusual strategy of booking an appointment to double up as interview time led the interview to take place in my house. This suited Summer very well and the interview took place while she did my hair (see reflective comment below).

The interview started with a face-to-face discussion of the interview process and explanation of the consent form. It was necessary to give an overview of how research helps develop an understanding what is written in books about careers. Despite an attempt to keep this in layman's terms, Summer was very quiet at this stage. Reassurance was given that the appointment could continue without the interview. Summer said she'd be 'fine' and was keen to start on my hair.

Summer turned out to be a valuable interviewee, full of stories, examples, reflections and anecdotes.

### 6.6.1 Summary of Summer's lived and told Story.

Table 8: Summer - Summary of lived story and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Age 16: Drops out of school age 16 after a handful of CSEs.</p> <p>Age 17: Finds a job in a shop – sacked after 3 months</p> <p>Starts a YTS beautician apprenticeship, 3 months late, failing to secure a full-time place at college</p> <p>Age 19: leaves placement after 22 months to find a more suitable placement and qualifies as beautician.</p> <p>Age 19: takes over the running of a salon to cover maternity leave.</p> <p>Age 21: Gets sacked and sets up mobile beautician business.</p> <p>Age 29: meets husband</p> <p>Age 32: moves to Scotland and tries to start a family.</p> <p>Age 36: Success with IVF treatment; has first child.</p> <p>Age 37: returns to beautician one day a week when maternity allowance ends.</p> <p>Age 39: Has second child and currently receiving maternity allowance again. Plans to return 1-2 days a week.</p> <p>Proactive Chair of one toddler group</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Education and qualifications.</u></p> <p>Perception of narrow range of options: <i>“obviously we didn’t have the options to do all the lovely things that you do when you do O’levels”</i></p> <p>Committee work: <i>“learned how to use the computer”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: Skill development</u>            Management of change            IT Skills            Team work            Insight into different understanding of the perceptions of work.</p> <p><u>Theme 3: Coping with working life transitions with support</u>  <i>“and I thought: Oh no, what am I gonna do?!”</i>            - then developing confidence to manage and lead change:  <i>“and I just thought, I don’t want, I don’t want the committee to be like that”</i>            - through to control and active decision making:  <i>“I think you can get involved in too many things. You got to pick the right jobs and the right places to do them really.”</i>            - husband:  <i>“he’s just you know stuck in that you have to go work to pay the mortgage and pay the bills which is horrible.”</i></p>
<p>Overall theme of development of transferable skills, whilst refining focus on longer terms goals:  <i>“and then I can go back to work for a couple of days. Being as I love mine so much and I can go and buy toilet rolls instead of him.....nice five acre plot, with loads of animals and loads of polytunnels and...that would be great...”</i></p>	



## 6.6.2 Narrative Themes from Summer's told story

### Theme 1: Education and qualifications.

This theme represented large chunks of narrative. For example, Summer's narrative began with her perception of her narrow range of options: *"obviously we didn't have the options to do all the lovely things that you do when you do O'levels."* In fact, over half of Summer's part 1 response was focused on her lack of educational success and lack of qualifications. In part 2 of the interview, she returned to the topic of qualifications several times. Her poor grades meant she could not go to college full-time; her preferred choice of career was in painting and decorating – which could be attained through a formal and recognisable qualification: *"a proper like City and Guilds certificate."* The emphasis was further reinforced by the disclosure in her story that she was not expected to well academically and this was extended to her beautician work too, commenting that her parents thought or said: *"she's never going to amount to anything"*. She then told the story of how her parents: *"steamed open my results from the beautician work course and was like: [startled voice] Oh my God, she's the best results she could have possibly got!"* She said pointedly: *"I mean going to college full-time is everybody's dream innit?"*

Later the feature she chose to highlight her employer's link to qualifications: *"She'd been back to college and trained to be a hairdresser"* (Line 220) Summer emphasised the professional aspect of her work by referring to being **"qualified** beautician." She explained after your status was classified as first, second the third year improver – all part of a three year apprenticeship under the old Youth Training Scheme (YTS). It was not until Summer takes on the role of Chair in the community's toddler group, that she referred to learning again: *"but I have actually ... learned how to use the computer since that so that's probably a bit of....a blessing really."*

The support for this learning came as part of the package from a government funded scheme, possible Surestart (Summer was unsure of the details) and she explained after the interview that the scheme offered training for those involved in the committee roles and this was extended to ensure Summer could manage the role effectively.

Thereafter, Summer's formal education was not explicitly referred to again however, it was very clear that her learning continues and this is reflected in the next theme:

## Theme 2: skill development

In addition to the computer skills Summer gained through the training offered for the voluntary work on the committee, there were more subtle themes in her narrative reflecting on-going learning. Taking responsibility for choosing and ordering toys: *“making sure that everybody’s catered for an’ going round the group an saying what do you want and what don’t you want.”* This was a new responsibility; her previous work would not have involved group work and certainly her last almost twenty years as a mobile beautician did not involve any tasks involving sustained group work. It is this aspect of managing a committee, which she described as ‘a team’ that illustrates the skills the role has allowed her to develop. For example, when describing the previous committees she had observed, where there was a fixed decision-making style based on rigid dynamics and friendships:

*It’s almost clicky and you sort of tend, people tend to just stay in their, if you’re on the committee, it’s the committee that all stick together.*

From this observation, she concluded that: *“that doesn’t improve a group”*. As chair, she describes how she is keen for her committee to be different: *“and I just thought, I don’t want, I don’t want the committee to be like that.”* Her musings continued:

*You need to get out of that and just go round and speak to everybody which is what I like to do anyway.....I want it to be a more friendly and happy and it, it is.*

Her acute observation of people was evidenced in stories she told of her customers, for example, how to manage their children’s requests for haircuts the mother may not approve of: *“she just let me do whatever I wanted with them really after that – you gain people’s confidence then dunt ya”*. She puts it down to her interpersonal skills: *“I just you know got the gift of the gab and: ‘have you had a nice holiday?’ all them sort of tricks.”* The voluntary role as a Chair had however, given her the chance to develop this *“gift of the gab”* skill to be useful in a team setting. She offered an evaluative comment on the committee story, which captured both her naivety of management discourse at the same time as her insight into the fundamentals of effective managing change: *“people are really funny ain’t they” set in their ways....you just got to mix it up a bit.”* See also: Appendix 3.

## Theme 3: coping with working life transitions with support

The first transition described in Summer’s story, is the change in work direction from the one she planned in painting and decorating. Her father put his foot down and refused to let Summer proceed with her plans, fearing the worst, according to Summer, due to her position

as a female in a male-dominated profession. Clearly respecting his authority she accepted this and initially at a loss “*and I thought: Oh no, what am I gonna do?!*”. Her path into beautician work was not a planned one as she described how she “*just followed her friends*”. The lack of planning seemed to backfire as her grades were not high enough. After a short stint in “*the job from hell*”, another transition this time into a role, which started her onto the path into profession. This one was supported by a fortuitous ‘work sample’ recruitment strategy, on a friend’s mum, a previous, regular customer. The transitions to work for different employers are marked by her “*loving it*” or working for someone who was “*a complete and utter cow*”. The “*cow*” Summer said “*sacked*” but on further questioning, Summer seemed to have taken advantage of an angry exchange of words and walked out. Either way, this transition was supported by her father again:

*So um an then I come home and told dad I’d got the sack so he just went: right Summer no worries, dunt matter, we’ll sort them.*

With his help, she successfully managed another employment transition. Summer does not discuss the reason for moving to Scotland but linked it in with IVF treatment. The relevance to her working life history is summarised with a short comment:

*And I thought mmm do I want to go and work in a salon again? And I thought, ‘nah can’t do that’ so I just went leaflet dropping and got up another business for myself here.*

Summer did not feel that her unpaid work on the committee was part of her working life as she ended her part 1 story with:

*So that’s been my beautician work life really. And that’s all I’ve done, my whole life [giggles] apart from getting married obviously....And having the girls.*

Part 2 of the interview explores her transition to an active voluntary community worker. She describes how the decision was almost out of her control but she manages by perceiving it as do-able as there would be support available:

*Ppphh I didn’t.... I was a bit stressed out about it at the start with but I’m a bit: oh well, it’s a new group innit, so if we don’t do it properly there’s always someone there that can help you out in’t there.*

She perceived the transition from paid employment to unpaid employment in this sense was an obligation, which not all mothers meet. She was also clear that it is not a role she intended to continue once her maternity leave ends, despite the support it has offered her and she offered the group. The thread of support in transitions was also picked up when she described how her boyfriend, now husband, encouraged her to slow down her work when their relationship first started as she recalled him saying:

*Come on you really ought to come home at six o'clock and have some tea and look after yourself and we can go out and do nice things and I'm thinkin'; Nah, I wanna go to work..... cos I was you know I just worked..... and I sort of thought hang on a minute maybe I do need to. .*

This skill of managing roles and work was referred to later when discussing working mothers transitions to maternity leave, specifically with regards taking up the voluntary roles:

*I think you can get involved in too many things. You got to pick the right jobs and the right places to do them really.*

Her story of her working life ended with a description of the working life transition her husband dreams of and is part of a mutual dream of self sufficiency. His dream was driven by unhappiness with his working life: *"he's just you know stuck in that you have to go work to pay the mortgage and pay the bills which is horrible."* In contrast, Summer did not want to change her paid employment, because: *"I do love being, I,I,I love working, I love my job"*. The support then it seemed had become mutual as if the dream were to become a reality, she would be supporting her husband too. Their mutual dream was to change their working lives, with Summer keeping her toe in the profession:

*But then with a bit of luck one day we'll sell the house, make loads of money and then we can buy a bit of land and live in a caravan then he wouldn't have to go to work....And then I can go back to work for a couple of days. Being as I love mine so much.*

*B. Is that what you'd really like?*

*Oh god yeah definitely, nice five acre plot, with loads of animals and loads of polytunnels and ... that'd be great....*

Her next planned transition in her working life was therefore a life-style choice, keeping her paid employment constant.

### 6.6.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Summer's story:

The themes in Summer's narrative were difficult to separate as they were largely overlapping. Theme 1 and 2 could have been easily grouped together but it was Summer's own (repeated) recognition of formal qualifications that facilitated the decision to separate them. Similarly the notion of support in theme 3 was evident in all three themes. Her progression from no qualifications to beautician work was clearly triggered by her parents. Similarly, her apprenticeship placements were successfully obtained through the support of family connections. Summer had a simple but insightful approach to life and where working life fits in. Her down-to-earth explanations and descriptions offered a narrative which described a first maternity leave which was controlled and managed and a second one, which was similarly controlled. The difference was that the second maternity leave story offered evidence of new skills developed in the community. Comments on her love of her paid work - as compared to husband's can be linked to an overall comment on an ideal work-life balance, which her story suggests is beginning to be manifested during her second maternity leave allowing her to effectively escaping the 'rat race' . Even here, her point was coloured by her grounded approach which ensures she maintains some contact with her clients for some cash input:

*I can go and buy toilet roll instead of him [giggles] ... Cos we'll have lots of polytunnels and lots of vegetables and he won't have to go to work to, to pay for food and things.*

### 6.6.4 Summer: reflective comment – excerpt from diary entry

*Summer as a mobile beautician comes across as a naturally chatty person. Surprisingly, she expressed unease at being interviewed, later explaining that although she could 'talk for England' if she focuses on their nails. Face-to-face conversations are according to Summer 'completely different'. Unconvinced but wishing to ensure the same power dynamics as offered to the rest, I agreed to have my hair done – bleached ends so as to add pink dye (which she apparently had lots of experience of doing. She came before on the recommendation of a friend to paint nails. Summer quickly went into her usual banter and the interview went well, despite the unorthodox result of my pink hair tips. The timing of the second part of the interview was awkward: Summer in full professional banter flow and my hair was getting foiled up. Rather than break the flow of the conversation and get to the point where we would have to go to the bathroom to wash the chemicals out. I opted to keep going and make up questions as I went. Did this reflect my greater confidence*

*and familiarity with the type of questions I needed to ask to delve deeper. My extravagant choice of hair colour was an unusual option chosen in part as I was told, it would be time-consuming and would eventually wash/be cut out. (The reality was it was also largely based on a lack of my ignorance of beautician work or hairdressing, especially anything which took more than a few minutes and a pair of scissors). In part, I also relished the idea of being rebellious due to the current position I felt I was stuck in at work. I wonder whether that made me more willing to break the rules about pre-forming questions for the second stage of the interview. Either way, it seemed to work, the interview was a success – and my husband and children bemused with the result.*

*It was a total surprise that Summer was the Chair of a toddler group, she was simply known to me as a mobile beautician. If I am to be honest, she challenged my perceptions of what it meant to be a beautician and specifically the extensive training required to become qualified. I suspect my attitude to beauticians is a shared one although I am aware that in Poland, beautician work is held in higher esteem and I had unconsciously adopted the common discourse associated with the UK perceptions.*

## **6.7 Case Study 6: Heather – distressed professional now ‘just mum’**

Heather is a self employed specialist engineer. She has held numerous contracts for example a project engineer leading a multidisciplinary team in the development of new projects for major energy generators in the UK. The work focuses on up front development of engineering documentation, plans for executing the project and estimation of costs and scheduling. As a specialist she has worked in industry verification.

At the time of the interview, she was on maternity leave with her fourth child. The interview takes place in Heather’s home.

### 6.7.1 Summary of Heather's lived and told story.

Table 9: Heather - summary of lived story and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
Started medicine, changed to engineering.	<u>Theme 1: Male-dominated work and job insecurity</u>
Completes specialist course.	<i>"admin are women, men are inspectors"</i> <i>"my ex-husband had been made redundant twice in our years together"</i>
First job as engineer and also completes MSc.	<i>"it's actually middle aged men and their wives have stayed at home.....they can't understand this kind of working woman concept. They just don't get it."</i>
1996: 1 <sup>st</sup> child born. Ex made redundant; maternity leave cut short (12 weeks). Returned full-time.	<u>Theme 2: Negative maternity leave decisions</u>
2000: 2 <sup>nd</sup> child. Redundant the day she found out she was pregnant. Forced to sign on.	<i>"I had to go to the bottle rather than breastfeeding....it's easy actually to spend less time with them....."</i>
Tries part-time lecturing at a college. (Very short lived)	<i>"If you didn't go back after six months, your job wasn't open" and "it was all a case of keeping, keeping the job as much as possible."</i>
Full-time 6 month contract after less than 6 months; child starts at nursery before contract.	<u>Theme 3: Organisational (and peer) perception: pregnancy and motherhood are problematic.</u>
Child has developmental problems, starts school age 6yrs.	<i>"What are you going to do with your children when you're off-shore?" I'm thinking: my husband looks after them, what do you think?! They couldn't understand that at all.</i>
Series of short term contracts.	<i>"during the interview one of the men asked me how old my children were and if I would be able to erm, commit to the job...."</i>
Gains permanent post in public sector	<u>Theme 4: Re-addressing the balance?</u>
Divorced husband (2 years later)	<i>"there was no problem about me taking time off for appointments....and er, she let me work at home a couple of days a week as well, later on"</i>
2007: Marries again and falls pregnant with third child	
First female manager	
Has 6 months full pay maternity leave and takes year off.	
2008: Goes back 3 months pregnant with 4 <sup>th</sup> child. Works part-time using holiday leave; desk job - no travel.	
Takes 6 months full pay; completing full year off.	



	<p><i>“and I got six months full pay which was incredible....they actually offer you career breaks.....it’s the first time I’ve ever come across that”</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve just taken on the treasurer of the toddlers....and sometimes the Brownies need a help out”</i></p>
<p>Overall theme of battling inequality now finding balance with role in the community:</p> <p><i>“....you miss things at work....sometimes I feel very isolated and you know it’s just, it’s just different. But I....enjoying it, being a mum, just being a mum and a mum’s role is different to a dad’s and that why I....much enjoyment, <b>much</b>”</i></p>	

At the point of interviewing Heather, she was on her fourth maternity leave and one which she perceived positively in the grand scheme of her family and working life. In hindsight, it was because Heather’s themes were so explicit and so central to her reflections of her working life, that they became barriers to interpretation as it became difficult to see past her narrative themes. Her story was one which had clearly been rehearsed and considered in part. Heather’s identification of themes are reflected in the narrative theme identification and unusually proved to be particularly congruent with IPA master themes.

## 6.7.2 Narrative themes from Heather's told story

### Theme 1: male-dominated work and job insecurity

This first theme was a recurring one, which heavily overlapped with the second theme – a typical pattern. The first theme described the sector Heather works in: it is made up of a male-orientated workforce (a stable, historical view) and there was insecurity in all but the largest organisations unless there is a boom in the economy. After setting the scene with her educational background, Heather quickly focused in on the difficulty of getting work and immediately identified the sector as “*male-dominated*” and “*certainly not family friendly.*” Heather inferred that the larger organisations were more law-abiding with respect to equal opportunities legislation. Yet even here:

*....it's mostly men, and it's actually middle-aged men and their wives have stayed at home, never worked, and their wives do their ironing and cook their food so they can't understand this kind of woman working concept. They just don't get it.*

The male-dominated environment is one which Heather clearly describes as one she has suffered from and turned out to be one of the most important aspects of her working life reflections. She mentions having looked into family-friendly policies in other organisations with no success of finding a solution to the perceived inequality:

*I've looked into you know working family companies' work-life balance and whatever but no-one no-one seems to have looked at the point of eh overnight.*

This demonstrates the theme reflects an active and current interest in this aspect of her employment, despite her being on maternity leave. Specifically, her story reflected her concern for the lack of support for mothers who need to go away for overnight stays and the lack of effort made to reduce the requirements to stay away from home, for example: when training is required. This she described as feeding the negative perception of motherhood at both organisational-level: time off for a maternity leave and accommodating a mother's role is simply an inconvenience (theme 2). Heather was at a senior enough level to experience and hear the comments of those in a position to influence organisational level decisions. Her peers and those she has contact with in her line of work appeared similarly pre-disposed towards chauvinistic remarks. A good example of this orientation was offered by Heather at a training course where the trainer proposed, ‘for the sake of brevity’ to refer to all examples as ‘he’. When Heather challenged this, her boss said: “*If you want to make a thing of it, want*

*to make a big deal out of it, you'll be just like her upstairs.*" 'Her upstairs' was an Asian woman who challenged a racist comment made in the workplace. Heather made clear in her tone of voice that the boss, at best, was inferring no support was on offer. The theme therefore captured not only that she is in a male-dominated profession but this was portrayed as a massive hurdle with roots at a organisational cultural level.

With regards the work insecurity, both she and her then husband were made redundant more than once, or left in the situation where one contract would end and the next job was yet to be found. The insecurity aspect of this first theme emerged in numerous PINS. She recounts the various interviews she attended and emphasised the temporary or less than permanent nature of positions held. Poignantly, she also recounted her experience of visiting an unemployment centre, whilst pregnant – and wearing baggy clothes to try not draw attention to her ever growing front.<sup>7</sup>

Heather's personal circumstances of an unsuccessful marriage to someone in the same sector perhaps accentuated the negativity she described and was clearly felt at this time of the story. The theme was linked to bitterness or comments offered quite dryly.

### Theme 2: negative maternity leave decisions

The instability of the sector and the demographics, as discussed above, were widely reported locally and Heather was reiterating a familiar discourse. As mentioned, she did so with a strong negative interpretation of how it affected her working life. Of central interest to this thematic analysis is her choice of content of her story and the focus on the problems motherhood and pregnancy brought to her working life experience were clearly linked to the theme above. Heather's story describes how her peers and most of her managers expected equality a representative of the minority, female workforce: *"I can't treat you differently because you have children..."* This was approach was adopted by Heather out of the paid work arena, when she first became a mother:

*I remember later on really feeling as if my role and my ex husband's was the same.  
The mum and dad were just the same....*

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<sup>7</sup> Under the Equality Acts (2010) pregnancy is a 'protected characteristic' in its own right rather than being subsumed within gender as before under the Sex Discrimination Acts (see also section 8.4)

It was at this point the interview was stopped as the recollection of the time of her first maternity leave evoked such strong memories; it caused her considerable distress and the recorder was stopped until she felt she could - and wanted to - continue.

During her first maternity leave, she recalled being able to take six months leave but at a much reduced wage. Even with this, she was forced to cut leave by half due to her ex-husband's unexpected redundancy. Her second pregnancy was discovered on the day she was made redundant. As such, maternity leave options were non-existent. If she was employed within an organisation, six months leave was the maximum, expected length of time off - regardless of written policy or legislation. If she were to take any more than this, she feared the employers/interviewers would guess that leave was due to having a child, which would reduce the chances of the next contract:

*but I think my fears at the time were being in my kind of industry it was very hard I felt it was very hard if you were, to get back into the industry so I actually if you took longer off then you didn't, if you took longer off than six months you wouldn't have a job so trying to break back into the industry and explain why you were off and then they would know that you'd got young children it would be really difficult to get back in so, for me, it was all a case of keeping, keeping the job as much as possible.*

Heather inferred it was a widely held belief within the industry that if you took more than six months off, for whatever reason, it became increasingly more difficult to “break back into the industry”. This need to stay within the six month bracket led Heather to continue to try for jobs whilst pregnant - and the drive reinforced by the requirements for “signing on” and get benefits. At this stage of the story, Heather recalled the time she was initially turned down for an interview when the interview panel heard she was pregnant. Within a short time of the employment centre hearing about this outright rejection of an apparently well-suited candidate, Heather was recalled for an interview:

*I thought it's terrible because I had to put the effort in to writing a presentation and I knew they didn't want to give me the job.*

This ‘going through the motions’ to ensure organisations were perceived to be compliant with the law seemed common, for example no part-time work was ever available in her working life in the sector until she worked for the public sector. Mothers, she concluded, have no place at work in the industry: “You know, it's still the case that the women I think, the women make the kids, have kids...” Her perception of motherhood being problematic was

reinforced by a friend's experience of work at the time of becoming a mother – albeit in another sector. Her friend, sometime after her first child, was put on contract work, rather than a permanent contract due to 'funding problems'. The woman lost out financially because of this status due to the timing of her pregnancy. She requested a return to part-time work. This request was turned down apparently due to further 'lack of funding' yet there was funding available for full-time positions.

Heather's maternity leave decisions were also driven in part by the availability of childcare and this was not an issue which was of any interest to the organisations she worked for. Heather could not turn to family for support. The extreme result of this childcare shortage was illustrated in the following: Heather described how she had hoped to secure part-time work following the birth of one of her children. The shortage of nursery places led her to take a decision to place her child in a full-time nursery *before* securing a job. In this way, the lack of childcare did not present a barrier – if and when she was successful in securing work. Part-time childcare places were far and few between and parents were told there was a waiting list.

The theme therefore captures the negative anti-mother decisions described by Heather as being due to relationship break-downs, inflexible organisational policy; individual managers attitudes; benefit requirements and lack of childcare. Her first child's developmental problems caused further anxiety. It is not surprising that given the insecurity of the nature of Heather's work, maternity leave decisions had a knock-on impact on her financial situation.

### Theme 3: organisational (and peer) perceptions of motherhood.

The theme of the organisational perceptions of motherhood however, emerged as a stand-alone theme. There were other contributing factors to maternity leave decisions and together these influenced both the overall 'told story' and also the 'lived life story' of her working life as described above. Heather's story of stress and unhappiness continued in this theme - and she believed the pattern of events described is shared by many women in paid employment:

*It's women take on the responsibility of caring so whether its children or elderly relatives it's the women it's really difficult for women to continue.*

When she fell pregnant with her second baby she was expecting maternity leave but was made redundant:

*Again, I knew that we, money would be a real problem again and I thought well I'm not going to have any time off with this baby so I was very worried.....*

Whilst trying to find a job, she found that she had to reinvent her family demography as she was frequently asked about the age of her children and whether she was really able to commit to a job. Since Heather's work involved contract work, interviews were common and the problem of negative associations of working mothers was common:

*When I went along to the interview erm I'd remember the, being interviewed by two two men and during the interview one of the men asked me how old my children were and if I would be able to erm commit to the job cos I had children I might have to take time off and that's what he didn't want. Now he's very senior in an oil company now....Erm I was pretty shocked at the time but I I needed a job so I had to erm I lied about the age of my children anyway because I had to, there was no way I could, say look it's my second child was so young so I think I said she was at school erm but to be honest in all of the interviews they were always asking how old my children were and what did I do for childcare and who looks after them if they're sick and ....*

Not helping this negative perception was the lack of role models in the sector. She had already been warned off making any reference to 'gender issues' (like 'her upstairs'). Heather says that she simply did not ever come across any women – other than at a much lower administrative level. Even when she worked in a much larger organisation, where there was a female working population she said:

*But after speaking to a lot of them, none of them had eh, children .....it was odd it was a self-selecting..... women who are having children and, not working there.*

The perception was based not on at an organisational level but also was also manifested at an individual level. Heather recalled that one of her bosses was intolerant of her role as a mother:

*he was absolutely awful he was a real bully..... His wife stayed at home and looked after the children you know was occasionally was around and erm then there was me with you know children you know children, young children and that's what he used to say you know.*

Her story at this point described how she took regular 'special leave', so unhappy was she with their working relationship, to avoid working with him. Towards the end of the interview she expanded on this story. She reflected her incredulity at the negativity she had from this 'horrible' boss who, she infers, should have been more empathetic to her dual role since "he had a daughter too", of similar age to Heather.

#### Theme 4: readdressing the balance?

The difference in tempo, tone and general positivity was however, very notable in the narrative linked to this theme, which only begins to manifest itself at the end of her story. Although closely linked to maternity leave decisions, Heather's transition from a negative story of her working life to a positive one was on a number of different levels (for example relationship and community links) and clearly had a profound affect on her general well-being:

*Erm this time I'm actually I'm I'm more relaxed about being away because I know I've got a job there I don't have to worry about suddenly being dropped by some people not wanting to employ me.*

The theme addressed not only maternity leave decisions but also changes in roles and perceptions of working life and family life. Importantly, these changes allowed for a fulfilling role in the community, too.

*I've just taken on the treasurer of the toddlers so I'm kind of doing that and I go to a two's group ... the two year old cos sometimes the Brownies need a help out em Scouts, I don't tend to do much you know with that they, and I suppose the other thing is just erm like they have a lot of you know like the local church em fair sometime or whatever and I always we always go to them and go and have our cups of tea say hello to people you know and so I kind of gradually and turning up at the school events you know and a lot of people you know can't go if they're working so so it's all that kind of thing you know just being around.*

This marks a change in the tempo of her story of her working life. In fact it transpired to be a transition towards readdressing the balance towards her role as a mother and her identity as a working mother. She describes regaining control of her home and work roles when she gained her first manager who was a woman. She spoke of the amazement of being allowed to take time off for doctor's appointments associated with her third pregnancy. She spoke in awe of a manager who fully supported her pregnancy yoga classes and even allowed her to

work from home a couple of days a week in her third trimester. Heather spoke of full pay for six months:

*which was incredible so for the first time I thought I could actually manage to go the whole year and spread the goodness of the money out....that was great.*

On her return, she was already pregnant with her fourth child and used leave she was entitled to, to work the short time back at work as part-time hours only. Her story emphasised the transparency and open communication with her manager. The negotiations seemed mutually convenient and stress free. This led to a discussion about career breaks, with which she was again pleasantly surprised. The situation at this stage was the complete opposite of that described in her first two themes and addressed the insecurity that was so prevalent in her early working life:

*It's the first time I've ever come across that" and "I mean, I'm quite confident that I'll be around.....if you go back even with your year off, if you go back after the six months, you back to your very same job. If you go back after a career break they're going to offer you a similar job.*

With this newly found balance between work and family life, Heather reflected on the experiences in community life - and commented on how new it all is and how she was meeting new people. She reflected on the loss of not having done so earlier:

*I didn't know anyone who had children in the village.....I had no-one to discuss child bearing issues with. So I had no support in that way...."*

At the time of the second interview in contrast, she was "slowly getting to know people" through Brownies, toddler groups, Scouts: "for the first time I actually get involved in it". She enthused:

*and so I'm doing things I've never done before and eh, erm and it's really nice to take them, it's really nice to get involved.*

In fact, there are many 'firsts' tied in with positives in her narrative: "I persevered and got my first job" and her "first child". Her first female manager who supported Heather's first maternity leave and managed her pregnancy at work:



but she was like: **no** you **don't** have to travel - and eh for the first time you know there was no problem about me taking time off for appointments.

Heather was amazed and delighted that:

*I got six months full pay which was incredible so for the first time I thought I could actually manage to go the whole year!*

In the same regulatory body, she enthusiastically described how:

*they actually offer you career breaks if you go back to the same job [inaudible] it's the first time I've ever come across that...because I was working with my first two I never had been to a toddlers group for the first time I actually took her to things like.*

When asked about direct involvement with community groups, she elaborated on her activity, which is more than just being part of the community. Heather actively supported a range of community groups for example: she is treasurer of the toddlers group - and Heather appeared to play down an obvious involvement in other community groups and events. Her reasoning reflected the readdressing theme well:

*What I felt was that it was it was just that people take it one very year and I thought well if I am home you know for a year I can do something so I think well I'll do this and I'll have done something to help out you know.*

The following quote summarises the theme well and offers some balance to the reality of stopping work:

*Still, I think, I think being at home with them is often really hard work and work is hard works so you know, I mean you're at home, you miss things at work....sometimes I feel very isolated and you know it's just, it's just different. But I....enjoying it, being a mum, just being a mum and a mum's role is different to a dad's and that why I....much enjoyment, **much**.*

### **6.7.3 Summary comment on thematic analysis of Heather's story:**

This interview was challenging as it was difficult to 'bracket off' and focus largely on the narrative content – see reflexive comments below. Whilst each interviewee offered a clear answer in each of the individuals' narratives and this often revolved around conflicting roles, this interview illustrated the most difficult decisions any of my interviewees had faced and was the most emotive. The difficulty was perhaps compounded by the preparedness of the interviewee so that there were instances of less spontaneous, unnatural story-telling at times, yet clearly a story she wanted to share. As well as conflict of roles there were clear pointers to difficulties due to gender inequality and Heather's attempts to seek solutions - as seen in other interviews but here the stories were much more dramatic. The thematic analysis took several attempts and eventually, the structure above was settled on. The themes overlap quite heavily, reflecting the reality of the intertwined, sometimes fraying threads of identity and experience. The experiences she had and the context she found herself in led to Heather making 'anti-mother decisions'. The sense of readdressing the balance seems to have been triggered purely by the longer length of time her current maternity leave had finally afforded.

### **6.7.4 Heather: reflective comment – excerpt from diary entry**

*The interview was an emotive experience but ended positively. At the start Heather's stories contained bitterness and unhappiness that was palpable but the PINS ended positively with happy endings. The breakdown Heather had mid interview resulted in both of us in tears. After the interview, I repeated the offer of not using any of the interview material if she preferred to withdraw from the study. Heather explained that she was not used to talking about herself and had been mentally prepared for the type of interview she was used to conducting, which was much more 'factually based'. This explained the incongruence of the story telling I had felt: her expectation that I was seeking hard facts on one hand and PINS I was seeking, which she told perhaps surprising herself at her disclosures. I reminded her that she had my number should she change her mind and that there were no consequences to her withdrawing – I had learned a lot and was grateful for her sharing of her story, regardless of whether or not her story was explicitly included in my research. (She did not call and was willing to be re-interviewed almost three years later).*

## **6.8 T1 (Time 1) IPA findings.**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was adopted to accommodate the inter-subjectivity which the researcher felt was essential to fully explore the sense-making behind the narratives given by the interviewees of their working lives. Each interviewee's narrative was slotted into a framework to identify emerging themes along with conceptual, linguistic and descriptive comment (see typed up version of many comments made in appendix 4). In addition, the emerging themes were labelled as either being associated with pre-maternity leave comments, first maternity leave comments or second/subsequent comments. See also section 4.9.

A cross-case comparison using the emerging themes led to collated into master themes. The first table identifies the master themes. If the master theme was present in each of the case studies was noted in the final column (recurrent theme). The research question which evolved was:

*How do women make sense of their experiences of their working lives at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave?*

**Table 10: Summary of master themes at T1**

<b>Master theme</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Recurrent theme?</b>
<b>A woman in a man's world</b>	Support for the feminist perspective	Yes
<b>The good employee</b>	Pre- maternity leave no. 1	Yes
<b>First maternity leave effect on working life is negligible</b> (maternity leave 1)	In relation to working life - because of organisational* support or because of lack of organisational support.	No (See section 6.11)
<b>Disillusionment: paid employment</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> or later maternity leave)	Organisation and, society level inputs into sense-making clashing	Yes
<b>Disillusionment : individual responses</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> or later maternity leave)	Individual manifestations of and sense-making to paid employment position	Yes
<b>Self-development + on-going work related skill progression</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> or later maternity leave)	Through community unpaid roles. Reinforcing/contributing to re-evaluations	No (Not found in Tina or Sasha's narrative)

\*For Summer this was support from the state system as she is self-employed.

The chapter proceeds with a tabulated summary of each master theme. This is followed by a short description of the relevance of the master theme to the research question. Reference to individual line numbers and quotations other than those in the table below have not been included as the stories are thoroughly described and documented in the case studies above.

## 6.9 T1 Master theme: a woman in a man's world

The large size of the theme is captured in the table below. The master theme here is made up of a number of sub-themes and a quote from an interviewee is used to facilitate the audit trail of this analysis.

Table 11: T1 Master theme - a woman in a man's world.

Emerging themes	Example of emerging theme source	Sub theme description	Example of quote
Legislation is ineffective for pregnant women	Heather	Organisational policy reflects legislation but this is a veneer in many cases.	<i>I thought it's terrible because I had to put this effort in to writing a presentation and I knew they didn't want to give me the job....</i>
Legislation is ineffective return –to-work mothers	Martha		<i>They were more interested in proving the case that you had to you had to be there full-time....I'm not entirely sure why.</i>
Experience and perception of managers is poor.	Martha	All negative comments re management (bar one example in Connie's interview)) are directed at male managers.	<i>...and instead of saying: Martha come through we'll just have a look at this together ...would you mind sorting this out. He'd email you instead. Really because his communication skills were so crap.</i>
Experiences of poor employee management	Connie		<i>....and the father said "Well if you're not happy" and they started treating me quite badly.... and I thought "This is not on"</i>
Rejects management hierarchy	Summer	Rejection of traditional notions of career progression	<i>Why, why are girls like that?" and they're just horrible, they were just horrible really</i>
Career = ambition/learning (not ladder)	Heather		<i>...Learning new things every day erm B. : So you don't associate it with</i>

			<i>promotion</i> <i>H. No cos I never have promotion in jobs [laughs]</i>
Family support for transitions	Summer	The importance a woman places on social relationships	<i>"...and told dad I'd got the sack so he just went "right Summer no worries, don't matter, we'll sort them." (Lines 88-89)</i>
Family and friends support for balance	Connie	Importance of networks for women	<i>"a friend has offered to have her on a Monday for me and Mum's going to have them the other couple of days"</i>
Relationships and working life decision-making intertwined	Connie (and Sasha)		<i>"some of the mums don't need to work cos their husbands are working, [name of organisation] or something like that and the money's there"</i>
No role models for working mothers	Heather		<i>"I didn't even know anyone who had children didn't and I didn't know anyone who had children in the village, through work".</i>
No experiences to draw on for motherhood	Connie		<i>"I was actually petrified of the whole being a mother, having kids, the whole package"</i>
Short term sacrifices (paid work) for longer term gains in motherhood	Tina		Conflict for mother/paid work roles
Conflict in roles + guilt is norm	Tina	<i>I do half the mum job, half the housework job and half the actual job so... no, it's not the best of best of both worlds at all [laughs] .... because one person suffers and it's me.</i>	
Marriage meant change in control of	Connie	Marriage for	<i>We got married during that time erm he got a job up here ....and</i>

work		women means change in paid employment perceptions/ expectations	<i>so I got a job at erm a retail outlet in a nearby town.</i>
Marriage = transition in work pattern/expectations	Summer		<i>Yeah he was a pain in the neck...I had to stop working in the evenings whereas I used to go down to work whatever time in the morning and come home whatever time at night.</i>
Marriage = different parameters for decision making	Tina		<i>because I was married and, you know, ran the house ...a lot of my friend were still living with their parents so they could support but two I just couldn't do that.</i>

With the exception of Heather and Sasha, none of the interviewees explicitly reflected on gender differences in relation to their paid employment. However, the analysis suggests that this is the essence of many of the emerging themes, as demonstrated above, and is made up of many emerging themes. It represents by far the largest master theme and is in evidence throughout all the interviews in one or other sub-theme guise.

Some interviewees, namely Martha and Heather, had very negative experiences of organisational policy which offered at best a thin veneer to negativity towards working mothers. Connie offered a notable exception here. Heather had a stream of stories offering evidence of discrimination. Heather was also explicit in her sense-making process of why her working life story is so difficult and unfulfilled – in short it was due to her status as a mother in a male-dominated sector. Martha's story of the meeting to which she was called to discuss her trial of part-time work was simply a process which she was clearly set to lose. She was "miffed" but was content to support her husband's work and stay at home – albeit this is largely due to a series of unplanned pregnancies. For Sasha, her experience of her organisation being simply unprepared for the unusual event of a pregnancy in her field – again clearly suggested her employer is geared up to 'a man's world'.

The 'woman's in a man's world' master theme is also manifested in Tina's interview. She emphasised the fact that she worked for a female manager and in an 'ideal' sector, where women predominate – early years' education. She used this supposed ideal, where her organisation permits her to bring her children to work, as the reason for choosing her career

path. However, the way in which the story was told, suggests the sense-making was retrospective. Finally, Connie was surprised at the lack of negativity she faced when she announced her pregnancies, suggesting Connie's assumption of the organisation's negativity in relation to pregnancy.

Linked to the above is the grouping of sub-themes, which draws together the interviewees' perceptions of management. In short, where the manager is male, the story is usually a negative one. Again, it is notable that in two of the interviewees stories where the manager is a female (Tina's boss and Heather's last manager) the stories are extremely positive: Tina's female manager is 'progressive' allowing her much needed flexibility to manage her children's needs. Heather's manager "*even*" gave her time off for pregnancy related doctor appointments and pregnancy yoga classes. Both Tina and Heather were explicitly glowing in their praise for the support they both received from their respective managers at the time of the pregnancies. This again suggests they perceived this experience of not being in a 'man's world' as not the norm.

The next sub-grouping suggests that the women tend **not** to follow, or wish to follow traditional career paths which are associated with increased responsibility (Connie took a step down from being a manager to sales); promotion (Heather see quote above); and ever increasing status (Summer's willingness to step down from the Chair's position as soon as her 'turn' ended, despite a successful and enjoyable term). This approach to work is often associated with the increased importance women place on networking and relationships over competitiveness (see Discussion chapter for theoretical support for this link for this gender difference in the value of work). The networking sub-grouping is particularly strong and manifested in each case study albeit in different ways. Transitions in Summer's working life narrative were punctuated by support offered by her father, and later her husband. Connie's working life took second place to her husband's in so far as she followed him when he was relocated – and no comment was made on the acceptability or otherwise of this arrangement which prioritised social relations over career. Connie's moves seem to have left her without a support network in the early days of her motherhood. Heather in her fourth maternity leave discovered the community network and realised how she had missed out before; Martha and indeed Summer, became an active agents in their communities through committee roles. For Tina, she reflected instead on her working environment, rather than a community based network for support. This strategy appeared to have contributed to her role conflict, which is part of the next sub-group for this master theme.



Role conflict, which was only ever spoken of with respect to mother/paid work roles, and never in relation to the father role, was most clearly demonstrated in Tina's narrative but it is manifested in more subtle ways in other interviews. Summer felt she had to prioritise her responsibilities for childcare while her husband did work on the house – although she explained that it was because of the tools he uses which would not be safe to use in the presence of children. Summer is clearly not one to shy away from manual work, not least decorating, which was her first choice of career. Social norms dominated over personal preferences. This rationale positions Summer's sense-making as being based on an underlying assumption that as the mother, she looks after the children and her husband does the 'work', even her paid employment was fitted in around her husband's availability and his time to rest. Sasha's conflict stemmed from her largely unspoken but inferred wish to return to work, which is hinted at as taboo or unacceptable – her sense-making leads her to contradictory expressed desire to be at home for 'the girls'.

The final grouping was perhaps the most surprising, the degree to which marriage resulted in an almost automatic change in working life patterns or expectations. This was clearly the case for Martha who turned to part-time work as soon as she married; Summer whose long working day was strongly discouraged by her husband to make room for her relationship with him around his working day; Connie who had to move to wherever her husband's work went, despite holding a management role and presumably a higher earner; Tina, who took a secondment from her beloved job to follow her husband for a year to set up a new business. Heather had to return to work full-time, painfully 3 months after the birth of her first son, since her husband at the time was made redundant. The consequences of breaking the social norm of who works, and who stays at home was re-evaluated it seems only after her second or subsequent maternity leave.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, this master theme of a 'woman in a man's world' is not surprising but the strength of its manifestation in different guises as evidenced by the sub-themes in so many aspects of the interviewees' stories was unexpected.

## 6.10 T1 Master theme: the good employee

The table below offers examples of emerging themes with examples from specific interviewees' quotes, which help demonstrate the link to this is important master theme.

Table 12: T1 Master theme - the good employee

Interviewee	Emerging themes reflecting sense-making of working life	Example of Quote
Summer	Decision making is decisive	<i>And I said "Fine, okay then, I'll be off", picked my scissors up and off I went.</i>
	Barriers are not insurmountable - or not perceived at all.	<i>I just thought: ah, that would be a cool job to do"</i>
Connie	Identifies people's social status	<i>opened up doors to the better paid money than just being a factory worker.</i>  <i>The mum was from a very well to do family and that's one thing I was not</i>
	Job changes, planned or unplanned managed well – adaptable and motivated	<i>and within two years I worked myself up to management.</i>
Martha	Career= hierarchy – driven to move from bottom up.	<i>I just rose up through the ranks</i>
	Authenticity: hard work and recognition are sought	<i>There was not structure, there was no one to <b>please</b>, to get on, if you like and err, it was all very much skive your way along if you like and I think that's quite bad for you...bad for the psyche.</i>
Tina	Success is hard work. Individual values are aligned	<i>you know, if you're good with your employers you expect</i>

	with organisations.	<i>them to be good back.</i>
	Is self-confident; competent and tough	<i>I don't mind working full-time or sometimes she'll phone at the evenings you know, cause I'm this fire-fighter</i>
Sasha	Values professional status	<i>I'm a mum, not that I don't want to be, of course I wanted to be, but I, it's just nice to be able to say I work for a company called...</i>
	Success is measured by money and variety in paid work	<i>a bit of excitement for doing something, where it's not just children and "not to have to worry about money, cause I never had to</i>

This theme is manifested in emerging themes that can be found across all interviewees' stories of their working lives *before* motherhood. The emerging themes tended to reflect values those that might be seen on an application form – and in part, contradict the first master theme (for example career equates to hierarchy at work). Each interviewee describes her working life pre-motherhood, in a way, which is in line with how an organisation would describe a 'good employee' reflecting values an organisation would support. This uniform finding arguably reflects the interviewees understanding of their identity at this stage of their lives - a good employee. This positivity associated with paid employment continues for some but not all, as evidenced in the next master theme.

### 6.11 T1 master theme: first maternity leave effect is negligible

The women's sense-making clearly identifies their first maternity leave as either positive or negative with regards the impact it had on their working life but overall, the essence of the stories suggests the impact was negligible on their working life trajectory.

Table 13: T1 master theme - negligible effect of first maternity leave.

Emerging Theme reflecting sense-making of working life	Positive/Negative effect with regards working life + source of quote	Example of Quote(s)
Progressive employer encourages work/family balance	Positive: Tina	<p><i>and my boss is definitely of the opinion where be good to your staff and they give them their freedom and they actually stay for longer ...in the long run erm ...and I suppose why I've actually worked for the same place for 13 years</i></p> <p><i>And I think <b>why</b> I've done that is because I my boss is <b>very smart</b> and she's obviously very child friendly, but she isn't actually... [pause] no she's not she's not to everybody .....I think .... she's likes to keep me in her organisation</i></p>
First maternity leave is a temporary break	Positive Martha	<i>They were <b>most</b> keen that I came back full-time. Not knowing any better I'd sort of made plans to that effect</i>
First maternity leave choices paid off:	Positive: Tina	<i>but that's actually worked out and I total... benefit</i>

First maternity leave – clear boundaries	Positive: Summer	<i>I did go back to work for a bit just on Sat, after my maternity allowance finished</i>
First maternity leave sets template for expectation	Positive: Connie	<i>they were very flexible you have the baby, they got presents for me and everything and then em... ... went back to work and they were so flexible</i>
First maternity leave marred by financial worries and instability and brevity.	Negative: Heather	<i>I knew nobody so, I had absolutely had no-one to discuss child bearing issues with. So I had no support.</i>
First maternity leave: organisation took away agency and ability to plan	Negative: Sasha	<i>although we had set up somebody to cover my job, that girl had let us down, so there was actually nobody to take over....I wanted to see what kinda carnage there was going to be.</i>
First maternity leave led to part-time working problems	Negative: Martha	<i>I'd negotiated a <b>trial</b> three day week. So those three days were hellish days and ....err, the other two days were sort of spent catching up and trying to get ready for the <b>next</b> three days again.</i>

For Tina, Heather, Summer, and Connie, the master theme of the good employee continues and the maternity leave is simply perceived by them as a short break before continuing with the organisation – or in Summer's case, her role in self-employment. The boundaries between maternity leave and work are clear cut and legislation appears to support a smooth return.

There is some contradictory sense-making and this is manifested in the emerging themes in the narratives of Connie, Heather, Sasha and Martha. Where the contradiction arises and maternity leave is not a short, smooth break in employment, this appears to be fuelled by the external triggers such as financial worries brought on by a lack of organisational support and poor management of maternity leave.

### 6.13 Master theme: disillusionment (a ): paid employment reflections

In sharp contrast to the previous master theme, the women reflected on the massive impact second (or subsequent) maternity leave had on their working lives. This was associated with negative effects and the blame is apportioned either to society or their specific organisation. The disillusionment is universally felt. The table below offers an indication of some of the emerging themes.

**Table 14: T1 master theme - disillusionment with paid employment.**

<b>Emerging Theme reflecting sense-making of working life experience</b>	<b>Disillusionment blame focused on <u>society or organisation</u> as source of problem + source</b>	<b>Example of quote</b>
Childcare for 2+ is a problem for most women	Society: Connie Organisation: Heather Organisation: Tina	<i>Cos it's very difficult to get again it's difficult to get childcare.</i>
Second maternity leave is marred by lack of organisational contact	Organisation: Sasha	<i>Maybe they've really missed me, and there's a pile of work like this I've no idea there might be, or there might have nobody to cover it, I don't know</i>
Second maternity leave does not lead to greater flexibility/understanding which is needed	Organisation: Heather	<i>Why would I go to the Midlands for a week to learn something that you could probably learn in about three hours anyway?</i>
Second pregnancy/ maternity leave restricted by unrealistic norms/expectations	Society: Heather	<i>I said that I didn't want to go on a rig whilst I was pregnant and it wouldn't be sensible eh but some of the male managers couldn't understand why I wouldn't want to try it and fit myself into a [flight] suit and go in helicopter off-shore for once.</i>

Second maternity leave tests balance between roles and role management and loss of agency	Organisation: Connie	<i>...and again they've been fairly flexible but they want me to work four days.</i>
Second maternity leave equates to escape	Organisation: Martha	<b>So</b> , <i>in a way it was a sort of relief to sort of stop working and just concentrate on having the children</i>
Flexi time is a false hope- positive perception of management reflects a false gloss	Society: Tina	<i>And everybody says best really work part-time.... no it's not the best of both worlds.</i>

This theme highlighted how all the women started off in full-time jobs, with positive reflections of their role as an employee. They had the experience of first maternity leave and there was a clear cut return. The narratives were straightforward with regards whether the first maternity leave experience was positive and the reasons for it being negative if that was the case. Their relationship with their paid working lives was constant. Then, this theme identifies how during their second or subsequent maternity leave, their sense-making about where they stood in the world of paid employment and their organisations reactions to them had left them disillusioned. This theme focuses specifically on their perception of their working life. Blame for the discontent and stress was apportioned equally to society's expectations and organisations but not necessarily explicitly or confidently. The next theme considers the individual level manifestations of this disillusionment.



### 6.13 T1 master theme: disillusionment (b) - individual responses

The impact of the disillusionment on the individual women was varied and the impact was a form of fraying of their previous working life sense-making and subsequent decision-making. The table below offers example of how this fraying was manifested in each of the individuals.

**Table 15: T1 master theme - disillusionment at individual level.**

<b>Emerging Themes reflecting sense-making of working life experience</b>	<b>Interviewee linked to manifestation of disillusion to paid employment life.</b>
Paid work dominates narrative – and life?	Tina
Boundaries between work and home life increasingly blurred	Connie
Maternity leave boundaries blurring	Tina
Unclear future	Sasha
Agency gained – still working on balance	Martha
Disintegration of mother role and agency	Heather

The sense-making at this stage of the working woman’s stories of their paid employment was very different to that of the ‘good employee’ sense-making at the start of their working lives. Sense-making also took on a different dimension to the first maternity leave. Whether or not the first maternity leave was viewed as positive seemed to be a reflection of organisational policy and management. Then, with the following maternity leaves, the sense-making for experiences is cast wider and the implications were felt much more personally. None of the women perceived the maternity leave as a temporary break with a clear, plan to return to a role they had before. All described their relationship with paid employment in very different terms. The essence of their stories at this stage suggests that return to paid employment is as receivers of decision-making that presents a challenge – but they were not prepared for a battle, not least after their very different experience following their first maternity leave. Their reactions to this were varied. Tina accepted the challenge, embracing it as her own decision to manage work and family. Connie embraced it as a means to an end, temporarily, until she has another child or pursues her own business goals; Martha felt she had risen above this stage and saw others suffering it, having been there already; Sasha

was in a state of distress about what to do and Heather was in a position of temporary acceptance, since the additional maternity leave time given, over-rides future planning needs. Summer appeared to be the only one, who was content with regards her current and future plans and placed her concerns on her husband's position instead. The theme captures an uneasy sense of individual tension and unclear future. The 'good employee' master theme dissolves over time; the woman's in a man's world remains throughout and this disillusionment occurs only after the second or subsequent maternity leave.

## 6.14 T1 master theme: self-development and work-related skills

Separate to the other master themes, is a theme, again only emerging in stories about their second or subsequent maternity leave. The table below offers examples of emerging themes, comment and example of quotation from each interviewee.

Table 16: T1 master theme - self development.

<b>Emerging Theme reflecting sense-making of working life experience</b>	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Motherhood is self-development time	Time for re-evaluation of life in general	Martha	<i>but now I've got family it's got everything you need, it's got community, friends, preschool and everything you want if you sort yourself out if you have a balance going you can have a pretty cool life</i>
Time for self-analysis	...of impact on others.	Martha	<i>Because..... I had the theory but I didn't have the skills, well I thought I did</i>
Time for observation	There are different types of mothers	Connie Sasha	<i>so I reckon I'll be I won't be a power mum</i>  <i>....but I just, I'm not ready to give it all up [laughs] you know, all of it, cause I seem to, I've worked quite hard to, you know, to get to the position I'm in now, you know so, I'm not, I'm not ready to give it all up yet.....</i>
Skill development	Management development: through	Martha	<i>If I ever go to work again, you know, by Jove I'll be a much better people manager, much better at</i>

	committee work		<i>organising <b>my</b> time and much more realistic of goals and things like that.</i>
Time to re-balance roles - multi-tasking is symptom not coping strategy	Re-balancing through involvement in voluntary work.	Summer  Tina	<i>I think you can get involved in too many things. You got to pick the right jobs and the right places to do them really  I am the world's best multi-tasker.</i>

Running almost in parallel to the disillusionment theme in relation to work, is the clear emergence of new sense-making which takes a step back from their paid work identity. The two interviewees who did not appear under this master theme were Sasha and Tina. The self-development is based on time spent in a community of other mothers and specifically, taking on roles within the various support groups in the form of toddler groups, brownies etc. Sasha, who at the time of the interview was in turmoil about her future paid work, is an exception, offering no emerging themes of self-development of skills during her second maternity leave. Notably, she took her daughters to the mother and toddler groups but was not on any associated committees. Tina's narrative suggested she felt she learned from being a mother generally and used this to bolster her professional competence. Her working pattern suggests no room for various toddler groups etc. although she may well have attended but not been on committees. Either way, there was no mention of this and no suggestion that self-development was part of her sense-making of her second maternity leave.

The master themes appear to suggest a clear pattern of findings (see overleaf):

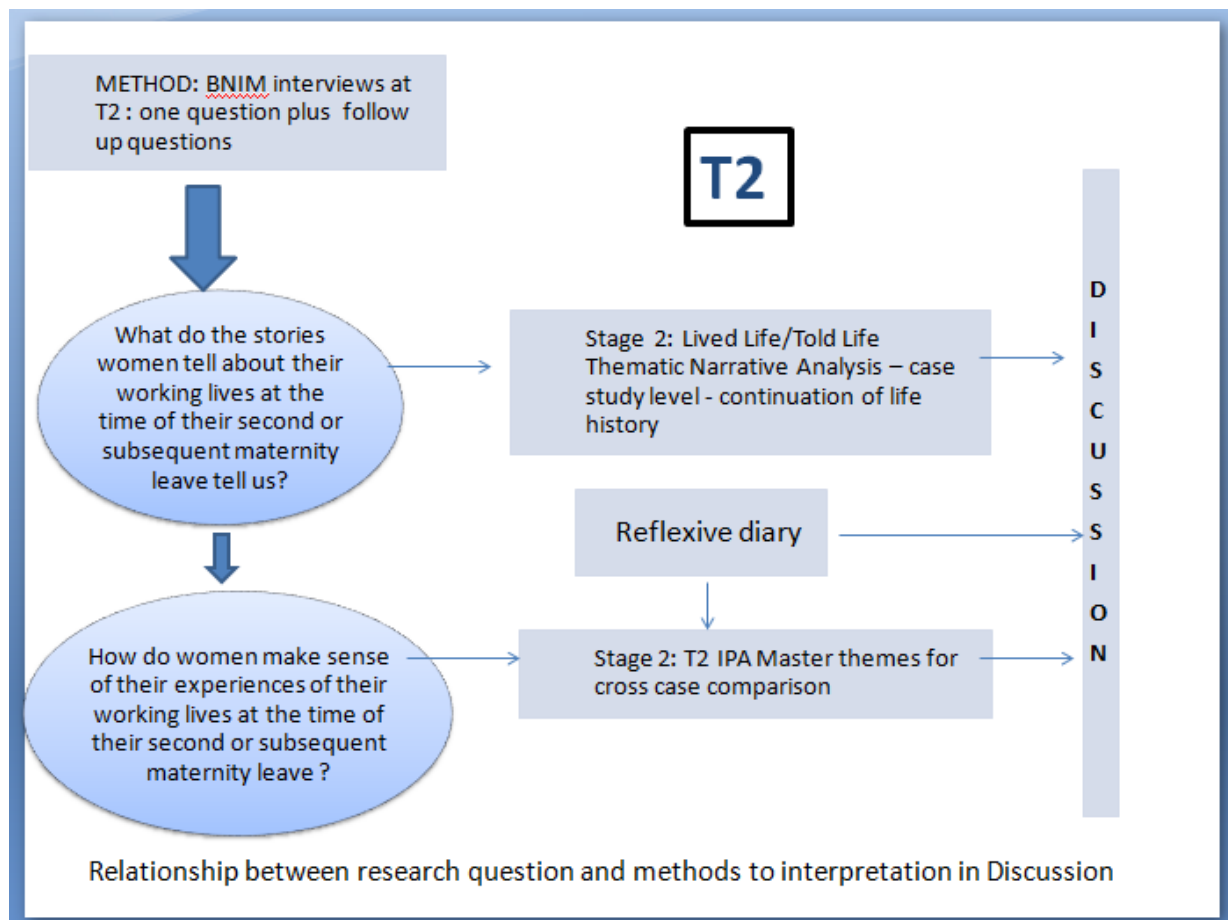
**Table 17 T1 IPA pattern of findings**

<b>Master theme</b>	<b>Working life period of story and sense-making</b>
A woman in a man's world	Present at all stages
The good employee	Pre-motherhood only
First maternity leave effect on working life is negligible	Maternity leave 1
Disillusionment: paid employment  Disillusionment (fraying): individual responses	Second or subsequent maternity leave
Self-development + on-going work related skill progression	Second or subsequent - and future planning for some

The next section describes the interview findings at T2 before collating both sets of analyses of both sets of interviews in the Discussion chapter.

## Chapter 7 T2 Findings

Figure 29: Relationship between research question, analysis and interpretation.



### 7.1 T2 Introduction to findings

At T2, a similar thematic analysis to that conducted at T1 was conducted to check for 'thematic coherence', a term Adams (2001) uses to discuss the psychology of life stories. This is taken from Habermas and Bluck's (2000) concepts of the ability to narrate their stories representing biographic coherence, causal coherence and finally in adulthood, thematic coherence. The second set of interviews allowed the 'lived story' biography to be updated. Thematic coherence, despite radical shifts in some participants' plans, was noted and this is commented on where relevant in the case study summaries that follow.

Each case study is revisited before the second set of IPA findings are presented. The IPA findings are first compared to the thematic findings before each IPA master theme is described. This leads naturally to the penultimate chapter, the Discussion where the case study findings and interpretations are triangulated with theory.

## **7.2 T2: Tina - from controlled professional to Lady Godiva**

### **7.2.1 Recap of T1 interview and analysis**

As was demonstrated by the general thematic analysis of Tina's narrative captured in the first interview, Tina's story had a common theme of conflict running throughout her working life. This conflict was specifically associated with managing herself, which she portrayed as successful due to her self-declared expertise at multi-tasking. Furthermore, her professional life was described as a 'fire-fighter'; her role associated specifically with resolving conflict in the workplace. Tina had returned to work apparently successfully after her first child, the ability to do so, she believes, was the result of a well-chosen career path into the private sector. This she feels was a decision well made despite incredulity of her peers at the time. She inferred through her early return to work that her second return to work following the twins was also expected to be another successful transition – as the capable working mother of now three children. Despite a positive gloss on her conflict resolution and control, incongruous comments at the end of her interview offered an insight into the fact that there was discontent beneath the glossy sheen. Tina exercised a degree of control over how much and what information she was willing to offer at the interview.

The IPA analysis of the same interview offered little support for the disillusionment phase associated with the second maternity leave period, but the facade hinted at some difficult sense-making *in progress*. A lack of balance between work and family life could be inferred, for example, through a complete lack of reference to her children and her role as a mother but no other evidence for this was available. It could be argued that this was a reflection of her profession. Tina did recognise the difficulties other mothers face through her work and identified with the difficulty of work and mother roles. No reference was made to her circumstances other than her wise career decisions and ability to manage. Further discussion of her personal experience of the differences in a second maternity leave was not developed further and her contribution to master themes was such centred on the sense-making of the first transition into motherhood.

### **7.2.2 Second interview: background.**

The interview took place in her home. Tina's appearance at T2 was, as before, highly polished, and her home immaculate. Her manner however, was much more relaxed only once becoming slightly restless when my Dictaphone unexpectedly stopped. Her story telling style was fluent, included many supporting mini-narratives but this time there was much more variation in speed and volume. (The first interview was memorable for the speed

at which Tina spoke). Another difference was her adoption of thinking out loud comments, for example:

*...and then when I actually did give in, why am I using the words 'give in'? I think I did feel like I was giving in...*

Such comments support the interpretation that sense-making is on-going, dynamic and fluid. She also linked me into the story on a couple of occasions for example towards the end: "*I would hate if my views in any way contradicted what you've done with your family and I came across insulting.*" This time there was no attempt to offer a positive sheen on her experiences and decisions. Her zealousness for her new found family-work balance, which accommodated a lack of control was in stark contrast with her first interview and was perfectly illustrated in her parting story: the topic of conversation with my daughter as we headed back to the car was the strict observance of costume rules for dancing competitions. She described her dislike of such strict guidelines and declared herself to be totally unrestrained by such rules. As an example, she described how she went horse-riding just the other day on her (secluded) land in a boob tube – which proved to be an ineffective clothing item. Her mischievous and hearty laugh reflected a very different woman from the one I first interviewed. Finally, her friends had apparently given her a nickname based on her commonly cited 'apple pie metaphor'. The fact that she used it at all reinforces the adoption of a new set of values.



### 7.2.3 Update of lived and told story

Table 18: Tina lived story update and narrative themes.

Revisit Interview: Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Returns to work 2 days a week</p> <p>Mother's health worsens</p> <p>Takes a secondment with the Council</p> <p>Returns to organisation; reduces hours further</p> <p>Resigns but gives extra notice</p> <p>Mother dies</p> <p>Lets all home support staff go (nanny, cleaner, gardener etc)</p> <p>Husband's business grows and she takes small admin role.</p> <p>Admin support staff taken on</p> <p>Voluntary roles including Children's Panel member.</p> <p>Plans include finishing book on managing twins.</p>	<p><u>Theme: Dealing with conflicting needs: resolving work</u></p> <p><i>"I think we're conditioned to think we can do both things" (work and home-life)</i></p> <p><u>Theme: Emphasis on status/social expectations</u></p> <p><i>"cause I'm a teacher"</i></p> <p><i>"my own traditional working career"</i></p> <p><i>"a kept woman" and "just a mum"</i></p> <p><i>"at the time we were just farmers";</i></p> <p><i>"I suppose I wasn't working...you naturally absorb all of that work you'd paid someone to do"</i></p> <p>Husband is supportive especially with regards farmer's role in the community.</p> <p><i>"My work has always been part of my identity and that wasn't there anymore."</i></p> <p><u>Theme: Dealing with conflicting needs: managing self</u></p> <p><i>"Bullied" (into returning to work)</i></p> <p>With respect to maternity leaves: <i>"it made me more aware that I had choices"</i></p> <p><i>"I am only one apple pie and I can never be more."</i></p>
<p>Overall Balance:</p> <p><i>"For me, when you're working and raising a family you're not doing anything well, my personal opinion, you're just coasting....and I think I'm actually living."</i></p>	

#### **7.2.4 Comment on narrative themes from Tina's told story**

##### Told story (thematically analysed):

From the above, it is clear that there was a dramatic change from the portrayal of a committed professional working mother, who had specifically made choices about her career path to accommodate her dual role to *"just a mum"* for whom *"career is a dirty word"*. It was interesting at this point to remember that her 'lived story' themes remained constant, although the way in which they were manifested and made sense of, had changed as the following description describes.

##### Theme: status, commitment and expectations

The first theme (social status/expectations) was still in evidence, for example, with respect to aligning her wife and mother role with her perception of a farming family's traditional role in the community. However, her own perception of being a farmer's wife was described as *"just farmers"* and a *"kept woman"* albeit one supporting diversification into a successful business. She still identified strongly with her identity as a professional and this in part was satisfied through her role with the Children's Panel. In contrast with other community work, the Children's Panel, she felt respected and recognised her professional status as an asset. Her narrative still therefore placed emphasis on status, specifically that of a fully trained teacher, an identity she admits to struggling without.

##### Theme: resolving conflicting needs at work

This theme was still very dominant in her narrative and responses. Her conflict due to her employment became untenable partly due to her reduced 8 hour week. Increasing family demands meant she was simply unable to satisfy all her roles. She rationalised that her restricted working week and long journey to work led to her being at the receiving end - and causing - further conflict at work amongst her team, rather than resolving conflict. Part-time work, she decided was not the way forward for anyone. This was a complete reversal from being the one who prided herself as a successful 'multi-tasker' and 'fire-fighter' to someone who was struggling to cope with her clearly conflicting and incompatible demands on her time and her role. The 'dealing with conflicting needs: managing self' theme is therefore closely related to managing work theme.

### Theme: conflicting needs: managing self

The third theme, 'dealing with conflicting needs: managing self' was a strong theme as it became a key aspect of the interview. This contrasts with the narrative offered in the first story. Her updated narrative offered some insight into her sense-making of why this was the case. Tina really opened up about this further still, once probed a little in the semi-structured interview, and this was discussed further in the T2 IPA analysis section below.

At the time of the T1 interviews, Tina had, as planned, returned to work, and after a failed attempt to arrange suitable childcare, worked minimal hours to ensure she could both take and collect her school age child. The twins went to work with her, initially twice a week.

Her attempts after the interview to settle back into working life included a secondment to evolve her role in her own organisation. The arrangement led to physical exhaustion:

*"I twice I fell asleep in the car driving home at three o'clock in the afternoon"*. Resignation within 9 months of returning followed – almost two months notice was given. During this turbulent time her mother died, there was an element of role reversal with her father's need for care and support - and her husband's business diversification was becoming increasingly successful – and demanding. After leaving her job, she subsequently offered support to a number of voluntary committees and then moved onto a more formal and unpaid role as a Children's Panel member. Her time as *"just a mum"* was now spent managing the home, supporting her husband's business, voluntary work and in her spare time, Tina was writing a book about having twins.

A new theme emerged in the follow-up interview story that of her *"supportive husband"*, who she credited as both acknowledging her unpaid work and giving her room to make her own decisions about her ending her paid employment.

### **7.3 T2: Martha: wise old bird to a slow (happy) boat.**

#### **7.3.1 Recap of first interview and analysis**

Martha was pregnant with her fourth child (unplanned pregnancy) and had stopped working for a large organisation after her second. This seemed largely to be due to an inability for the organisation to manage part-time work. She was at T1 self-employed as a child-minder. At T1, she had described her battles to re-gain control due to her over-commitment to voluntary work. Her story was punctuated with various attempts, failed and successful to gain agency. For the first time, she felt she would be able to have time to enjoy her baby and even consider what might lie ahead for her with regards paid employment in the years ahead. At T1 time, she had, in her own words, become this 'wise old bird' who was now ready to take control. Three themes were identified in her story:

- Agency – largely lack of it at first then slowly gaining control but never completely acknowledging she has complete agency
- Negativity, fairness and conflict - conflict begins at school and then surfaces throughout her working life. Her story was punctuated with the theme of unfairness in the world of paid employment.
- Resolution through motherhood - and redemption – she has minor victories throughout her paid life but does not regain control properly until she employs a strategy of reducing conflict in motherhood. This increases her sense of agency.

#### **7.3.2 Second interview: background.**

Martha suggested we meet in the town's cafe. It was close to the primary school where she dropped off her four children, which was also a short walk from her house. After twenty minutes of waiting, I got a text back from Martha saying she was just on her way. Martha was unflustered by her late arrival and gave no explanation. I heard from another source that it is not unusual for her children to be at school late.

As with the others, I started by explaining the interview will be in three parts: a request for an update of her story; some questions and then discussion of findings to date.

### 7.3.3 Update of lived and told Story

Table 19: Martha - lived story update and narrative themes.

Revisit Interview: Lived Life Story	Revisit Interview: Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Sets up Facebook page for one committee (fails)</p> <p>After the birth of 4<sup>th</sup> child, stops committee work</p> <p>Sets up Facebook accounts to help other mothers manage (problematic)</p> <p>Helps out with Zumba – active member</p> <p>Full-time mum.</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Agency</u></p> <p>Attempt to manage school info</p> <p>Attempt to manage committee</p> <p>Future plans: <i>“there are options....”</i></p> <p>(Community projects)</p> <p><i>“So I thank you nature...”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: Negativity, Fairness and Conflict</u></p> <p>Facebook solutions – conflict</p> <p>Tesco customers</p> <p>Family fun days</p> <p><u>Theme 3: Resolution through motherhood</u></p> <p><i>“No more committees!”</i></p> <p>Maternity leave: <i>“best days...”</i></p> <p>Career: <i>“something to do, give”</i> (community projects)</p> <p><i>“I wasn’t interested in this womanly role...”</i></p> <p>(u-turn emphasis)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Overall Balance:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Basically I think in a nutshell, you get more in touch with life when you stop working you’re not just roboting along and you do have to think what on earth you’re up to, what you’re up to..... and that’s a good thing.”</i></p>	

Martha had not returned to paid employment. Her three primary school age children and baby took most of her time. Her husband had been promoted and held a managerial position

at the head of a large department. She was still involved as a *parent* in PTA committees and other groups.

#### **7.3.4 Comment on narrative themes from Martha's told story**

Martha's story - and interview responses - was full of musings and reflections, as before. The analysis uncovered the same three narrative themes reinforcing again the idea of thematic adherence.

##### Theme 1: agency

Martha clearly believed she had regained agency and was driven to maintain it following the birth of her fourth child. With four children under six years of age, she described the logistics to manage them as challenging. To help, she turned to her previous paid employment skills in IT to help set up a Facebook page so that mothers could share information about forthcoming school events. Similarly, she wished to continue to contribute to committees but time-wise this proved difficult. She again turned to social networking and Martha set up a Facebook page, assuming that the committee members would adopt and manage it. As before, she did not accept complete agency for her career path, repeating the story of her failed attempt to work part-time for a large organisation:

*Being a big American company about not really wanting to... look too much at part-time... they would, but not if they could get away with it, you know what I mean, which is a funny way of looking at it .....I mean I couldn't go back full-time with two little kids so I gave up the work and we tightened up belts.*

In another part of her story, her seeming control over the challenges that motherhood had brought on, was described in a way which side-stepped responsibility for her decision:

*so I thank you nature, yep, she's throw things in your life that will make you get your perspectives sorted out and say this is wrong....*

Regardless of the trigger for her need to manage herself, her narrative told a similar type of story as before where she described herself as "*this wise old bird*" to reflect on "*taking the reins*". In this interview she described the need for information as early as possible: "*I'm a slow boat, it takes me a long time to turn.*"

More generally, Martha blamed the government for the decisions mothers make regarding returning to work:

*Westminster has put us in this situation where everyone you know, is coerced to go back to work I don't necessarily think it's a good thing obviously they're thinking what's good for the economy maybe but ...it starts it's not good for the family and you're storing up all sorts of expensive problems for later on.*

Clearly, the theme of agency and control remained salient in the story but this time Martha showed how she has taken a step back to consider a wider perspective. Was this due to her lack of personal contact with the world of work, or because of her vantage point as one who is now on her fourth set of toddler groups, nursery classes with new mothers, return-to-work mothers and so forth? The theme then remained stable – she has a sense of agency but did not take credit for it. Her stories around the theme took a broader perspective.

#### Theme 2: negativity, fairness and conflict

Martha's negativity, apparent especially at the early stages of her story at T1 was resumed, this time with some resolution (theme 3)

*I think we're encouraged to even from school, not to think negative reactions to people who like thinking all the time I get negative response, people are offended people are annoyed...people want you to shut up and go away and erm, it's all the better to be very passive, don't rock the boat you know shy away, shirk into your little corner and live your life as quietly as you can or as non-offensively as you can until you die but that isn't living certainly I can't do that I've tried it and I cannot do it.*

This admission linked into the second element of conflict. Martha's conflicts in contrast to the above, narrowed down to her daily life and managing the conflicting needs of her children:

*It's **such** an annoyance 'cause you can't quite get yourself, you want to go to everything with your kids, you want to be there but you can't quite make it to the assembly or whatever.*

Some of Martha's solutions did not work, despite her best attempts and led to conflict within the community she strives to help in an attempt to manage:

*I was at pains to deliberately retain the role as a parent so I set it [web-page] up for them and I thought, well, there you go, you can **use** it. They'll have to moderate it and administrate it. I've made them administrators, well I thought, that's self evident you'll have to administrate it and I thought, well, you know you've been running as the sort of decision makers of the school the voice of the school for that long, you'll know what to do. I got it **totally** wrong; they didn't know what to do.*

So with the best intentions, she created negativity towards herself and her peers who put the idea together: “there was a lot of backlash” and “they reacted in the most unfriendly manner you’ve ever seen, heh, so there was **flaming** going on.” An interesting manifestation of the conflict element of the theme came when encouraged to expand on her reference to her dreams in childhood:

*One I can easily remember is a little house like my mum's a little family a little bit of garden, beautiful surroundings, beautiful sky, different sky every day lovely places to round about a happy little home and a happy little family and the other one was just so scary [laughs] it was like och gee whiz change the frigging world or something I don't know - just make a big difference, that was probably an evil thing, I don't know about that now [embarrassed laugh].*

The two dreams correlate with her two greatest conflicts at T1: family life and making a difference to the community through the committees – and relates to later reference to wanting to work in community projects in the future.

Two further manifestations of conflict position her as a mother and organisations, as represented by her husband's role:

*The woman's at home all day, the man's out you don't see one another a lot, you've got totally different worlds you're living in now, different experiences, different relations to things you know come at poles apart from one another, you know you don't see eye to eye you know one can resent various things that the other one does or does not do and so it goes on but I mean ach everyone goes through that once in a while it's not even, it's just a in many ways in modern western culture, that's marriage for many many people and my parents before them and theirs before them and so on it's just the way humans have to be so, there's that, that's a conflict which comes from being put in that position not willing and choosing not to go back to work.*



An example of such conflict was given through Martha's description of a work's 'family fun day'. She described almost comically, the information she needed upfront and the logistics which came with bringing four young children to such an event from spare sets of clothing and nappy changing facilities through to packing food for babies through to active 6 year old boys:

*And it's the wives that are doing all that for the guys, so they don't have to think about that you know, they think: let's have a family fun day it will be fine.*

She did not however, take an exclusively female perspective. The fairness element of the theme was manifested through her description of why maternity leave boundaries need to be clear cut:

*Two reasons, one: if the company doesn't have a guide of what it's doing, even in a six month or a time ahead it needs to have some sort of parameters it can't have just roll on because if you've got someone on a roll, the business itself needs you'll need someone to fill that role....and the other reason was what was the other reason?....Yeah business perspective they needs some guidelines, even if they change it, say even if after six months they're going to some kind of review period so that they can, so that they know what the hell they're doing basically.*

This element demonstrated the broader perspective Martha took in problem solving, an extension of her IT skills. She felt strongly about this need for fairness and reinforced the point:

*And I'm totally in favour of doing what's best for your mothers and your families; I think businesses need to shift majorly in that direction for society's benefit as a whole. I think they will see it but anyway it will work against that if you're expecting them just to say: 'right I'm going to have time off until and we don't know when we coming back and we'll just please ourselves' I think people will lose a bit of credibility... and it could just be something that knocks them in the opposite direction.*

### Theme 3: resolution to motherhood

Martha remained resolute about her decision to remain in control and this was still linked to control and balance:

*I'm not going to be as busy as I've been and I'm going to concentrate on home but I think before you can get to do that you have to get that balance back.*

But this time she expanded the story and her resolution to motherhood was described as clearly changing through experience:

*I had scorned [it] in the past, I wasn't interested in this womanly role and I didn't think highly of it before I got there erm as a youngster and I didn't see my mother enjoy it.*

Furthermore, she positioned her role now, as being more important than paid employment:

*You got to spend all your time with your baby which was very important, get away from your work [laughs] which is never as important, never ever.*

On probing deeper within the semi-structured interview, Martha further demonstrated the strength of this theme in her narrative:

*B. It does make sense...*

*Yeah, I don't know yeah from a woman's point of view I suppose it does, yep...why, why would it that be? I suppose it's inevitable but in terms of women working... hmm are they missing something? Are they left with a part of their life that they're missing and the man by contrast is, all he's got is that part of his life, filling up with a means to escape....*

*B. What do you think that a woman is missing?*

*I don't know....I think the man does, I think the man does I think the man's life is so full of work that's it's obvious what he's missing out, he's missing a lot of his time with the children not just not seeing them five days out of seven"*

The resolution therefore was reached in part, by drawing comparisons not between her previous and current life but through the comparison with her role and her husband's.

## **7.4 Case Study 3: Sasha – art returner through home and heritage**

### **7.4.1 Recap of first Interview and analysis**

Sasha's first interview took place in her home at the time. Sasha's story was a mixture of goal-driven determination – once she made her mind up to do something, it would happen (for example: her decision to specialise using her nurse training). In contrast to this, there was also a huge reliance on external triggers to make life changing decisions (for example: after the huge shock of not getting into art college). These two themes alternated against a consistent backdrop of what Sasha valued highly – financial stability, new challenges and variety. Motherhood appeared to have taken away the ability to form new goals as she described the importance of being there for the girls clashed with her desire “*not to give it all up, yet*” with regards work. She had returned ad-hoc, part-time, after her first daughter although the gap between her two children meant that the return period was very short. The interview identified her state of irresolution, despite the end of her second maternity leave fast approaching. This fact accentuated by the formal letter from her organisation asking about her intentions. Neither her organisation, nor Sasha, had up to this point initiated any contact, let alone discussion/negotiation with regards forward planning post maternity leave.

### **7.4.2 Second interview: background.**

Sasha had moved house and the interview took place in her new home. The house had historic links and Sasha was in the process of restoring original features.

### 7.4.3 Update of lived and told Story

Table 20: Sasha - lived story update and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Takes full year off work</p> <p>Returned to work part-time over 20 hours a week+ (more than before). Same organisation, new role.</p> <p>Moved house</p> <p>Become an active volunteer of the Heritage Society – one day a week.</p> <p>Reduced work to 8 hours a week.</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Goal-driven determination</u></p> <p><i>so actually erm yeah it probably made me realise that my job was probably that I was needed in my job so yeah.</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: Lack of Goals and determination</u></p> <p><i>“I’m kinda fed up with my work em to be honest em I’ve sorta you know just but if I could think of something else to do I probably would you know</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: External drivers/influences and triggers.</u></p> <p><u>Theme 3: Values of variety, independence and financial security</u></p> <p><i>it was exciting for me, ‘cos it was all new things.</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Overall theme:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I suppose if I’m not being busy then I don’t know what I’m doing”</i></p>	

Sasha spent time going over her return to work after her first child before moving onto information about her life after the first interview. It transpired that soon after the T1 interview, she and her husband decided to move house. Eventual contact from her organisation, offering a modified role with a new challenges they wanted her to head, left her changing her mind about returning to work after her second daughter. Her new role led her to work 24 hours a week, more than she had done since she got married and had the

children. She had subsequently reduced her hours to “two days a week”, which she later clarified actually translated as roughly 8 hours a week. Each grandmother has the girls for a day each so there were no childcare issues. She had moved back to the area she grew up in and was an active (voluntary) member of the Heritage Society.

#### **7.4.4 Comment on narrative themes from Sasha’s told story**

As before, Sasha’s told story was difficult to tease apart as Sasha had a tendency to digress and lose track of her narrative. This resulted in my occasional prompts to get a response to the question asked.

##### Theme 1a: goal-driven determination

With regards her second maternity leave decisions: Sasha described how she had agency at all stages despite citing what sounded like a mantra: “I just always think, what happens, happens.” This contradicted her first version of the story, specifically, her maternity leave decisions, which she now took responsibility for and narrated it as part of her ‘goal-driven determination’:

*...because I’ve orchestrated it so that my work you know the kids came first.....my work is not that important.....I kinda organised my work would be like that....but I do feel that **my** role as a mum is....that’s my **full-time** job if you like.*

Her narrative at this point became very confused as she tried to justify her role as a full-time mother with paid work two days a week. To justify this confusion, she explained that it was all about how men, she conceded, do their full-time well-paid job and then come home to a mum, who’s still doing her work: “**the mums are in charge still.**” So despite the confusion she felt about working full-time and two days a week in paid employment, Sasha was clear on one thing:

*It is the hardest job I’ve ever done in the world you know ‘cos it’s just relentless and it’s non...you know, it’s every day.*

##### Theme 1b: lack of goals and determination

This theme was less conspicuous and arguably merged into the first in the second interview. What was clearly identifiable in her narrative was her fear of not working, as mentioned: “a really frightening thought” which was the driver for her determination to remain in some form of employment.

At the end of the interview, as I debriefed her and checked details of her told story from the first interview, she was surprised that I picked up on her determination saying she and her sister were just describing how she, Sasha, was so much more goal-driven than her sibling. She was told she “sees things right through to the end” and was “not a quitter”. She had set herself a goal of helping out her local Heritage Society. With regards her paid work, her goal setting ideas were still not formed as evidenced by her indecision with regards whether or not a career in art would support her financial ‘needs’. (Her husband’s salary is adequate to support them). The lack of goals was in part described as a desire to stay in employment:

*I’m kinda fed up with my work erm to be honest erm I’ve sorta you know just but if I could think of something else to do I probably would you know.*

The reason given for this was a new member of staff, taken on to support her role – without prior consultation: “which has put my nose out of joint a wee bit I have to say”. This had not had the effect of acting as a full trigger (theme 2).

#### Theme 2: external drivers/influences and triggers.

Despite Sasha’s claim: “I’ve got two children now so really I’ve got a good excuse not to go back”, Sasha responded with great enthusiasm when she felt needed (first and second maternity leave, heritage committee), especially during her second leave: “of course I felt chuffed you know somebody wanted me but it wasn’t necessarily what I had in mind!”

Sasha’s need therefore to feel wanted and her need for fresh challenges resulted in the complete a turnaround with regards her plans around maternity leave. She had, she explains, up to the call from her employer ‘resigned’ herself to be a full-time mother as “they’re not going to want the wee, small hours that I can do.” She described her second maternity leave as a time when she was “at my lowest ebb you think that nobody wants you.” Arguably, her angst could have been resolved with a proactive call on her part but Sasha’s need for a trigger to act at crucial transitions remained fixed. The extent of the requirement for an external trigger was illustrated well here:

*I waited the whole year and I hadn’t heard a thing from them and I sort of was like I kinda resigned myself to the fact that I’d had a year off and I thought they’re not going to want me back you know .... for me erm I’d kinda already made my mind up about that erm and anyway after a year I thought I’d touch base with them nobody had been in touch or anything and eh so I went in to see them and I I was absolutely gobsmacked you know they were desperate for me to come back.*

This preference for an external trigger was described in one part of her story as the benefits of networking in the community as it might lead to serendipitous meetings *“and before you know it you’ve inveigled yourself into something else.”*

With regards other drivers and challenges, these she happily found: the new home; the period decoration; the Heritage Society work. It was perhaps the case that these interests were now perceived as adequate to take over her fear of ‘not working’. She explained she was bored with her paid work now and said she would even prefer *‘to do the ironing’*, rather than start her working day.

To summarise, there was some conflict in her story with regards her need to work but a lack of external triggers at work, together with her fear of not working – and the wish to set a role model for her children - have hampered her ability to leave. She was however, finding new challenges within the community and her home life, which appeared to be slowly replacing her interests:

*I just erm I’m delighted to have something else to focus on so obviously girls you know work but erm to have this to focus on as well and it is a big commitment em you know but it’s just nice to feel part of a community so yeah.*

### Theme 3: values of variety, (independence) and financial security

The independence component of this theme was non-existent, presumably because she relied on her husband to earn enough money to live from. The value of money was less of a dominant theme, she referred to earning *“a reasonable amount of money.”* Although money was referred to when describing her unpaid work (her husband’s lack of understanding of voluntary work), it was perhaps manifested most through her overwhelming fear of not being in paid employment again: *“a really frightening thought for me”*. Whereas before the need for variety and money was satisfied through paid employment, now, this appeared to be satisfied in part at least through other outlets as described above. The theme modification arguably linked into her evolving understanding of the meaning of work (see IPA master themes). The drive for variety however, was a further conflict source for her as manifested in her decision-making regarding a return to paid employment and her desire to stay at home.

*I always need to be doing something new otherwise I’m just bored and I’m bored at my work now cos nothing’s new it’s all just same old same old you know.*

At the end of the interview, she concludes: *“I suppose if I’m not being busy than I don’t know what I’m doing.”* Just as with Martha’s dream, an unusual interpretation of evidence to support this theme for variety, as well as perhaps conflict, was Sasha’s appearance – depending on whether you spoke to her left side or right side, she was a blonde or brunette – a unique hair colouring! Her appearance was of a flamboyant style – one which would perhaps befit an artist.



## **7.5 Summer: still working, planning - and getting there.**

### **7.5.1 Recap of first interview and analysis**

Summer was the only long term self-employed interviewee in my sample – the mobile beautician. She told me the only way she could be interviewed was while she was doing her job and I opted for the longest process I could (naively) think of, which resulted in a rich stream of recollections and reflections. Her story was a simple one of an unsuccessful education and a YTS beautician work scheme, which after a protracted training programme, led her to a becoming qualified as a beautician.

### **7.5.2 Second interview: background.**

Since Summer had done my nails on several occasions after the first interview, I had hoped to avoid bleaching my hair and opted to invite Summer to a cafe for the second interview. The interview took much longer to get going but once Summer did open up, she presented a rich narrative, filling in much detail about events originally omitted from her T1 story.

### 7.5.3 Update of lived and told Story

Table 21: Summer - lived story update and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Does not formally return to work as planned</p> <p>Husband gets made redundant</p> <p>Starts back working evenings</p> <p>Business slowly grows but Summer only works when the children at play group/school or asleep</p> <p>Fund raising secretary for village group</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: (Education and) qualifications – and career.</u> [Beautician work] <i>“it’s just a job”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: skill development</u> <i>“and I always find that that doesn’t improve a group”</i> <i>“I don’t want the committee to be like that anymore”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 3: Coping with working life transitions with support:</u></p> <p>Motherhood was: <i>“busy, “hell”</i> so return to work was: <i>“a bit of sanity, a bit of normality, be Summer, not x or y’s mum”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- husband’s supportive role but traditional division of labour</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Overall theme: carrying on as before, working towards the end goal of self sufficiency.</p>	

Summer did not return to work until she had to for financial reasons. These were primarily due to her husband’s redundancy. She had planned, she explained, never to work again. She also took on the role of a fund raising secretary after recovering from post natal depression.

#### 7.5.4 Comment on narrative themes from Summer's told story

##### Theme 1: (education and) qualifications – and careers.

This theme is much less prevalent at T2. In fact, the idea of career only emerges when Summer was questioned about her qualifications:

*I don't class a beautician as a career ....Beautician is just a job. Just a job that can make you's money...which I love I absolutely love it.*

As such, she did not immediately associate it with the qualification she took so long to achieve. However, she does go on to say:

*Yeah, I do but I can't get any higher, I can't get any more qualified, I could get more qualified I suppose, I could go and and do a few but not **much more** ....*

As an after-thought to the comment regarding qualifications, she added on: “*I can't*”. Her notion of a career was associated not with more qualifications but with more responsibility, which she said, without stopping to reflect, she did not strive for. Later on in the interview, Summer contradicted her earlier comment about owning a salon deciding that it could be a future goal:

*I **could** have my own salon.....that would be an option and have people work for me then. And not have to actually do the work.*

*B. Would that appeal to you?*

*I think so. I could, yeah I could run a salon.*

*B. Do you think you have the skills to do it now?*

*Yeah, definitely, I think so.*

The line of questioning leads the narrative analysis to the next theme:

##### Theme 2: skill development

Despite post natal depression after her 2<sup>nd</sup> child, which she blamed on motherhood being “*just all **far** too much hard work....*”, Summer is defensive about her ability to self manage: “*I think I knew what I was letting myself in for....*” and agreed to become a fund raising secretary for the group her first daughter attends, pre-school. Again, she perceived the voluntary work as something she was obliged to do, in her role as a mother. It did however, pay dividends, as described in her newly found transferable skills if, she were to have her

own salon. She also credited motherhood more specifically for her personal skill development:

*Just cause you've got more confidence, life in general really you just....*

*B. Do you think it's just getting older, ageing?*

*No, it's probably to do with having the children. Because not only, you, you you don't have to stick up for yourself but you sometimes you don't have to stick up for your children. And I think that makes you more confident.*

Later on, her story disassociated gaining confidence with regards skill development and being a confident mother:

*I **seem** that I am but I'm not really ...you know. I'm always asking, I'm always on the phone like: oh Mum, what do you think about this? Do you think I should .I'm always asking Jake and, you know or anybody really....*

This theme is also linked in with the third theme, which again emerges at T2. Finally, her skill development was clearly observed during a charity bag pack she organised and managed. See Appendix 3.

### Theme 3: coping with working life transitions with support

Whilst Summer described how Jake, her husband earned the money, her narrative suggested she was in part playing a supporting role beyond her motherhood, which did not sit comfortably with her plans to work minimally, if at all:

*And I started working in the evenings then. Cause obviously I couldn't work on Saturdays cause he was not wanting to look after two children on a Saturday morning, which is a bit selfish [high pitch] but there we go, no. so we just worked evenings so that's all I've been doing really since then. So.....looking after children and working in the evenings.....more so now.*

However, this moved her away from her ideal, was contradicted and her narrative suggested she was unsure about future transitions with regards paid work. In the end Summer resorted to her shared end goal of self sufficiency. When questioned about paid work within this end goal dream, she says:

*Well I think we probably have to, I mean realistically we're not going to be able to go make toilet roll are we? Someone's going to have to work. I mean if we both did a part-time job so we are at home most of the time then yeah, that would be great which means I could do my beautician work still. And that would be **brilliant**".*

For Summer, this theme captured some hints that there is some conflict between her enjoyment of paid work and her desire not to work. This is more fully explored using IPA, specifically, the master theme: the 'meaning of work'. It was the lack of transition to her and her husband's ideal that caused her to breakdown in the interview:

*Oh no, it's not that I'm upset, it's just made me realise that ..... our aims haven't changed, they're still the same. .... I sometimes wonder: oh what's the point? Why don't we just stay where we are and just keep paying the mortgage for the rest of our life and **fit** in with everything and everybody but it's not what we want to do".*

It seemed that Summer had, in part taken a leading role in moving towards the transition towards self-sufficiency, or at least embraced it goal for transition that must be acted on sooner rather than later:

*We need to do it now. We're not getting any younger. I don't want to be digging bloody potatoes out when I'm six hundred do I?! [laughs]*

*Post script: at time of writing up this PhD, Summer had finally sold her house, found a five acre plot to build on and was in the process of completing the sale.*

## **7.6 Heather: motherhood is not enough but it is plenty!**

### **7.6.1 Recap of first interview and analysis**

The first interview with Heather at T1 was one which was emotive, full of negative stories of motherhood and associated experiences and relationships. The story ended with positives in that she had found work, which had granted maternity leave as well as a career break. It was during this career break, that Heather had time to properly explore her role as a mother and for the first time, felt part of a community.

### **7.6.2 Second interview: background.**

Heather appeared relaxed but prepared – she invited me into the same room in her home clutching some clearly comprehensive notes she had prepared for the interview.

### 7.6.3 Update of lived and told Story

Table 22: Heather lived life update and narrative themes.

Lived Life Story	Thematic Analysis: Telling of Told Story
<p>Maternity leave had turned into a career break</p> <p>One treasurer role for a committee</p>	<p><u>Theme 1: Male-dominated work sector and job insecurity</u>  <i>“It’s mainly men who work there.....with a lot of old-fashioned attitudes”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 2: ‘Anti-mother’ maternity leave decisions</u>  <i>“but I think I must have been a proper survivor being able to do that..”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 3: Organisational (and peer) perception: pregnancy and motherhood are problematic.</u>  <i>“I don’t think anyone at my work would <b>ever</b> think there was any transferable skills <b>ever</b>”</i>            Returning to paid employment: <i>“basically you’re coming back as a beginner again”</i>            Part-time work: <i>“a second class citizen, you’re not counted”</i></p> <p><u>Theme 4: Re-addressing the balance – feelings resignation (work)</u>  <i>A few years after that I’ll be back at home looking after old relatives so there you go, that’s our lot [Laughs]...you realise that that’s what’ we’re going to be doing, 15 years of it!</i></p>
<p>Overall theme of success in motherhood but resignation regarding work:  <i>I’m really in two minds about it all the time...it’s all very natural, you have the good and the bad...<b>I wasn’t doing anything wrong.</b></i></p>	

Despite not returning to work, Heather's narrative still centred around the four themes as before, although one, theme 2, anti-mother maternity leave decisions, had a different emphasis:

Theme: 1: male-dominated work sector (and job insecurity)

The job insecurity part of the theme was no longer relevant and whilst Heather did make passing reference to her much valued ability to take maternity leave followed by a career break, this did not represent a narrative theme. The issues of the work sector she was in being male-dominated, was still very much in evidence: "*It's mainly men who work there.....with a lot of old-fashioned attitudes*" and later:

*...but I think the men I worked with didn't have the pressures. ....it affected my confidence of being able to do a promoted post, because in the back of my mind I'm still trying to think of the children to come with...*

*B. do you think you're typical of other women?*

*I'm sure I am.*

Furthermore, Heather's narrative reinforced this point that not only was she in a male-dominated sector but that this led to discrimination through her reference to not offering equality in wages to women; not being open to part-time work or flexibility and even indirectly discriminatory human resource policies regarding what leave is paid for (child associated reasons are discretionary), sports events result in paid leave. In addition, Heather described how organisations tended to resist change to cultural norms which discriminated indirectly, for example: holding courses which require nights away from home: "*The kind of approach to work that you must go away for a few nights.*" And it is exactly this culture, which Heather focused on repeatedly:

*For me, I guess it is if you're going back to work after children and you're looking for some flexibility and part-time arrangement, that's when it's the, that the negative part.*

This, she argued, is not insurmountable, citing examples of women who work together to reach compromises:

*...but I think but I think you'd have to work with women who would said: 'yes that sounds reasonable let's do it that way.' But if you're working with men, whose children are grown up and at the time the women were at home and god forbid their*



women were... had to leave their jobs if you got married, women actually left the civil service. One of these **bosses** is actually one of these men and it's like: 'why are you here?'

The theme overlapped more at T2 with the second theme, perhaps reflecting the distance now between her life now and T1. That said, her husband was still in the same sector and so news about the workforce and who has left/been promoted was regularly forthcoming.

#### Theme 2: negative maternity leave decisions.

At T1, the decisions forced upon Heather were given a strong emphasis throughout. This time, the narrative theme changed emphasis. This time, negative maternity leave decisions were replaced with 'pro-mother' decisions regarding maternity leave, specifically her career break option. Heather's narrative reflected the positive aspects of her ability to enjoy her children now that she has no job insecurity and financial pressures are lessened as a consequence. *"I thought it would be nice to have another year at home."* This was reflected as being in sharp contrast to her experience of the first two maternity leave decisions where she narrates T1 manifestation of this theme: the loss of agency: *"I didn't have a choice"* and further:

*I wasn't physically fit enough to go back to work after the birth and I wasn't sleeping, the baby wasn't sleeping particularly well....you know I was physically and mentally trying to cope with that and suddenly I was back at work.*

She emphasised: *"there wasn't any choice and there wasn't anybody to help me have a choice."*

In contrast with her breakdown when reminiscing about the details of her first two maternity leave periods, this time, she reinforced a more positive perspective on this theme: *"but I think I must have been a proper survivor being able to do that..."* Although the anti-working mother attitudes by many men in her workplace remained salient in her narrative (see theme 3), she said many men simply believe: *"women with children should really be at home."* The fact that there were no jobs that did not include travel abroad and the sector was *"not open to part-time"* meant that the problem was almost self-perpetuating with no women setting role models and few women moving up to strategic positions. This resulted in her stance: *"so it doesn't make me want to think I want to go back for a while"* as she inferred that those who were successful in returning part-time after maternity leave do so: *"many, many levels below what they were trained to do, that's not a career."* In short: *"there are no developments or*

*prospects ever if you go part-time.”* She therefore narrated maternity leave as marking the end of a career choice. The full-time option after maternity leave was similarly not perceived as a possibility for Heather:

*I tried to work, I tried to have a career and work work full-time and have children and now I, it's too much, it's too hard and it's a real pressure on the women.....it doesn't sound very good does it?”*

The ultimate effect of anti-mother maternity leave decisions was the result, in which presumably the organisation suffers:

*They all leave at my work, the women all leave, they don't stay, they **all go** and that's because they have kids, erm the women won't go back and stay if they don't think the work is worthwhile.....and the worthwhile isn't just financial...it's how they are treated.*

At another point in her story, she remembered an instance of another woman who was in her workplace with children who “*didn't hang around*” and any attempt to remain in work was a result of women “***managing to hold onto their job.***” The effect was not limited to the organisations either. Heather's attempt to remain in her union whilst on maternity leave was compounded, presumably by ignorance, rather than policy:

*In fact, the unions got in touch and said I pay a small amount supposedly on maternity leave. And they said you need to stop paying it because we need to leave you off the union because if we vote, you can't vote because you're not at work, so you need to be off because we're going to have a vote for a strike. And I said but I'm employed, and then I, I had to go out and go back and forth through all this negotiation for them to say yes, she is employed so she can vote (1hr) (laugh) and they said they'd never come across it before [laughs]. Like I'm the only person!*

The quote above also offers a clear overlap here to the next theme.

### Theme 3: organisational (and peer) perception: pregnancy and motherhood are problematic.

The key issue which emerged under this theme at T2 was the perceived loss of skills as a consequence of maternity leave:

*But I think people at work might think if you've been off work for a year basically you're coming back as a beginner again, I think that's what they think [laughs]*

Yet, Heather clearly associated her third and fourth maternity leaves periods as times when she not only held onto her skills but also gained new ones:

*"I think in places where more women generally work, the women themselves will understand the...skills you gain from other experiences in your life" yet as Heather narrates in her story, these skills are not recognised: "I don't think anyone at my work would **ever** think there was any transferable skills ever."* In another part of the story, she explained that as the primary carer for four children:

*At the moment my job is huge in terms of all the things I've got to consider, you know and work through and all the responsibility is absolutely **huge**, no one else thinks that, it's a shame that. [laughs].*

As a result the perception of mothers by any organisation was a theme Heather returned to in this theme too as indicated by the lower pay:

*If the woman has taken erm, you know has been out of work for a few years raising children and then come back into the job market she's almost definitely not be as well paid then, you know, men.*

And this she perceived as being an imbalance before women go on maternity leave and was then compounded further by the maternity leave. Part-time work resulted in being considered: *" a second class citizen, you're not counted."* The statement she backs up with a story of a researcher who was discriminated against purely due to her part-time status. The problematic, low status and negativity associated with motherhood for Heather extended beyond organisational parameters:

*Most of the time I just feel like the mother, the mother that nobody pays attention to [laughs] er the mother that suggests things and they ignore me until it's suggested by someone else.*

The theme emerged again, during the card sort when she added:

*I think what it is, it's very much as though if you're a single mum with children, then you're very much down at the bottom of the pile, which is very sad...it's indicative of how we value mums.*

The evaluative statement associated with stories about perceptions of motherhood being problematic was as follows:

*So yeah, I think the ad thing is that mums have got to...got to settle for less, in whatever part but men don't seem to have to settle for less, do they?*

#### Theme 4: readdressing the balance – feelings of resignation (work)

At T1, her delight at having time to enjoy her children was clear. This she explained was because she had the choice of a lengthy maternity leave, the option of a career break and the guarantee of work when her leave ended. Heather was exploring voluntary roles in the community and revelling in her mother role. Over time, this theme in her story had moved more towards resignation or at least, some lack of clarity with regards the benefits of staying at home:

*But I think at the moment I just feel erm, I'm really in two minds about time all the time....I must admit now I feel a bit brain dead and I feel, I feel quite isolated at home I think.*

Her voluntary role as a treasurer for one group was: “a very, very small commitment.” She was keen to recall the benefits, “the first steps, first words” reading “**all** the newspapers” and commented “I could do something with the parent teacher association eventually.” These were options which had previously not been available. The balance she had now achieved through gaining this time brings with it a realisation which is incongruent with her feisty anger at the imbalance at work and negative perceptions men and organisations have:

*I think err, I think I realise now that I can't have everything. I thought I was managing to have it but I don't think I was....[shaking head].....A few years after that I'll be back at home looking after old relatives so there you go, that's our lot [Laughs]...you realise that that's what' we're going to be doing, 15 years of it!*

The problem, according to Heather is one shared by other mothers: “I know a lot of mums thinking: what on earth am I going to do?” And her reflections led her to infer that the solution needs to be traced back, in part to the women in the workplace:

*I think we need to develop more of a sense of what's important and what's right and what's not right and I think at work you just get on with what they tell you to because you're a **good employee** and I think now I'd be going: no, actually, I think we need to focus on **that** more, **that's** more important.*

Under this theme, it may also be appropriate to slip in Heather's comment on the current research:

*I think it will help mums like me feel like we actually have a voice, you know because people like me seem to be forgotten.*

## **7.7 T2 IPA findings.**

As before, IPA was adopted to accommodate the social construction of the interviewees' sense-making of their working lives using a double hermeneutic. The same process was adopted, with each interviewee's narrative slotted into a framework to identify emerging themes along with conceptual, linguistic and descriptive comment. Examples of emerging themes identified contributing to each master theme are offered following the same pattern of presentation as for T1. Where the master theme is of particular importance, each case study is considered in relation to the master theme and research question.

The first table identifies the master themes at T2. If the master theme was present in each of the case studies, this was noted in the final column (recurrent theme). The research question which evolved from T1 was:

*How do women make sense of their experiences of their working lives at the time of their second or subsequent maternity leave three years after T1?*

(See overleaf)

Table 23: Summary of IPA master themes at T2.

Master theme	Comment	Recurrent theme?
<p><b>Traditional stay-at-home mother - following tradition?</b></p> <p><b>Link to T1: A woman in a man's world</b></p>	<p>Summer, Heather, Martha, Tina and Sasha all consider themselves traditional 'stay-at-home' mothers</p>	Yes
<p><b>The changing meaning of work – a split concept</b></p> <p><b>Link to T1: Disillusionment (individual)</b></p>	<p>The time off has led them to reflect on what work means to them be it paid or unpaid.</p>	Yes
<p><b>Organisations' anti-mother perceptions/policies</b></p> <p><b>Link to T1: Disillusionment (paid work)</b></p>	<p>Heather, Tina, Martha and Sasha perceive employment decisions to be hampered by organisations. Summer acknowledges the issue but has not suffered personally.</p>	Yes
<p><b>I've changed: self-development + time to reflect</b></p> <p><b>Link to T1: On-going self-development</b></p>	<p>Each interviewee reflects on their personal self-development – which is largely not recognised by the employment world.</p>	Yes
<p><b>Community network</b></p>	<p>All interviewees attribute their self-development or sense-making to an active link to the community but only until second or subsequent maternity leave</p>	Yes
<p><b>Perceived role of society's support</b></p>	<p>Manifested in various ways and feeds into organisational and individual rationalisations</p>	No

As can be seen, the master themes give the impression of representing links to sense of on-going development of sense-making from T1 master themes.

## 7.8 Comparison of IPA master themes to narrative analysis themes

Whereas the women's narrative themes at both T1 and T2 seem fixed, the IPA findings appear to capture ongoing and dynamic sense-making. The following offers support for this finding before each master theme is unpacked further.

It is clear that Tina had re-evaluated *both* maternity leave experiences and this sense-making started *before* the interview begins - as she mentions at the start of the interview. Tina was one of the two interviewees whose narrative offered little support for the 'self-development' master theme at T1. Whereas in the first interview, Tina portrayed herself as a professional woman in control; at T2, she was far more relaxed and concluded she is: *'the kind of mum I want to be'* who offered much rich detail in vocalised, open thought processes, for example:

*Then when I actually did give in, why am I using the words 'give in'? I think I did feel like I was giving in...*

Martha, despite her claim: *"I'm not a natural sharer of this stuff"* (T1) fills both sessions at T1 and T2 with much self-reflection. As with Tina, her rich, detailed vocalised sense-making facilitated the analysis. Lines 859-874 offered a good example of the type of soliloquy Martha's narrative was prone to:

*That's a conflict which comes from being put in that position not willing and choosing not to go back to work and I'm trying to think of an explanation for you [laugh] just to make sense of what I just said.*

*B. It does make sense...*

*Yeah, I don't know yeah from a woman's point of view I suppose it does, yep...why, why would it that be? I suppose it's inevitable but in terms of women working... hmm are they missing something? Are they left with a part of their life that they're missing? And the man by contrast is, all he's got is that part [paid employment] of his life, filling up with a means to escape.*

*B. What do you think that a woman is missing?*



*I don't know....I think the man does, I think the man does I think the man's life is so full of work that's it's obvious what he's missing out, he's missing a lot of his time with the children.*

Sasha's narrative also captured the fact that her sense-making was on-going. She had no difficulty vocalising her thought processes but was comfortable to offer incomplete rationalisations. Her narrative from the outset at T2 clearly illustrates she was making sense of some of her working life experiences as she narrated them resulting in similar rhetorical questions. For example, with regards her management of two young children, a necessity to slot in additional work roles:

*you know, erm, I kinda feel, I, I've broken the back. Does that make sense? You know, so it's.....yeah they're actually, yeah.*

In doing so, also drew me, as an interviewer and as a mother, in for support for her sense-making. This was accommodated by the phenomenological nature of the analysis.

Summer's sense-making of her working life was evidenced when Summer was asked about her longer term work plans. The snippet below illustrates her not fully formed sense-making, which as she verbalises it, showed her exploring various options before reaching a conclusion.

*B. OK. What would you like to be doing work wise in five years time?*

*...I don't know. That's hard. I really don't know. I think I would like to back to work full-time but then again, I would want something that, I still could look after the kids on the holiday I wouldn't want to be...it would **have** to be a job where I had the school holidays off which would mean.....teaching or, I don't think I wouldn't want to go and do that. ....I could be a dinner lady I suppose. [laugh] That would be a no no.*

*B. Would you not want to carry on with your beautician work?*

*Yeah I would but if I did that, I wouldn't be able to I wouldn't be able to have six weeks off in the summer and ....*

*B. So in five years time, Ellie would be*

*Nine....*

*B. And another two years she'd be going into secondary school.*

*Yeah ....[looks puzzled].*

*B. So do you think you'll be actively looking for a change in work then?*

*Yeah, probably. See what, no, I don't think I want to change.... [long pause]*

*B. What about in ten years time?*

*.....no, they'll still be at school and I think I still think I should be there. Yeah.*

*B. So what sort of work?*

*The only thing I can do I suppose is to carry on as I am. Being a mobile beautician and going out in the evenings. But that's exhausting and as they get older, they're not going to go to bed so early and I'm not going to be able to chill out so much am I? After they've gone to bed.*

*B. So is it what you'd like to do or what you feel you have to do? Would you **like** to carry on as things are now?*

*No, not really. I think, I think..... on the the scheme of it, as a family we don't want to be working full stop. We want to be able to sustain our own life really, with self sufficiency you know and you know, eco friendly environment and healthy living and ....just look after ourselves....*

*B. and not be involved in paid work at all?*

*Well I think we probably have to, I mean realistically we're not going to be able to go make toilet roll are we? Someone's going to have to work. I mean if we both did a part-time job so we are at home most of the time then yeah, that would be great which means I could do my beautician work still. And that would be **brilliant**.*

*B. So that would be your ideal.*

*To just work part-time as I am.*

**Figure 30 Excerpt demonstrating Summer's on-going sense-making**

Heather's story, anecdotes and reflections were powerful and extreme with regards illegal employment practices and failures of the system/society to support her as a mother. The same T1 gender inequality narrative themes were returned to. However her story suggests that at T2, she had found herself in the position she longed for and has readdressed the balance, although not satisfactorily: her experience of being a working mother in an organisation that does support her time off, however, was not what she expected. The IPA permits a further exploration of her sense-making of this contradiction of wanting to be a *working* mother yet knowing this is a goal, which she has proven in her sector is impossible to achieve. Specifically, IPA allows the narrative theme associated with a sense of resignation to be unpacked further and demonstrate that resignation is a state of flux rather than a fixed acceptance.

## 7.9 T2 master theme: traditional stay-at-home rationalisations?

This theme exists as an extension of the ‘woman’s in a man’s world’ master theme at T1. The table below offers examples of emerging themes, comment and quotation examples from each interviewee.

**Table 24: T2 master theme - stay-at-home rationalisations**

<b>Emerging Themes reflecting sense-making of working life experience</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Example of quotation</b>
Stay at home mother is valued by partner	..but admits that her choices may have been insulting to other working mothers	Tina	<i>[he] quite likes the fact that I do community things because he doesn't actually have any time and he says he if had more time <b>he'd</b> like to get involved so he's quite happy for a wife...to be a kept woman [smile]</i>
Women support partner's paid employment	Inference: organisations are oblivious/expect this	Martha  Tina	<i>So it's not just like just 'jolly' ....it's the wives that are doing all that for the guys, so they don't have to think about that you know, they think: 'let's have a family fun day it will be fine'.</i>  <i>I think they're more likely to be at a stage where they're you know higher in their career when when they've got a good woman behind them [card sort remark]</i>
Natural division of labour	The stereotypes were confirmed by all in the card	Martha	<i>.....and that comes as it has done for time immemorial that its own pressures these are no surprises,</i>

	sort too.	Summer	<i>the woman's at home all day, the man's out... Cause obviously I couldn't work on Saturdays cause he was not wanting to look after two children on a Saturday morning, which is a bit selfish but there we go...</i>
Achieved life goals, now a mother	Sasha in particular illustrates conflicting sense-making – she is equally driven to paid work (see narrative themes)	Sasha	<i>[Being a mum] that's my full-time job if you like you know it is you know men can't understand that because obviously they do their work which is like well paid job and they go and do it and that's fair enough... I could have been the bread winner in the family I, I can't imagine that role so obviously I wanted to be the one who's the mum.</i>
Roles rightly follow family traditions  (Organisations assume wrongly roles should follow traditions)	Links to natural division of labour emerging theme	Summer  Heather	<i>I didn't have children to pay someone to look after them.... and I waited an awful long time to get Ellie so I feel it's my job and my responsibility to look after her and take her to school and pick her up and feed her and everything else.  and it's like: 'why are you here?'</i>

All 5 interviewees describe themselves as 'stay-at-home' mothers, even though Summer and Sasha have (limited) paid employment. Summer only works when her children are in bed; Sasha's flexible 8 hours are somewhat incongruent with her 'full-time mum' self-description but she was at pains to explain how her work can take second place, if a doctor's

appointment or some other child orientated need emerges. Tina acknowledged that motherhood for her, is a full-time role and to try and fit in paid employment proved to be impossible. Martha at T2 had all but relinquished her child-minding duties and Heather admits that her four children are as much as she can manage at present.

As such, despite no explicit intentions to give up their working lives when narrating their working life narrative at T1 their plans had changed after their second or subsequent maternity leave. This was in sharp contrast to their return to work after their first maternity leave - albeit not entirely successful return in all cases. The analysis explored their sense-making of this change in plans. This first theme suggested that the interviewees perceive a sort of acceptance – albeit at times begrudgingly – of a natural stay-at-home mother role. Of interest is how the women reached their current working life position. Their universally adopted ‘good employee’ sense-making master theme at T1 had disappeared after T1 and before T2. The importance of this theme was reflected by a case-by-case exploration of sense-making that led to this change over time. Particular focus was included on the role of the organisation offering threads which were then woven together to form the third master theme (organisations are anti-mothers). This cross-over of themes was inevitable as rationalisations were not based on one variable but a combination of factors. To unpack this theme further, each of the five case studies relationship to the master theme is considered individually.

### 7.9.1 Tina

Tina provided a good example of how she continued to try and be the ‘good employee’ to the point of exhaustion:

*I remember coming home my husband was sitting at the kitchen table and I arrived home crying with the baby under each arm, who were crying, we were all just flopped down on the kitchen floor and he said: ‘what are you doing?’ and I said: ‘I don’t know’ and he’d been telling me for ages either **not** go back to work.*

It was obviously not the lack of organisational support that led to Tina’s realisation that part-time work with three children was impossible. Her employer was extremely accommodating, permitting her to work a flexible, reduced hour contract, her twins went to work with her and her manager developed a new role for Tina to ensure her skills and experience were kept in the organisation. Tina’s T1 interview ended with the unexpected evaluation:

*...and also I am a working parent I know you try, you try to do your best in both worlds you try to be this stunning wife and mother and you try to be really good at your job and everybody says best really work part-time, "oh the best of both worlds", it's like, no it's not the best of both worlds: I do half the mum job, half the housework job and half the actual job so... no, it's not the best of best of both worlds at all ...because one person suffers and it's me.*

A reminder of this remark at T2 resulted in Tina welling up with tears: *"Oh that makes me want to cry...I can see why I didn't last long!"*

It was at this point of the meeting she proudly described her apple pie analogy, which encapsulated her rationalisation. It is based on a coping strategy she read about in a book. Tina describes how a woman is like an apple pie, which can only ever be **one** apple pie. Before marriage she is whole. Once married, she splits her time into two – time for herself and time for her role as a wife. When the first child comes along, the pie has to be re-cut into three, so the slices get smaller. She explained how she had an especially difficult time re-cutting her pie when she had twins as suddenly, everyone had a fifth of the pie, instead of a third. The pie pieces will get bigger again she said cheerfully, as the children grow up and move away. In the meantime, she can only ever be *"one apple pie"*. This sense-making sits comfortably with her narrative theme of dealing with conflicts and natural inclination to be a problem-solver. In addition, it must solve her cognitive dissonance regarding a complete u-turn in her career plans. Her ability to be a stay-at-home mother and maintain her professional identity through the children panel, plus her husband's support are all offered as support for her rationalisation (see also master theme: community roles).

In the card sort question, where the interviewees are asked to place cards in order of perceived value by organisations and society, Tina positioned the women's cards in an order suggesting the typical de-valuing of mothers with 2 or more children and unmarried women at the top. She positioned all the men's cards in a row, reflecting her belief that neither employers nor society see that the number of children a man may have, would affect his ability to manage work and family:

*I think they're more likely to be at a stage where they're you know higher in their career when when they've got a good woman behind them.*

This relates to a common emerging theme that it was a woman's role to support her husband, as indeed Tina now does. The following snippet further supports the underlying traditional division of labour in her household:

*B. Why do you think there's a difference then? [Pointing to two different sets of responses]*

*T. [Long pause]. I just don't think in the workplace it's a consideration for the if the man has children...*

*B. Why is it different for men?*

*T. because..... women, the man just tends to go to work, do his job [laugh] and that's it. And the woman is expected to have, just before she goes to work, made the beds; done the breakfast; [laugh] sorted everybody out; sorted out childcare, erm thought about what's for tea that night; thought about whether the football kit is clean, and how the kids are going to get to dancing lessons.*

Further probing about whether this was a social expectation led Tina to offer an example of a friend whose husband breaks the norms but still supporting the overall unpaid labour roles associated with mothers, regardless of their additional employment roles:

*He actually does do **all** the food shopping ....and he does most of the cooking but then that's seen as his bit she does all the washing, all the organising of the children..... So she's often got home at night by the time the meals already made, and then he's reading the paper so she gets in at that time and she's got to do all the dishes, and still put the three children to bed.*

It is important to remember that despite Tina concluding that it was unethical for an organisation to encourage career-driven women to focus solely on their paid employment, she also used phrases such as 'give in' to describe her resignation from her organisation – an organisation which fully supported her motherhood status. The conflict was clear and Tina's sense-making leading her to become a stay-at-home mum was not easy for her. Importantly, it can be deduced this all came about *after* the event, specifically after her second maternity leave.

### **7.9.2 Martha**

Martha in her reflective style specifically addressed her traditional role and the fluidity of life, which brought her to this role, despite her expectations and reservations:

*but ...life the way is set up it changes around you and the father was then in this traditional bread winning role, he was doing, he was doing a lot of hours, his job was the only thing that we had it was the only thing that we had, it was very important to him it was anyway but his career was the focus and he would do the hours and he's climbed that ladder he's now a manager he's he's ...he's in charge of the city, middle east and somewhere else, I forget where...*

*B. He's really done well...*

*He's done well and he's got there I knew he would I told him years ago he would be a manager but he didn't believe me, he was partially right, he said five or ten years and I was like no, you can do it before then you're better than all of them but of course you have to have the experience not only for them to give it to you but for you to be able to do it but erm, so he's in a very much in that world, and I was very much in a world which I well, I had scorned in the past, I wasn't interested in this womanly role and I didn't think highly of it before I got there erm as a youngster and I didn't see my mother enjoy it, she didn't enjoy it she was always, choring away at the chores, grrrr, you know I look at them, through my eyes now .....history repeating and you know, dad worked long hours as well.*

This snippet supported the traditional division of labour sense-making. In addition it offered another element of support for the master theme through the emerging theme of the woman's role of supporting her employed husband. It emerged in Martha's story of her partner's 'family fun days' at work, which are described as the organisation's impression management of being 'family friendly'. For Martha, as for Tina, their resignation from paid work after their second maternity leave was described as a 'relief' as they could focus on one full-time role, their unpaid role of being a mother.

### **7.9.3 Sasha**

Sasha's sense-making for a traditional stay-at-home role similarly suggests an acceptance of paid employment being within a 'man's world' (T1 master theme). Her personal conflict between wanting to work and wanting to be at home was not completely resolved (see narrative themes) and her sense-making picked up the conflict well at T2:

*Fabulous if you can stay at home not meaning that folk that stay at home it's not a good value, but you know, the girls see that you work, that you go to work and that you, you know you've got a job...and it's **nice**, so yeah.*



As she progressed through the interview, she further reflected on her own thought processes and says:

*I suppose when I'm thinking back it would have been lovely to just have focussed on the girls and not you know had something else to think of in the background.*

In this particular case-study, it was therefore particularly interesting to hear Sasha's responses to questions on inequality in employment. Her responses to the questions at this part of the interview were very hesitant, with many false starts. The question of who should stay at home seemed to get to the crux of her conflicting views and her sense-making was exposed as not presenting a coherent picture:

*I **could** have been the breadwinner in the family...I, I can't imagine that role so obviously, I wanted to be the one who's the mum...'*

She regained her sense of coherence by turning the point to one of equal pay, which she confidently stated should be unquestionable. Her card sort pointed to the belief that marriage equals stability. Again, Sasha's rationalisations were not fully formed at this point and as she attempted to verbalise her justification for her card sort choices. She recognised her lack of an explanation and cut it short by saying; "it's odd isn't it?"

Sasha felt strongly that the difference between the genders goes beyond paid employment and as such traditional division of labour is deep-rooted and extended beyond the roles of mothers. She referred, for example, to the book 'Men are from Mars and Women from Venus' to emphasise this belief. She was firm in her conviction that **exactly** the same job should result in the same pay. Sasha did however, reintroduce a question mark by ending that in her husband's industry some of the work is 'not really a job for a woman' and some of the older men would not want to have a female boss, because they think women are 'meek'. On balance whilst Sasha appears to be offering conflicting rationalisations for being at home, the majority of the conflict is in part perhaps due to a personal drive to be in paid employment to satisfy her own need to have variety, challenges - and recognition - in her life, rather than perceptions of sexist attitudes. The need for recognition in part explained her change in plans, 'resigning' herself to full-time motherhood albeit whilst working more hours than since she married:

*...and I I was absolutely gobsmacked you know they were desperate for me to come back erm had heaps of stuff they wanted me to do couldn't wait for me to come back.*

Furthermore, Sasha's employer, through a lack of contact and communication during her second maternity leave up until this point fed Sasha's insecurity. Sasha's personal drive was therefore in conflict with her traditional stay-at-home rationalisations. Although at first she did return after her second child, over time and by the time of T2, her stay-at-home mum rationalisations had become dominant once more. (See also community master theme as it is Sasha's role in the community which helped feed her stay-at-home rationalisation).

#### **7.9.4 Summer**

Summer was unequivocal about the fact the ideal scenario is that mothers stay at home to look after their children. Some mothers however, she reflected, want to go back to work for a variety of reasons but these were described negatively. She, for example, was happy when money was tight, to work a little after her second child. Traditional division of labour was hinted at in the following: "*if the kids need looking after, he doesn't **need** to stay at home, does he?*" Her views on her reasons for wanting to stay-at-home were clear:

*I've had children to look after them myself. I didn't have children to pay someone to look after them.... and I waited an awful long time to get Ellie so I feel it's my job and my responsibility to look after her and take her to school and pick her up and feed her and everything else.*

Summer saw no conflict between her rationalisation for being a stay-at-home mother and her evening work, at T2:

*I'm just a mum that goes out to work.*

*B. Can you see, is the same for other mums?*

*No. I see other mums as going out to work and they're workers and they are part-time mums.*

*B. Do you think they struggle with role conflict?*

*Yeah. It's really hard. I don't think they struggle as in ....physically. I think they struggle mentally.*

So whilst Summer personally did not struggle with accepting a traditional role, she acknowledged she sees other mothers do. Her particular job means her knowledge is likely to be based on a considerable sample of women. Summer's particularly strong feelings about motherhood are inevitably in part due to her long battle to become a mother and her

sense-making is not affected by the demands or expectations of an employer due to her self-employment status.

### 7.9.5 Heather

Heather's sense-making can be compared to Sasha's and Tina's in that there are two conflicting stances. Whilst Heather found some resolution in community roles for her drive to be in paid employment as did Tina, Heather's needs remained unmet, despite some attempts at integrating into the community. All three interviewees however, offer vocalised sense-making and rationalisation for staying at home. Heather's rationalisations for staying at home were largely focused on a lack of organisational support as evidenced by the narrative themes – notably that men in her sector hold traditional views on the division of labour and do not understand why she would want to return to work. She did however, further reinforce this position by reaching out to different reasons for accepting her position including the sheer volume of housework associated with four children and a lack of family support. Other reasons were however, also give for her stay-at-home position. This gave the impression of trying to convince herself, as well as portray logical sense-making:

*I could I did I feel I could manage my juggling work and home and at the moment I don't feel I can, I don't think, I don't have any help from grandparents or anything, it's just....just us.*

The following snippet captures both types of stay-at-home rationalisations – from the work front and from home:

*So I think **combining** the two is pretty much impossible actually, **now**. [laughs]*

*B. Do you think you're typical of other women?*

*[Pause]. I'm sure I am. But I think some women haven't realised, you know I tried to work I tried to have a career and work work full-time and have children and now I, it's too much, it's too hard. And it's a real pressure on the women.....it doesn't sound very good does it? It's too much, it's too hard too much pressure on the women in the type of workplaces we have.*

There was clearly an overlap in the above to the third master theme (organisation's anti-mother perceptions/policies) and like Summer, she noted that her thinking is not unique. In fact, Tina eluded to the conflicted sense-making mothers face in T1 too. At one point, Tina told the story of when she suggested to one client that she employs a nanny/home-educator for her child rather than be unhappy with the services Tina's organisation offers (orange juice

example). Unlike the others, however, Heather concluded at one point that: *“I don't think I'm really a kind of....natural, stay at home mum”*. The use of the word 'natural' again alludes to the idea that the once she becomes a mother a woman is expected to 'stay-at home' supporting the traditional division of labour.

#### **7.10 Master theme 2: the changing meaning of work – a split concept?**

The next master theme helps unpack the sense-making in a different direction. As mentioned, the traditional stay-at-home mum role was not an explicitly stated aspiration in any one of the interviewees' T1 narratives. As such, there appears to have been a shift. Could this represent a shift in their understanding of the meaning of work? This question becomes all the more pertinent when considering the strength of the 'good employee' master theme at T1 in all case studies. How do the women make sense of this shift away from the good employee to a stay-at-home mum?

Again, this master theme is collated from emerging themes from **all five** interviewees as demonstrated in the table below. Clear links were visible in the emerging themes to the community which have been collated under a separate master theme.

(See overleaf).

Table 25: T2 master theme - the changing meaning of work - a split concept?

Emerging Themes	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Career has different meaning and is linked to identity	Tina: a critical turning point <sup>8</sup> . Summer: the least career minded interviewee associates work with her identity.	Tina  Summer	<i>Somebody said something like: 'I was a real <b>career</b> woman' and it was like 'what?!' ...I was actually insulted and it was the light bolt moment"</i> <i>Just to get a bit of sanity, a bit of normality be Summer, not Ellie or Rose's mum....</i>
Career was incidental but missed in some ways	In contrast, community work is effortful - and now planned	Martha	<i>I think before you have a family, you just think about it as something, the choice is you know incidental, it's not even there you need to go and decide what you were doing.</i>
Community work is meaningful and interesting	Sasha: work is interwoven with strong values	Sasha	<i>I don't get paid for doing it but sometimes you have to do things that you don't get paid for doing</i>
Work, career and jobs are separate concepts	In the 'good employee' master theme, all three concepts (work, career and job) are aligned and therefore not in conflict.	Summer  Heather	<i>Beautician is just a job. Just a job that can make you's money...which I love I absolutely love it.</i> <i>B. But it's not a career.</i> <i>No, No.</i> <i>B. What does the term 'career' mean to you now?</i> <i>I haven't got one!</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> + maternity leave results in loss of career, not necessarily a job but more work.		Heather	<i>I think err, I think I realise now that I can't have everything.</i>

<sup>8</sup> Boje would describe this as a 'little wow moment'.

The women's first maternity leave had a limited impact on the women's understanding of what work meant for them, although their disillusionment following the second or subsequent maternity leave was evident and perhaps triggered the re-evaluation of their understanding. For all, it would seem that to make sense of their experiences it was necessary to separate out concepts of work, career and job, which before motherhood were clearly aligned and reinforced. The alignment at T1, supported the common 'good employee' master theme. This fraying of the three concepts would help explain the variety of individual manifestations of the disillusionment at T1: Heather mourned the loss of her *career*, despite having 'a *job*' to return to; Martha perceived her unpaid *work* as a means by which to eventually acquire a *job*; Summer had no inclination to have anything more than a *job* as a mum, which she did not perceive as *work* but enjoys her paid job for the financial benefits; Sasha feels she has had the *career* and now just craves a *job* to satisfy her needs of variety – to supplement her *job* as a mother. Finally Tina had shifted her *career* towards the voluntary *work* so as to satisfy her professional identity concerns – her work-load has grown as a consequence. Before motherhood, all had work, which was their paid job and this was associated with their chosen careers.

Again, as this master theme is a major contributor to each of interviewee's sense-making of their working lives, the manifestation of this master theme in each case study is considered individually.

### 7.10.1 Tina

For Tina the realisation that the meaning of work had changed for her was sudden and dramatic, after her return from her second maternity leave, rather than a growing realisation:

*Somebody said something like: 'I was a real **career** woman' and it was like 'what?!' I never... put myself in that category I was actually insulted and it was the light bolt moment...*

Tina offered explicit explanations for why she perceived both maternity leave periods differently now, although there remains some degree of conflicting sense-making. The following comments about her return to work illustrate the contrasting emerging themes within this master theme: "I really enjoyed it actually, it was nice to feel...you know...I enjoyed my *work*" contrasts with later evaluation: "I think that I never really wanted to go back work". Perhaps conscious of her contradictory sense-making she rationalised: "If I hadn't gone back

*to work after each maternity leave, I would have felt I sold myself short” and later: “but when you take a step back and think, of course it was never going to work”.*

Tina was clearly aware of the huge change in her value of work. To embrace her new identity as a full-time mum, which saw as the only realistic way forward, she was almost evangelical: *“I thought I could do it all”* and later:

*For me when you are working and raising a family, you’re not doing anything well, my personal opinion is you’re just coasting...and I think I’m actually living....”*

Furthermore, she described a ‘career’ as a ‘dirty word’. She was acutely aware of it not being necessarily a shared understanding or value of work: *“I hope I’m not offending you in any way for any decision you’ve made in your career”.*

Tina therefore has adapted to the change by separating her professional identity – now channelled into community work - from her mother identity. Her concept of work and workload has in fact expanded:

*And now I’ve got – I think I was quite spoilt for a while, but then working allows you to be spoilt because you know there was a time when I had a cleaner, a gardener and a nanny and in actual fact, I can now do it all: I **am** the cleaner, the nanny and the gardener...*

### **7.10.2 Martha**

When asked about the meaning of a career, Martha explained:

*A good person will have a career but it’s not .....it’s not....your friend, it’s .....funny it’s something you just got to get on with and do, [laugh] whether you like it or not.*

It is unclear where this stems from but she was deep in thought and appeared to be describing her own experiences despite using the third person, in the segment below. Together, the two snippets might be describing how without work, she lost her ‘place’.

*I’ve been living on that cliff top, that odd man who doesn’t speak to anybody just lives and feeds the birds or a little castley thing and I think no, no that’s not good, I don’t want to be there either [laughs] so, I suppose that could be one effect of not working erm other people can have an effect a lot of folk have is they are working away “have*

*an effect a lot of folk have is they are working away, chavving away and then the shock of it, you know specially if it's been years and years they it can trigger a wee depression in them cause [sniffs] .... [long pause] because they're stuck in their own little ...world....without no structure and social structure so they just sort of slide down don't they?..That's a sort of classic thing that happens to women that don't stop working as well.*

Despite not really caring about her career or what her job was, without it, she was inferring she lost – or women could lose – some sense of their place in the world. This notion of distorted perspective is also eluded to here:

*...whinging on about your pensions and stuff because 'I don't like this bit about my job', or... they're so, you know, all they can see they're focussed on their little world around them so focused in on it the problems jump out at them.*

For Martha therefore, her last maternity leave had given her time to reflect on the meaning of work and see it from a different, wider perspective. Her rationalisations took a practical turn, again reflecting a common emerging theme whereby career and work are separated concepts:

*and now if I was going to work in Tesco's, which wouldn't terrify me now...*

*B. Why would it have terrified you before?*

*Because I would have found it boring I would have found it the end of the world, just so dull so uninspiring and dead end.*

The idea of getting a job appeared a more realistic goal than aiming for a career and was the culmination of her own, self-development whilst on maternity leave (see also self-development master theme). A job would serve a financial purpose and not replace her current role and identity, which she reflected on and was happy with:

*If I was going back to have a career, I seek it to have something to do with my life something that I would be very much more in charge of even if it was popping into Tesco's for four hours two days a week because instead of seeing it in that dim horrible way I described to you I would say that's nice, that's £80, that's £200 in my pocket. That's one of the things, I miss not earning one of the things after I left work was not earning my own money I soon got over it [laughs] because the other side weighed it out but it's it's healthy to earn your own money in a way.*



### 7.10.3 Summer

The financial aspect of work was also reflected in Summer's emerging themes:

*I think I appreciate more what you can have if you're going to work....and you just can't....just can't go and buy a new pair of shoes when you feel like which is a bit depressing init? [high pitch and laughs] I like new shoes [laughs]*

In addition, Summer's paid work was associated with her identity:

*And I could have some money then to do what I wanted to do like put petrol in my car and keep my car on the road and....*

*B. So you went back to earn some money for **you***

*So I didn't have to ask Jake for money [laughs] Just to to get a bit of sanity, a bit of normality be Summer, not Ellie or Rose's mum....*

Summer's sense-making placed emphasis on her job as a mother and contrasted this positively with her husband's paid employment:

*I feel that's my **job** though, my job. I'm their **mum** to look after them.*

*B. An unpaid job.*

*Yeah...no, cause Jake looks after us. I'm not unpaid am I, crikey! [laughs] Jake looks after us.....and later: They may get a pay packet at the end of the week but they don't get to see them doing their first bit of drawing, or their first anything. They're missing it **all**.*

During the semi-structured interview, Summer was asked about her reflections on her first and second maternity leave:

*B. So in hindsight do you feel that your second maternity leave was a positive or negative experience?*

*Positive.*

*B. Why?*

*Because you get paid to do nothing [laughs heartily]*

*B. Do you think you did nothing?*

*No, certainly not. I was busy*

Summer was in fact busy with committee work, as described earlier, but she struggled to perceive this as 'work' resulting in further conflicting comments:

*Erm, we did a bit of fundraising for the playgroup, a bit of bag packing and face-painting and shows and things like that to do, erm, school fate, erm. I don't know, I've been lazy ain't I? Well, I've been looking after [laughs] two children ha ha and I walk the dog! [More nervous laughing] yeah.*

As with the other case study findings, Summer had clear distinctions between work, career and job concepts, even if the concept of 'work' was a little restricted:

*I don't class a beautician as a career. Beautician is just a job. Just a job that can make you's money...which I love I absolutely love it.*

*B. But it's not a career.*

*No, No.*

*B. So what's the difference between an army career and a beautician work career?  
...I don't know really, that's a good question that! I ain't got a clue. I don't know I think it's just something.....I don't know a career is something that you're just, you're just just aiming to be, achieve the best that you can be....*

#### **7.10.4 Sasha**

Sasha claimed at the start that she did not understand why she took on quite so many hours after her second maternity leave, although it was clear she was happiest when busy. As commented in the first master theme, Sasha had a deep rooted need to work and this conflicted with her competing desire to put 'her girls' first. Work for Sasha was paid and this aspect stopped her from pursuing new avenues, for example returning to her teenage years goal of an artistic career:

*See I would I would really love to to do something creative and I really would but there's a frightening part of it is that is that you know obviously there might be a start point where I wasn't working I know that sounds really strange..... I haven't been in work so you know that part you know that part's almost like a really frightening thought for me.*

The need to earn money was secondary to the need to feel employed, in fact a fear of *not* being employed. This fear was a point she returned to again and again throughout her narrative: *I'm delighted to have something else to focus on.*" And a little more clearly in the segment below:

*...but you know the girls see that you work that you go to work and that you you know you've got a job and it's nice (interacts with child) so yeah that part of it was a strong driven thing with me to go back.*

Sasha started the interview saying she could not make proper sense of what she had experienced during either of her maternity leaves. She commented on the lack of organisational communication after her second maternity leave. Her comment *'it just seems very strange...'* when describing the organisation's approach to her suggested she blamed the organisation. Later on she offered the following rationalisation for the excessive hours she accepted after her second maternity leave as again being linked to her fear of not working:

*Because it it made me realise that I possibly was wanted and needed. Prior to, you know, cos I'd never been off or I'd never been I'd never had any time off I mean I'd worked solid from being thirteen.*

It was this type of enlightenment gained through vocalising her experiences that led her to decide that the interview process was like having therapy (see chapter 9)

A different dimension of this master theme is a repetition of the three concept separation. For example: Sasha repeated the distinction between career and work and a separation of concepts which is relatively recent:

*I haven't got any aspirations to be anything you know I didn't want to go down [another] route and I didn't and I don't have anything else that I wanted to do I reached my you know pinnacle [laughs] and that was me then I knew I wanted to be a mum.*

Her unpaid work for the Heritage Society was not a job and is not even described as 'work': *"Yeah well erm I obviously just volunteer."* This is contrasted with her husband's employment: *"because obviously they do their work which is like well paid job and they go and do it and that's fair enough."* The comment clearly linked to the first narrative theme.

### 7.10.5 Heather

Heather effectively grieves for her loss of career and her sense-making led her to the conclusion that she simply could not have a career. The reasoning is based on two conclusions: Firstly the pragmatic reality of being a mother of four children:

*I've got...yeah. I mean the main thing for me is that because I've worked with children before is managing the workload of.... the children and working ....part-time and juggling it all ...and err I find with four children I find it just too much to consider doing.*

and later:

*B. Do you think that's why your view of career has changed over the course of your motherhood?*

*.....erm.....[pause] I think err, I think I realise now that I can't have everything. I thought I was managing to have it*

*but I don't think I was.[shaking head]*

*B. Are you not happy about that?*

*Erm, yeah I'm not happy about it but I'm resigned....yeah.*

Secondly, and linked to organisations' anti-mother stance is her belief, based on experience that she cannot pursue a career part-time:

*So I think **combining** the two is pretty much impossible actually, **now**. [laughs]*

*B. Do you think you're typical of other women?*

*[Long pause]. I'm sure I am.*

Heather sense-making leads to a definition of a career, which is clearly based on her negative experience of being in 'a man's world' and further links into the next theme:

*A career isn't a job that's doing a job that's a number of levels below what you were trained to do....which you have to do that job because of inflexibility in the workplace ...so that's why it isn't. but I suppose it is a job a job that equates to your potential as in your qualifications and experiences, your training.....*

### 7.11 Master theme 3: organisations are anti-mother

The changing meaning of work theme after second or subsequent maternity leave explains in part the T1 findings and demonstrates on-going sense-making. Emerging themes also pointed to 3 of the 5 interviewees attributing their understanding of what work means to them personally to a sense of their experience of their organisation's being 'anti-mothers'. The master theme was typically - but not exclusively - directed at their own organisations. Heather captured this master theme in the excerpt below and also typifies the common overlaps with other master themes:

*But I think my workplace would just because it's mainly ....men from and you know quite fixed views I think they never realise that because I feel, that in terms of my job my brain hasn't emptied of what it did in my job, erm, My brain hasn't because from what I do for job I know I could go in tomorrow because it doesn't change much ....I know I could do my job and I do, I read a lot ....so I know I could bring more to the job but I think people at work might think if you've been off work for a **year** basically you're coming back as a beginner, you know beginning again, I think that's what they think.*

The table below summarises which participants this was relevant to specifically and the nature of the emerging themes:

Table 26: T2 master theme - anti-mother organisations.

Emerging Theme reflecting sense-making of working life experience	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Part-time work is unsuccessful	Unprompted comments on the difficulty of part-time work were forwarded by all.	Tina  Martha	<i>[Part-time] is <b>rubbish</b>. I wouldn't recommend it to anybody, not when you're, I'd recommend part-time working if you didn't have a family... Being a big American company about not really wanting to... look too much at part-time... they would but not if they could get</i>

		Sasha	<i>away with it they don't do part-time they don't do job share you know this is the job or B: do you think they could do S: she says yes they could but they were just being awkward</i>
		Summer	<i>I see other mums as going out to work and they're workers and they are part-time mums....they struggle mentally</i>
		Heather	<i>...no developments or prospects or promotion prospects <b>ever</b> if you go part-time</i>
Unsuccessful management of return due to poor communication /negotiation	Emerging themes here were in part due to revisiting previous experiences and often expanded on in T2	Tina	<i>if someone went from full-time down to part-time, the managers have got to educate the rest of the staff on expectations for that person,...if they've had a year off or six months off, they're actually going to come back <b>different</b></i>
		Sasha	<i>after a year I thought I'd touch base with them nobody had been in touch or anything</i>
Systems are set up for families with 2 max. children	Difficulty in gathering information to manage day-to- day activities reinforces the impossibility of paid work	Martha	<i>I'm a slow boat, it takes me a long time to turn sometimes I need time everything, everybody I need to kind of know in advance.</i>
Organisations hold	Martha considers	Martha	<i>companies ....will fund people to</i>

<p>short term views regarding the value of maternity leave</p>	<p>the next generation and what organisations should do.</p> <p>Heather focuses on the brain drain.</p>	<p>Heather</p>	<p><i>do a Masters or whatever, they'll have a list of what they need, and they fund it, part you pay, or whatever, I mean surely it's not a major stretch to do the sort of same for women coming back to work after maternity leave?</i></p> <p><i>..people at work might think if you've been off work for a <b>year</b> basically you're coming back as a beginner, you know beginning again</i></p>
<p>Organisational policies are not mother friendly</p>		<p>Heather</p> <p>Summer</p>	<p><i>So there's all this list of things, you get endless amount of time off <b>with pay</b> but the only thing that applies to working mothers is you can have two days, one or two days <b>if</b> your boss says yes....</i></p> <p><i>I have heard a lot of mums have lost their jobs because of redundancy, I don't think that's fair. I mean if you're on maternity leave you shouldn't be made to, you shouldn't be made redundant.</i></p>
<p>Maternity leave means promotion prospects dashed</p>	<p>Heather is the only interviewee who had aspirations to continue in her chosen career and directly attributes her</p>	<p>Heather</p>	<p><i>I know women who have had children who doing part-time jobs at a level, many levels below what they were trained to do that's not a career.</i></p>

	motherhood to the end of her career and believes this is common.		
Unmarried women = best	Card sort exercise: all interviewees judged unmarried women with no children to be most valued by an organisation, married with two children least valued. The opposite order (or all in a row) was true for men.	<i>Martha: this is totally illegal, I'm sure you're not allowed to choose on this basis but I'm sure they do....</i>	
Skills developed during maternity leave not valued or recognised	See self-development master theme		

This master theme captured both positive and negative comments about organisation's reactions to motherhood. The positives were restricted to the agency afforded within some sectors to go back. Tina:

*So, I'm glad I went back I liked having the opportunity and I liked having the choice and I'm glad I went back... you know so it's hard to say you regret anything, erm, and I think I would have been thinking I felt I sold myself short.*

Summer believed that whilst there were issues, from what she had heard there are some excellent examples of good practice:

*There's a lot of places like banks and stuff they're **amazing** if you want to take more maternity leave as long as you like have your, you do so many days you got to do, then you can take a lot more.*

Heather admitted there is a greater availability of childcare, including summer clubs and generally, in theory at least, more options, as explained by Tina in her comments on social inequality. (This was by coincidence the topic a decade earlier for her thesis). Her conclusion on the differences then at T2, are not entirely positive:



*So erm, yeah, yeah, the only things that's changed is women have more options but with options comes more responsibility and women just have to work harder.*

Thereafter, the sense-making turns to the difficulties posed by organisations' perceptions and management of motherhood. The most common topic associated with returning to work was the lack of success associated with part-time work, which is not necessarily due to organisational policy:

*You also you you know you kind of get accused of swanning off here at lunch time and I think it's just like a natural reaction for you know at the level I was at, you go in, you make some pretty unpopular decisions [wry smile] then you sod off at lunch time, you know of course they're going to be annoyed with you. (Tina)*

The interviewees, bar Heather, felt that there were practical steps that could be taken to help. Tina for example, thought some education was required to pave the way for part-time workers (see self-development master theme) and before that, managers should have an open discussion on what the future might be for the employee: *"And I think the expectation at work is **when** are you coming back and not **are** you coming back."* Heather explained that this lack of proactive action perpetuated the issue:

*They're not very good at trying to take action against people or even trying to prevent things happening in the first place, it's really quite an old fashioned office..... with a lot of old fashioned attitudes that's women with children should really be at home and **perhaps** not their attitude is pretty inflexible in terms of managing children and work commitments.*

A total lack of open communication was also a contributor to Sasha's disillusionment with her employer simply not getting in touch after her second maternity leave and an equally unhelpful approach before she left:

*No, no I don't think so otherwise wouldn't they tell you that you could do that and you know this is what you do about your National Insurance contributions and everything they don't seem to tell you any of it.*

Martha offered practical advice:

*I think what they should do for me is if someone is going to go off on maternity leave, don't make it so bad the longer you go, oh, that the worst time off, ohh I've got to fill in for that person for so long. Get someone else in place even for two years, even for five years get them in place to do the job by that time the company may have changed and grown and that person may be able to move may be want to move in another position in that company and the person on maternity leave can come back the door is open them.*

Another of Martha's suggestions came from a perceived inequality of access to training on return. This was pertinent to her specifically, due to the speed of change within the IT sector:

*Well, that was what I was going to say, companies like Paul's will fund people to do a Masters or whatever, they'll have a list of what they need, and they fund it, part you pay, or whatever, I mean surely it's not a major stretch to do the sort of same for women coming back to work after maternity leave?*

The lack of training opportunities available to part-time working mothers, was an aspect which Heather also felt was an issue. This theme also overlapped with the rationalisation for being an 'opt out' mother. Tina in particular, was especially emotive on this topic of organisations who effectively wanted the 'good employee' back as before motherhood and as many managed to continue to portray after their first child:

*But then I think, I think **any organisation**, that would encourage people to be like that is actually, not ethical and it's really and maybe it's maybe it's the recession and people are grateful to have jobs, you hear it all the time, 'well you're lucky to **have** a job', you know so people are working longer and harder and it's not how to get the best out of at all erm.... so career, 'I'm a really a career driven woman', you think: tsk, it's a shame for you really, what are you missing out on?*

The card sort exercise laid bare the women's belief system on who organisations value. Their justifications for positioning the cards in the following order were typified with Martha's voice-over below as she sorted the cards in the order an organisation would discriminate against them. She begins with the female cards, then moves onto the male set of cards:

*This is totally illegal, I'm sure you're not allowed to choose on this basis but I'm sure they do.... 'unmarried woman' you know, you don't know how long you'll need her for anyway, you'll get a few years out of her won't you. Then it may be business change*

*over time erm, then ahhh, she's probably got a routine sorted, she knows what she's doing she's probably got her baby-sitters in place ['married with two children' card] She doesn't know what she's doing, ['woman with one child'] one phone call from the childminders the baby's sick and she'll want to run away home. So she'll be last, 'working mother one child'. That's my best guess Basia [laughs] you know do I get a grade? [Both laugh] ..... 'Working man'...this is totally different. You're better off being a married father because, you're a family man, it says a lot of good things about you, you know, you've got your priorities straight you're your err you know, you're a good guy, likes to take his kids to the cinema, an un-working man, you're too immature they've got immaturity against them. .... bloody contrast isn't it! [Laughs] you write this up!*

Summer's interpretation of the card sort for the men was concise but effectively captured the same rationale: *If they're married, they're with their wife and they've got children [laughing] erm, he's obviously; he's a stayer isn't he!* [Laughs] The cards did not necessarily represent the women's perceptions but the shared perception of discrimination was unanimous as Summer, infers here:

*I think if a man and woman are doing exactly the same job then they should get paid exactly the same amount of money but then....but then I don't think, they're not, are they .....I think it should be the same for everybody really they should.*

Once again the emerging theme of equality of pay highlighted the distance moved from the good employee stance. Summer further offered a scenario of how she perceived an organisation would respond to an employee's apology for being late to work due to sick kids which then also offers an overlap with the traditional division of labour:

*The dad's going to get more a rollicking than the mum [laughs] because it's her responsibility to look after the children! I just really, that sounds really narrow minded doesn't it! [Laughs]*

*B. So that dad would get more 'told off' than the mum?*

*Yeah, but then she's probably gone in and said look, I'm going to take this job but my responsibility is first to my children. Dad's not going to say that. ....*

*B. Do think she'd get the job if she said that?*

*I hope so, I really hope so, yeah....[Stops and thinks for a moment]..... probably not!*

## 7.12 Master theme 4: I've changed: time to reflect

Table 27: T2 master theme - I've changed.

Emerging Theme reflecting sense-making of working life experience	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Personal development during 2 <sup>nd</sup> + maternity leave	Repeated emerging theme	Martha	<i>I've grown up a lot</i>
Transferable skills development during 2 <sup>nd</sup> + maternity leave	Repeating emerging theme	Heather	<i>"I wasn't doing anything wrong"</i>
Balance in life generally	....or lack of it at T2. For Heather the return to work has to be worth the effort.	Tina Heather	<i>apple pie analogy</i> <i>resigned to situation</i>
Cog in the wheel	With reference to community and helping change occur	<i>See community master theme</i>	

The small table does not represent a lack of theme strength, rather it reflects a lack of variety in its manifestation in womens' subjective constructions of their own self-development. The unifying element was the fact that this self-development was triggered and in most cases started taking place during second or subsequent maternity leave, a period of no paid employment. The re-evaluation of what was being learned from the experience of being away from work appears to coincide simply with the time to think, as Martha neatly summarised:

*Basically I think in a nutshell, you get more in touch with life when you stop working you're not just roboting along and you do have to think what on earth you're up to, what you're up to and that's a good thing.*

Whilst some of the interviewees focused on their personal sense of change through development, others considered the value of this – or lack of recognition of this by employers. A summary of excerpts illustrating this point follows:

One of the triggers for Tina's enlightenment was brought on by a young single mother who she barely knew saying Tina was clearly:

*[I was] a real 'career woman' and it was like 'what?!' I never... put myself in that category I was actually insulted and it was a young girl, who worked with as single mother, she wasn't planning on going back to work. 'I want to raise my own kid'. ....and it was the light bolt moment ....*

Up until that point, Tina's justification in part, lent heavily on her 'ideal' working situation inferred further with comments such as:

*I suppose the skills that I've learned in my working career actually make me a better mum. But then I worked in the childcare industry so I suppose ....*

Despite the "light-bolt moment" it took Tina some time to mull over the need to re-evaluate her situation and learn from her various experiences and reactions to comments such as those from the young single mum:

*I think, after having hours and hours of therapy talk with one of my best friends, she thinks I have a problem with trying to do **everything** and trying to prove that I'm superhuman rather than doing what I want to. [Softly spoken] And, she's been telling me that for years and actually. Now, I think she's right.....*

She justified the move away from work, which she had previously inferred was a symbiotic relationship with her motherhood, by attributing some blame on her organisation:

*When you take a break and it's not like you've left to go to another company ...I think you actually go back with fresh eyes. erm, see things differently but then the problem is that you move on with your life but you go back they expect you to be the same and I think that's quite difficult, you have actually moved on, grown up experienced a lot more stuff....and I think that's a learning curve your colleagues have to accept your not the same person that left.*

She explained that:

*After I went back to work after my second maternity leave I noticed a **real** different in my attitude. I think I as **less** tolerant of idiots, [laughs] I was less tolerant of...erm...time wasting because time becomes such a precious commodity.*

After a very emotional resignation, Tina now felt passionate about her personal journey of self-development and offers passages such as the following to illustrate the validity of her sense-making which had resulted in a perceived balance in life generally:

*My eldest son and I were walking out yesterday and 'oh gosh look that's flowering that wasn't flowering the other day'. And actually just, I think you learn to live. My for me, when you're working and raising a family you're not doing anything well, **my personal** opinion you're just coasting .... [said very slowly] and I think I am actually living.*

The same sense of passion and enlightenment was portrayed in Martha's elaboration of her comment: "I've grown up a lot":

*B. Do you think you've learned anything valuable from your experience of your break from paid work?*

*Yes! Oh my god yes, I think when you're rolling along in a rut you're not learning anything and sooner or later we're supposed to learn that what humans do it's the way we are it's part of our design so things will happen to that make you learn and if you haven't been learning for a while you have to catch up the longer you've been in a rut the more catching up you have to do [chuckle] you can have great bit bumps, and jolts and shock and big wake ups and... yeah, you can definitely have your eyes opened and that's a good thing there's a difference between going along and being a brain dead not thinking person and someone whose actually alive.*

With regards transferable skills, Summer reduced it to having more confidence- noted in the charity bag - pack which would allow her to sell more 'products and stuff':

*B. And do you think that you would use any of these skills in your beautician work?*

*Yeah, I think so because I could I think I could probably sell things more now I could never, you know products and stuff. I would never, even when I worked in the salon*

*I'd never be: 'look here's the shelf of fantastic shampoo. This is what you need, blah blah I feel I could do that.*

Probing questions made it clear that in fact, although Summer felt she has learned new skills, this was not the perception others would have:

*B. Do you think other people in that salon would think 'oh she's been on maternity leave, she's must have learned a lot'...*

*I wouldn't have thought so*

Martha believed that the maternity leave learning time has helped her in her negative attitude towards paid work, which at T1 had been picked up:

*It will be something to use those skills for a thing which will be good for me, **good** for the people I was using them to help or to serve or just even to get paid to do something that they don't want to do whether they really need someone to do. At Tesco's I could be chatting to the customer s they'd be having a better day because I find that when I go in and yap to them I don't know if I'm getting old wifey, I go in and yap and they yap back and they're **nice folk** you know you can't it doesn't matter if they're x, y or z or whether you can analyse them as them as you know or yes, if you their soul mate for ever, you'd probably find a lot of reasons that they would hate you and you would hate them but that's not the way to, it doesn't.... I don't think there's any point to think about that so. I've shifted.....*

Heather reflected on transferable skills:

*I think we develop more of a sense of what's important and what's right and what's not right and I think at work you just get on with what they tell you to because you're a good employee.*

and later:

*But I consider myself to be a very different person to who I was two years ago....and...erm.. you know there as.....er.....I mean there's skills like erm... you know like planning and managing you know lots of different tasks, and you know even financial management and all of those kinds of things but also the for me it was*

*actually step back and it's was things like err negotiating and influencing. And managing behaviour and distracting.*

Sasha used her recognition of self-development and change as a consequence of becoming a mother: *"I mean it changes you beyond all recognition"* to consider, if not take up as a career, art again. After so many years after her rejection from art, it is during her second maternity leave that she finally made an enthusiastic return to this *"glamorous thought of doing the art thing"* by designing and painting her fireplace tiles as part of the restoration and re-decoration of her new home. It was clear she has a flair for this yet when asked whether she would chose an art related job over a medical one, her narrative theme reflecting the importance of money takes over. To support her sense-making here, she offered an example of a friend who has a successful self-employed career in ceramics and declared her friend said it was *"the best job in the world"*. Sasha rationalised that due to an exceptionally large order from 'notonthehighstreet.com' based on her successful art venture, even she (Sasha) would be *"sick of it"* – again reflecting a narrative theme. The need for variety emerged again - although she is clearly attracted to the idea in the first instance.

On a personal level, the maternity leave has helped Heather come to terms with motherhood:

*Erm, I've...well, I've learned myself that I can actually be er, I can actually err **be a mum**, I have it in me to actually be a mum and to [laughs]) look after, you know, er **nurture** my children, and that I did have it in me all the **time** and actually I've learned that ..a lot of the feeling, some of the ...first two children, feeling inadequate or frustrated with bringing up a child and dealing with their tantrums actually still have a lot of it now (laughs) but now I realise it's just all very natural, you have the good and the bad and I think then maybe I thought erm, I had less of good times compared to the bad times, you know, the child is tired when you get home but I think erm, ....er...that it's natural to be frustrated, with your children it's just part, **I wasn't doing anything wrong.**"*

For Heather, as with Tina and Martha, this level of sense-making was imperative to overcome the negative experiences and emotions associated with maternity leave decisions made first time round, which were not repeated after second or subsequent maternity leave periods. Importantly for the current research, the sense-making is considered relevant to the woman's narratives of their working lives. For example Heather reflects on how motherhood



has affected her perception of a management role and how her experience would differentiate her management style from that of her previous (male) managers:

*...if you're a manager at work developing people that work for you...you know you have more of a sense of that because you're doing it with your children all the time, you know you're thinking about them and their interests and what they would like and you know developing a role in developing other people rather than just saying 'meet the targets' like my boss would say [laughs].*

### 7.13 Master theme 5: community network

Table 28: T2 master theme - community network.

Emerging Theme	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Voluntary work is link to professional identity and future employment	True for Martha and Tina	Martha	<i>all they need to do is one click 'attending'</i>  <i>opportunities abound they are all around you</i>
Community work is a rite of passage for mothers on 2 <sup>nd</sup> + maternity leave/ Mothers take their turn to be a cog in the wheel	True for Tina, Martha, Summer – although <b>all</b> do community work With reference to community and helping change occur – but change in the cogs in not always possible	Martha	<i>"I did my bit"</i>
Significance of community work	But not perceived as important for Summer or Heather	Tina	<i>so that's how I think I've fulfilled my need, feel like I'm using skills I've have"</i>
Sense of belonging		Heather	<i>It's very small, very small commitment</i>
Sense of reciprocity		Sasha	<i>I needed to feel part of a community</i>
		Sasha	<i>so ok you're not being paid for it but you get you're being paid in other ways</i>

Tina acknowledged that motherhood for her, was a full-time role and to try and fit in paid employment proved to be impossible. Tina's sense-making therefore turned to other aspects of her life to justify this position. Tina had an unsuccessful attempt at joining in a toddler group committee, which she did not expand on. At the time of T2, she was completing her

training to be on the Children's Panel. A position she felt strongly would draw positively on her qualification. Sasha also believed that a mother's role is a form of full-time employment, albeit an unpaid - and maybe in her household - an unrecognised one. Her work in the community for the Heritage Society seemed to be the start of a new dimension to her unpaid working life offering her variety, recognition and a path back to her artistic interests. Unfortunately, her partner did not have high regard for voluntary work and this perhaps was perpetuating her conflicting views on the value of her roles. The difference of opinion with regard unpaid work further reinforced the belief that men and women perceived working life differently. Interestingly, Martha's husband too, was not described as fully supportive of her voluntary activities but this is couched in terms of his efforts to encourage Martha's to better balance her roles.

*I did my bit and it was time for the new faces to comes along so...erm....I didn't want to be in there hanging on, [laughs] done it.*

The sense of the committee work in the women's communities being a rite of passage was a common emerging theme for Martha, Tina and Summer. The lack of positive comments regarding community work suggests Heather did not feel the same way. Martha's enthusiasm for the benefits of being involved with the community was strong:

*B. A link to the community?*

*Yeah, that's a brilliant thing as well, you're, opportunities abound they are all around you, you find your own so, the stuff you can get back, you asked me before I went bag packing, you asked me...well, that's not true, if you asked me before long ago before I considered it I would have said 'oh my god how boring!' .....” But not so, all you do, you're out in your own time something you've arranged and you're doing it and you're thinking: 'I'm doing a good thing, I'm going to get all this money in for playgroup if I'm doing it I'm going to do it really, really well' you know there's no point standing there bored when you can fill the time with being nice to people and they're nice back.*

In another part of the interview, she inferred that her benefits from the community need to somehow be re-paid (just as Summer felt obliged to “do her bit” too):

*I think I'm really lucky, I've got opportunities I really am look, especially in a place like this to, to get involved, you can help out and it's really good fun to do ..and the*

*people are great, don't get me wrong, people are great it ....someone's got to pay for this lovely world that we live in you know [laughs].*

Sasha, like Martha, perceived a difference between her perceived value of unpaid community work and that of her husband's - who is a "typical manager". This difference she attributed specifically to a gender difference. She wanted to be remembered as someone who was generous – not with money but with time. She rationalised the difference with her husband's opinion:

*He's just your typical manager and you know no he just doesn't see it like that at all erm you know you're doing your free work you know kind of thing so but I like giving something back you know.... that's what people remember people for being generous not with money but with just being generous in general you know giving up their time to do things and I you know that's in my nature to do that and so you know I don't feel yeah ok I don't get paid for doing it but sometime you know you have to do things that you don't get paid for doing.*

Sasha's involvement clearly benefits her personally but she also justified her involvement on a wider scale:

*I think it can give you a lot of self satisfaction so OK, you're not being paid for it but you are getting paid in other ways.....I needed to feel part of a community...and you hope that a little bit of what you can add to their thing is going to make a difference.*

Summer associated her second committee role negatively:

*It was more stressful because I knew what it was I had to do whereas if I had gone into it completely blind I would have thought 'oh no' but it put me off doing more things on the committee.... Everyone's on the committee says: 'it's really easy, it's really easy' but when you actually know what's involved, it's not easy **at all**, especially when you're not, you're not of a I mean I'm not, I'm not in any way shape or form treasure-y material so I mean, people who have worked in banks or or big supermarkets or done them sorts of things, then obviously they know, they know all about looking after money and stuff like that, but I didn't have a **clue**.*

In part this negativity might be attributed to the post-natal depression she was recovering from at the time. A question to confirm the negativity or otherwise returned a positive

evaluation of her community role, suggesting a transient negativity, perhaps associated with her illness, which she does not refer to again:

*B. Do you think the stuff that you learned would help you then in second committee role?*

*Definitely, yeah, but not what I've done but what other people have done. I've like looked at what other people have been doing and I've took that on board and thought: 'oh, I can actually do that'. I've seen what's been done I've not been **told** what you've got to do I'm actually **seeing** what they're doing so yeah, I can do things like that.*

Tina turned the interview round on the topic of community work and asked me:

*Do you think though that sometimes... that you get couthy<sup>9</sup> maternal people and you get the career people and if the couthy maternal person isn't, their need aren't really met in the workforce they tend to go into the community side of things?*

*B. Why did you feel you needed to help?*

*Yeah, I think it's because my work was always part of my identity and that wasn't there anymore.*

The excerpt suggested that Tina was perhaps still making sense of the community role, or at least her experiences in the community roles, and with other volunteers. She did not expand on this point and ended the point with: "That's really funny how that works out isn't it...."

Heather played down the community role:

*It's very small, very small commitment, it's a small group and it's just, you know paying, basically collecting fees, paying the hall, paying the insurance but it's you know it's nice enough to do and everybody pitches in and does something, so... that's where I'm kind of actively involved and ...erm...but I don't feel I have time really to help with anything else like that at the moment.*

Heather then negated it completely with the following evaluation, returning back to her unresolved balance of motherhood and carer. The community clearly did not fill gaps left by her lack of paid employment :

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<sup>9</sup> Couthy meaning, in this context natural

*I am the person who's at home all the time and I feel **I'm** missing out and when you're working all the time, you feel you're missing out. **Cause I did that.** Now I've met a couple of folk that work part-time and **they** feel they're missing out because they feel they don't have one or the other.*

## 7.14 Master theme 5: perceived role of society

Table 29: T2 master theme - perceived role of society.

Emerging Theme	Comment	Source	Example of quotation
Typical female roles are not valued by society	Especially mother roles!	Heather Martha	<i>...all the responsibility it's absolutely huge, no one else thinks that.</i>
The expectation is to return to work	After both first and second+ maternity leave	Tina Summer Sasha	<i>Bullied</i>  <i>Women are supposed to have children then go back to work probably</i>  <i>Obviously the thing is to go back to work isn't it?</i>

So far, the master themes have considered the sense-making interviewees go through to accommodate a change in their working life as a result often, of organisation's perception of them once they have more than one child, which does not sit comfortably with the positive individual changes they perceive.

The splitting of their understanding of 'work', 'career' and 'job' appear to be a common means by which to explain their subsequent change in working history paths. Experiences within organisation and their integration into unpaid work in the community play a role in their sense-making.

Taking a step back, interviewees also drew on wider societal norms and expectations that they feel supported or hampered their decisions to become stay-at-home mothers. Notably, the legislation or government funding was not raised as an issue, although Summer did make passing reference to the agency women have to have as many children as they can manage:

*They do a lot already. I mean they help you with child care and you get working parents tax credit and no, I think we, I think mums do alright really.*

*B. Do you think it's different if you have one kid or more than one kid? Should there be different levels of support?*

*Hmmm. No. Because you know what you're letting yourself in for so you don't have to have any more do ya?*

Instead, the focus of the emerging themes under this master theme stems from. For example, Tina felt she '*bullied*' herself into returning to work both times. She blamed society for being '*conditioned*' to go back after maternity leave. Furthermore everyone at work "*expected*" her back and this was echoed also by Summer in her explanation of the card sort:

*Whether you've got children or not....it's just not how society sees everybody.... I think women, at the end of the day, they've carried this little baby in their tummy for 9 months and they're going to look after them, whether that means **paying** someone to look after them so they can go back to work if they want to...*

The sense of a social norm, associated with returning to work after having children contradicts the phrase: traditional stay-at-home' mothers, and this contradictory view was present in both Tina and Summer's sense-making as illustrated again below:

*Sometimes, you think wouldn't you really be better off just going to work. But that's not what we want...but you sometimes think, well, because **everybody** does it. Because **my** parents have done it, because **Jake's** parents have done it and because that's what you're supposed to do in life you're supposed to, you know. Christ, we got a lot more than some people....*

*B. Why do you think you're supposed to do things in a certain way?*

*It's just what you're supposed to do, init? You're supposed to go to work until you're 65 and....*

*B. And what are women supposed to do?*

*Well, they're supposed to have children then go back to work probably [laughs]*

*B. Do they?*

*Well, my mum did. My mum worked for people when we were little then she went back to work, well no, before we left school. We used to go with her. I can't imagine anything worse than taking Ellie and Rose to work with me that would be horrible.*

Tina's on-going sense-making about the social expectation of returning to work, was similarly vocalised more than once too. It is a point of confusion; she even questions herself as she told her story:



So is it **me** that always said I was coming back or was it the expectation? [Long pause] I think...yeah....I think everyone expected me to go back....

Sasha felt that her first and second maternity leave decisions were qualitatively very different. Having a second child meant, she reasoned, meant she could decide: “*that’s it, I’ve **two** children now so really I’ve got a good excuse not to go back.....*” In fact, Sasha’s sense-making about her return remains conflicted. Her drive to stay employed is rationalised at one point by also blaming social norms:

*Obviously the thing is to go back to work isn’t it? You know, that’s what I wanted to do and it’s the sort of **expected** thing.*

This expectation the women felt, perhaps goes back further than their maternity leave period – back to when they first started working and never considered there might be a possible conflict with the idea of raising a family and maintaining a career, as suggested by Heather:

*See I thought errr, when I went into work, I really believed that women have it all, women have careers, they have children and that’s what I really thought [laughs].*

The policies may support women in theory but the culture of a male-dominated sector remains a powerful force working against Heather – and for her, her lack of integration in the community simply reinforced the loss of her motherhood status when maternity leave was cut short the first two times. The male-dominated workplace discrimination is not restricted to Heather’s sector. Martha describes how organisations and society fails to recognise that not only should there be equality, but as Martha sees it, organisational gratitude for the benefits of good mothering and staying away from paid employment whilst raising children:

*Give me equal pay, don’t make it so that if I have kids it’s in any way detrimental to my career, that’s totally off, because it totally doesn’t recognise what you’re doing for society. Because you don’t get paid for it, society there’s different ways to get paid, there’s moneyed work you get paid, you know....society owes you cause you’re not bringing up the next drug addicts and you know people with psychological problems [laugh] you’re bringing up some well rounded people that can then, these are the people who aren’t the odd balls that the company doesn’t want to recruit.*

Being under-valued comes up as an emerging theme in many guises in Heather’s interview too:

*At the moment my job I've got is **huge** in terms of all the things I've got to consider, you know and work through and all the responsibility it's absolutely huge, no one else thinks that, it's a shame that.... [laughs]*

As well as a counter-intuitive pressure to return to work – conflicting with organisations' impression of not wanting women with two or more children, the findings here, suggest that the women saw fundamental problems with the expected division of labour and recognition of their share of domestic duties. Tina explained the practical implications:

*If we were both here in the morning, both got the children ready, both took time off for the children were poorly and were both here at tea time at well here to cook and put the children to bed – it doesn't matter. But actually I don't know any family that's like that [laughs] so I would say society is like that.*

Martha expanded on this problem based on her experiences of managing four children and thwarted efforts to introduce internet solutions to help:

*Instead of driving a smooth road, they can really make like you know you're going through lumpy and mud and you can't get anywhere it can make life difficult. The other way round is it smoothes the cogs which would be a more natural thing to do, a more obvious smooth the cogs so that they can get things going a bit better but they ...they don't.*

One of the last questions asked was whether the women perceived themselves as a feminist. 'Yes' was the answer most gave although Tina offered some explanation to her hesitancy, mirroring Summer's emphasis on women having a choice on the number of children they have:

*But then I suppose I feel a little **cheated** calling myself a feminist because I have become the main caregiver, although by **choice**, I have become the main cook, although by choice, but then I suppose feminism is about having a choice.."*

Further probing about her reasoning led to this excerpt, which captured the reality of this sample's reflections on having more than one child and the impact on their working life:

*Yeah, and the thing is, I think used to want to change the world... but actually.... you know, I wrote my thesis on gender stereotyping*

*B. Oh right...*

*T. and I think we still a stereotypical nation now more than when we were in the 70's actually.*

*B. Would you call yourself a feminist?*

*T. I'd say I **used** to a feminist...yeah definitely **used** to be....but now...I just, I used to totally want to change the world, and I think the only thing that's changed is that women have more .....options but with options, you just have to work harder because nobody helps you. I don't know about your family dynamic but... you know, Colin would love more children but he says he actually does realise that actually, it wouldn't impact on his life that much at all but it would impact on mine immensely. A lot, yes....my husband's having a vasectomy on Tuesday [laughs heartily].*

## Chapter 8 Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

The first chapter of the current research asked the question: *are we nearly there yet?* The literature review was organised to reflect an organisational perspective on maternity leave and the women's perspective on what maternity leave meant with regards working life trajectories. The sub-topics were:

- the glass ceiling;
- the gender pay gap;
- the difficulties associated with flexible working/part-time working and
- maternity leave break definitions and parameters.

This chapter begins by considering these sub-topics and two perspectives in light of the findings in order to offer a response to the research question: What do women's stories tell us about their experience of their working lives?

The women's narratives included stories of discrimination (Heather); inequality (Martha); positive maternity leave definition and rights (Connie and Summer) albeit at times mismanaged (Sasha) and flexible and part-time work (Tina). Alternative working patterns were not necessarily managed well (Martha). At a simple level, the 'told stories' offered insight into a response to the question: are we nearly there yet? The women's perceptions of organisational stance towards them as mothers, supported literature review findings that yes, we are still heading in the right direction but there are still considerable barriers to overcome (Miller 1996). This finding therefore fully supports the significant body of research reflecting gender differences in employment to date such as the findings from the Work and Women Commission's report (2009) and the Royal Society's recent report (2012). The problem is still a current one. The first part of this chapter teases out the reflections to consider the differing expectations and perceptions of first and then second maternity leave. In short, first maternity leave was reflected on by the women - and to a greater extent by the organisations - positively. Exceptions occurred in male-dominated sectors (Heather). This suggests legislation and supporting human resource policy in many organisations can, and does, generally work. Where difficulties arise, these appear to reflect individual managers' (or organisations' cultural) negativity towards women. In contrast, second maternity leave periods were universally regarded by the women as important turning points in their sense-making about their working life trajectories. This was manifested in master themes reflecting

disillusionment growing beyond organisations to incorporate society's lack of support for them as working mothers. The chapter will argue that research evidence to date, which does not distinguish between first and subsequent maternity leave together, does not capture the qualitative difference that this sample suggests clearly exists. The chapter will then go on to discuss the second key finding – second or subsequent maternity leave is perceived to be part of a working life trajectory, not a pause in a career – a model is offered to help visualise this specific time in a woman's life. Furthermore, the self-development which occurs during this time is linked to a change in meaning of the concepts of work, job and career.

## **8.2 Oh no! You're going to be a mum?! Actually, that's fine.**

If *all* maternity leave is considered together, the overall outcome as reflected in the 'lived life' story findings would appear to support negative interpretations of maternity leave on a working woman's employment (Joshi, Paci and Walfogel 1999; Caplan 1998; Singh 1999; Saurel-Cubizolles et al. 1999; Tomlinson 2004; Hewlett 2007; Liu and Buzzanell 2004; Borrell and Kidd 1994). This negativity is commonly reported and focussed on in previous research for example McCracken, (2000 ) and Court, (1995). The 'told story' analysis, however, exposes the women's belief that first maternity leave had a negligible effect on their working life histories. Management of the women's break from employment was not universally good but the blame was largely contained by the women and did not change individual women's overall sense-making. Negative experiences after the first maternity leave in this sample were perceived as being due to discrimination brought on by an organisational culture unwilling to accept part-time work (for example: Martha), or more blatant individual managers' discrimination due to ignorance of legislation for example, at recruitment interviews (Heather). The message received by the women from the organisations regarding maternity leave was clear: come back after maternity leave and carry on as before. The narratives of first maternity leave support figures such as Hewlett's (2007) comment that 93% of women plan to return to work after maternity leave. In fact, this sample's planned working life trajectories changed direction by the time of T2 interviews, remaining constant after first maternity leave – and to a point for some for a short time after second maternity leave.

The stories of first maternity leave capture the women's ability to keep constant the 'good employee' sense-making process, facilitating a mere pause in working life to have their first child. This was possible when the organisations - and specifically direct line management - were overtly supportive, pro-active in planning first maternity leave breaks with their employees. All six women did return to their employment after their first maternity leave. None of the women demonstrated an immediate shift away from the 'good employee' master

theme, even if their return was marred by poor management. With one child, it was clearly possible to maintain the 'good employee' sense-making, offering stability to both employee and employer. The findings from the first maternity leave in this respect support Grosser and Moon (2009) who report that organisations that supported alternative work patterns were rewarded with staff just as engaged as before. Intuitively this is logical: if employers help with a potentially life changing transition, then the transition is more likely to be successful.

Näslund and Perner's (2012) reference to dominant stories could also be used to help understand the staying power of the 'good employee' sense-making. It is argued that this master theme is linked to mutually beneficial sense-making (for employer and employee) in so far as male-orientated set of values on career and work offers a convenient short-cut to the individual's sense-making processes. Since the transition to becoming a working mother went according to plan, the women were not triggered into re-evaluating working life decisions. The women (bar Summer) felt part of an organisation before motherhood, adopting the organisational values. This was reinforced if the return to work after their first child was managed successfully. In this respect, the current research contradicts much of the literature review findings of negativity associated with maternity leave. Yes, we are 'getting there' with regards women in the workplace becoming mothers. Clearly, as Heather's story illustrates, there are still problems but legislation and human resource strategies can work. This finding can be seen through an examination of 'lived life' stories and understood with sense-making frameworks developed through the women's identification with their organisations. It was perhaps not surprising that failure to repeat the smooth transition on becoming pregnant again was felt all the more acutely. The close correlation with the women's perspective of organisational perspectives and their own sense-making was unexpectedly wrenched apart at second or subsequent maternity leave as will be discussed in section 8.3.

Looking at the findings from a feminist perspective, liberal feminists promote equality of opportunity for women – and first maternity leave experiences proved this was a realistic goal (if not always achievable) for women going on maternity leave for the first time. Achievement of the goal remains however, highly dependent on a supportive organisational culture - and informed line managers. All interviewees were aware of *but not at all surprised by* the news stories regarding gross inequality of pay structures at a council at the time of the interviews. This perception of working life being governed by men's perceptions and values (the man's world' master theme), and associated barriers for women, was not perceived to be an issue created by maternity leave. Support is thus clear for Buzzanell and Miu's (2007) paper, which states: "*maternity leave 'dissolves the veneer of gender neutrality'*" (p.465).

Certainly, the master theme of the women working in a man's world was strong from the outset at T1 but only once the stories reached descriptions of pregnancy. The example cited in Hewlett,(2007) was the basis for the card sort question at T2, (see chapter 6). If a woman arrives late to work due to child-care problems, the issue is perceived by the organisation as a problem. If it was a man arriving late due to child care problems, Hewlett described the reaction as being worthy of a joke and soon forgotten. This sample agreed unanimously with the likelihood of a difference in reactions to such a scenario. Interestingly, the sample also suggested the man would be asked about the *mother's* whereabouts if he had been left 'holding the baby'. In numerous way therefore, it was therefore a robustly supported perception by the women that they work in a man's world, which is brought into sharp focus by maternity leave, especially second or subsequent maternity leave when their motherhood is more likely to leak into the employment sphere. Although the women were accepting of their domestic roles, even embraced them, all made clear that they adopted the traditional division of labour so more children meant more unpaid work. Their perceived role, as support to their husband's paid employment was spoken and explicit. The controversy over the division of labour extends beyond the home (Sullivan 2000). Vociferous and divided opinions clearly exist in our culture too. The perception portrayed in the women's narrative is that the debate is not heard in the workplace and is not relevant to mothers with one child. The likelihood of childcare issues is multiplied with increased number of children - notably both women with four children were not in paid employment. Importantly, first maternity leave findings contradict the literature review which paints a universally negative picture. Second maternity leave supports the statistics on inequality in the workplace because of motherhood as is discussed next.

### **8.3 You're having ANOTHER baby? That IS a problem!**

The findings at second or subsequent maternity leave were clear: if women opted for a return to paid employment on a *part-time* basis (Martha); took long maternity/career leave; were not proactive in setting terms of return (Sasha) or worked on a contract basis (Heather), organisations viewed maternity leave as not only an unhelpful pause in their working life but also a backwards career step. The implications of these messages the women perceived the organisations sent out are important, not least because, for example, training stopped (Martha). If the women's perceptions are accurate, this organisational perspective perpetuates gender inequality and clearly paves the way to reinforce the well-established gender pay gap (Macpherson and Bond 2009).

The 'good employee' master theme captured the women's congruence with organisational values pre maternity leave and post first maternity leave. Once another maternity leave is taken, the 'disillusionment' master theme captures the women's reflections of negative organisational attitudes towards them. Furthermore, the interpretation of the disillusionment regarding work over time develops into a fully formed 'organisations are anti-mothers' rationalisation (master theme). Individual disillusionment extends to a poor view of society's support for them. This was only captured as retrospective sense-making three years after their second or subsequent maternity leave. The anti-working mother belief, together with the early disillusionment master theme, appears to be in response to the disintegration of the relevance to the women of a 'good employee' sense-making. Whittle and Mueller (2012) argue that the stories that were narrated by bankers about the banking crisis "*shaped how the crisis was made up and acted on*" (p.111). It is argued that the dominant 'good employee' concept similarly affected decision making. The time away from the organisation could be argued to have helped shape future decisions about when or whether to return to paid employment. Where the disillusionment started before the second maternity leave, this was correlated with the dominance of the 'man's world' theme in the woman's narrative. Heather, Sasha and Martha should have been protected by the legislation and human resource policy at their first maternity leave time, especially as the current thinking is that they maternity leave periods are all the same. However, mismanagement by male, uninformed or prejudiced managers/systems sped up the disintegration of their 'good employee' sense-making. The importance of individual managers not following protocols for pregnant women at work (Davis et al, 2005) is therefore supported.

This finding that second or subsequent maternity leave is qualitatively different reaffirms the value of listening to women's stories rather than directing questions as assumed areas of importance (Belenky et al. 1997). From an organisational perspective, it has implications on the inappropriateness of the same management strategy for first and subsequent children. Legislation too, clearly supports women who wish to return to work after one child and some willing organisations can successfully implement supporting human resource policies. This supports findings by Dex and Smith, (2002). Increasing maternity leave entitlement offers evidence of ongoing efforts in this direction. However, neither legislation nor human resource policies appear to be effective at keeping/managing mothers of two or more children. Rather than address the problem at a strategic level to hold onto valuable employees, the problem appears to be framed by organisations as being the mother's once there is more than one child. At this point, the literature review findings are consistent with findings from the current research sample. Yet promotional material from larger companies, stresses their effective family friendly policies (for example WM Magazine 2009). This material aims to reinforce the



image organisations try to portray. As Grosser and Moon (2009) note, in reality, organisations will not be forthcoming with admission of a problem if the reality contradicts legislation – and this would naturally hold true for mothers with more than one child. ‘We have a family friendly policy’ - as long as you just have one child or you pretend to have none’ is unlikely to be written even in the small print! This perception however, surfaces in the narratives of the women (for example, Martha’s and Heather’s). To add to the conflicting messages, the media at the time of writing is full of stories which put the spotlight on successful women entrepreneurs who have a full and active family life and stories of ‘getting back into shape’ after childbirth. These sit alongside stories of how to manage work and family commitments, always assuming that ‘work’ means paid work. An example was the Sunday Times article: *Working mothers are less depressed*’ (1.4.2012) based on research by Harkness (2012). The message being sent out by much of the media is that it *is* hard to work and be a mother but it *is* an achievable goal which women should strive for. Occasionally, the two positions - being employed, and staying at home to raise a family - are set side-by-side (for example: Scottish Women, 2012) but the argument is always offered as a paid work versus stay-at-home option. The controversy surrounding the division of labour has been recorded, analysed and discussed in many forms over the years, (Sullivan 2000; Belch and Willis 2002; Silva 2002). Today, two extremes are offered in popular culture: *paid employment* or *not working* are the two choices available. Unpaid work is not in the equation and stay-at-home does not equate to ‘work’. The sample felt that the expectation of their organisation was that they would **not** return to paid employment after a second child, mirroring Dawson’s experience (2006). Furthermore, although maternity leave is a clear cut limited period for legislation and for organisations, it is not for these women. The result was a mismatching and largely unspoken set of expectations of different stakeholders in paid employment during maternity leave negotiations. Examples can be found in Sasha’s narrative of her organisation’s lack of communication and Martha’s hostile communications with her organisation. The findings fully support the confusion surrounding negotiation of maternity leave (Lui and Buzzanell, 2004). The confusion centres specifically for second or subsequent maternity leave. This confusion is clearly fed and reflected by on-going media stories in our culture.

From an organisational perspective then, the women reflected that after one child, the motherhood status can be (and was) largely ignored, or in Tina’s case, be an asset. Importantly, the woman’s motherhood should not ‘leak’ into the workplace (Gatrell 2008). The inference is that organisations would prefer that motherhood should somehow be hidden – even in some situations literally (for example as illustrated in Heather’s story) and this is often ‘do-able’ with one child, juggling roles to manage both children and paid employment.

This at times leads to the employment of an extensive support network (for example Tina's nanny, gardener and house-keeper/cleaner) or extensive preparation (Martha's three day preparation for a four day week). On return from their first maternity leave, women attempted to follow the 'good employee' sense-making values and behaved without leaking the additional workload of one child.

This first key finding, then calls for a re-evaluation of the assumption that first and subsequent maternity leave should be treated in the same way by theory, legislation and organisations. The finding that there is a qualitative difference between maternity leaves can be interpreted as offering conflicting findings to existing research - or a new perspective on an already complicated set of findings. Yes, we are heading in the right direction with regards women in the workplace and this is exemplified by (mostly) positive stories of first maternity leave experiences. The story clearly changes with the second child. The implication of this, in terms of working life trajectories, is considered next.

#### **8.4 Changing the pattern of work**

Alternative working patterns are more likely to be considered after second or subsequent maternity leave periods. If the stories here are representative of even a minority of women, the research findings give us insight, through the stories told, about the reality of changing the pattern of work. There follows a comparison of findings to research evidence.

Job sharing was not considered, or even mentioned by the sample, supporting Kodz, Harper and Dench's (2002) research, which suggests that employers' commitment to flexible working is still low and employees do not expect or perceive it as a realistic option. In Hewlett's words, alternative working patterns are perhaps implicitly perceived to be 'toxic' (2007, p.32). It is worth revisiting the conclusion reached in the literature review: opting-out of career ladder trajectories by adopting part-time, flexible work patterns or taking a 'career break' is linked to discrimination of women, not necessarily motherhood. Singh (1999) for example comments on the positive response men receive after an agreed break from the usual workplace. This sample's stories confirm the negativity of not working full-time is linked to the workplace adopting 'a man's world' values. Another contributing fact for this interpretation was the repeated portrayal of ignorance of the legal right to consideration of alternative working patterns. Both Martha's and Sasha's stories typified this and thus support research by Buzzanell and Lui (2005). Where organisations had comprehensive knowledge of maternity rights, this was used against the woman (Martha) as well as to support women (Heather and Tina).

Perhaps the goal set by liberal feminists who promoted equality between men and women is nearly achieved with respect to employment legislation. Are we nearly there yet? The findings from this sample suggests 'yes' with regards first maternity leave breaks – if organisations are effective in ensuring managers translate policies into practice. The findings however, support a patchy picture of translating this success of promoting equality of opportunity into practice for mothers of more than one child if alternative working hours are attempted. An alternative approach advocated by Hakim (2008) would be to abandon disintegrating gender segregation in equality legislation.

Returning to work on a part-time or flexible working basis also perpetuates an existing problem of lower value associated with not taking part in the UK's long hours culture. Long hours are still correlated with commitment (Court 1995, Stone, 2007) which disadvantages changing work patterns to anything other than full-time. Notably all of the sample returned to work part-time – or attempted to return part-time - at some point after childbirth, additional hours would not be easy if at all possible. Their return to paid employment was often, though not always, due to financial pressures. Research has shown the current recession may also have an impact on return to work decisions (Smeaton, 2006). The discrimination women face, especially if they do not work full-time, is evident in the narratives. A good example of how this is manifested was offered by Heather who felt she had to try and hide her pregnancy when visiting job centres and when attending interviews. Despite the Equality Acts (2010) making pregnancy a 'protected characteristic' in practical terms this results in no additional rights and so the change in law results in very little difference to a pregnancy employee or interviewee. To balance this negative interpretation of more recent legislation, fathers are now entitled to take a proportion of a woman's maternity leave. Whether or not this is taken up is yet to be seen.

Are we nearly there yet? Once a mother has a second child and adopts a working pattern other than full-time, the answer from this sample appears to be 'no'.

Second maternity leave breaks therefore support the negativity which previous research has proven to be associated with the discrimination statistics in pay, glass ceilings *and* flexible working arrangements. The reflection of the stories however, clearly hinges on - and is correlated with - the stubborn dominance in the workplace of a 'man's world' values and expectations of what paid work traditionally mean. This supports one of Marshall's (2000) three 'cross woven themes: 'working in male-dominated environments', which was incongruent with women's master theme of the 'good employee' at T1. Weick (2012)

demonstrates this level of complexity is not unusual in individuals' narratives over time – and conflicting findings:

*These articles are generative because they don't stop there. They demonstrate that confusion need not immobilize us, either in everyday life or in our scholarly life. In a way, any old structure and structuring provide temporary resting points. It is against that background that older genres, predispositions, institutions, devices, and dominant stories have a disproportionate influence on our sense of what is occurring. That is a mixed blessing. It provides temporary clarity but it also leads us to notice fewer cues and ignore even more. We enact our anachronisms.* (Weick 2012, p.150)

Since research to date does ignore cues by assuming all maternity leave periods are equivalent, there was, up until now, a silence about the positive reflections of women returning to work after their first child. Similarly, cues that point to second maternity leave being qualitatively different are also ignored, which leads to difficulties in acceptance of alternative patterns of work.

This leads to the consideration of unpaid work. During maternity leave, the woman's pattern of work changed from paid employee to unpaid domestic labour. Perceptions of unpaid work were also linked to the 'woman in a man's world' theme, which later developed into rationalisations of accepting traditional divisions of labour and resulted at times in unplanned changes in working life trajectories. With two or more children, the effort of unpaid work associated with managing two or more children simply became exhausting (a theme noted in Marshall's 2000 paper), especially when additional unpaid work in the community was also incorporated. Notably, none of the sample took an active role in community work until their second or subsequent child – although all used the community network during their first maternity leave. (This again reinforces the conclusion that the two maternity leave periods were qualitatively different). The traditional division of labour is a division, which has changed towards more egalitarian positions. However, regardless of the employment status of the woman, there remains a stubborn weighting towards women taking responsibility for the bulk of domestic duties (Press and Townsley 1998; Sullivan 1997, Bianchi et al. 2000, Gupta 2006). Role conflict became untenable for the interviewees after the second child. Hewlett (2007) suggested that 'opting out' offered a means to escape the role conflict between unpaid and paid work but this perpetuates the statistics for the glass ceiling. It also leads to uncomfortable financial decisions requiring much justification as it turned decisions towards women taking traditional stay-at-home roles. Only one of the six women (Heather) expressed a desire to 'rise through the ranks' after her career break/maternity leave, supporting the notion of smaller pools of applicants available to break through the glass ceiling as suggested by Cotter et al. (2001).

Whittle's and Mueller's (2012) research considers the same universal event experienced in different ways by the bankers. This differs from the individual experiences of a woman, albeit all experiencing a biologically similar experience of motherhood. However, the similarity that does exist is that both bankers and women had stories which were no longer plausible. There was a need to construct new stories, consider new meanings, reflecting some fluidity in sense-making (Edwards and Potter 1992). The individual sense-making was clearly intertwined with perceptions of the meaning of work, jobs and careers. This is considered in the next section.

### **8.5 Career? Not for now thanks!**

It has been established that the findings support the argument for a qualitative difference in experiences of first and second maternity leave breaks. Only Summer, who was self-employed, pursued her original pre-motherhood 'career' goals, returning to the same hours on the same pay as after the birth of her first child. How do women make sense of this? Looking beyond individual narrative themes and considering the women's of sense-making of their 'lived life story' sheds further light on this unique finding and helps to highlight why there is a mismatch with literature to date.

As befits research exploring working lives, the literature review explored the concept of a career. Arthur and Rosseau (1996) offered the definition of a career as '*the unfolding sequence of a person's work experience over time.*' The definition's broadness does not capture the importance the women's stories placed on the differentiation between their work as a mother and their paid employment. To this end, Huang's (2006) definition, which suggested twin concepts of life career and occupational career, does appear to provide a better match. However, the findings suggest women's narratives merged occupational and life career strands through skill development in one to use in the other (for example Martha's IT skills and Tina's teacher knowledge in community roles). Furthermore the majority disregarded 'occupational careers' completely and decisively after second or subsequent maternity leave. Instead, could Khapova et al.'s (2007) *subjective* career and *objective* career be a better fit? The women's stories frequently referred to motherhood as their 'job', never 'career'. In fact, the notion of a career is an emotive concept: grieved for by Heather; completed by Sasha; never wanted by Summer; "*not your friend*" (Martha) and a '*dirty word*' for Tina. It could be questioned whether the concept of a career is perceived to be relevant at all if the women's voices are listened to. The categorical distinction of subjective and objective Khapova et al. (2007), could however, be applied to the concept of 'work' in so far as motherhood is a subjective concept to the women whereas paid work, is objective and

somehow detached from their sense-making the time of second or subsequent maternity leave. Similarly, then, Goffman (1961) wrote about movement to and from personal and private career, yet here, the findings do not support this notion simply because second maternity leave sees a separation from the women's understanding/values associated with paid work and their subjective motherhood role. This separation was preceded by the disillusionment stage and supported by contact with the community. Importantly, the community link was correlated with self-development, as will be discussed in section 8.7.

Nicholson and West (1980) question whether the analogy of a career as a journey is appropriate. As was evidenced in the 'I've changed' master theme, *the time* subsequent maternity leave(s) offered to reflect and readdress a balance in their lives was critical (Eriksen 2001). This suggests that the time not spent 'career travelling' was important – and therefore not a pause in working life, as literature assumes. Time off in this sense was not as important with first maternity leave as during maternity leave break second time round. Unpaid 'subjective' work during the women's maternity leave was not considered by them as part of their career. So, the women did not perceive their unpaid work as part of their career, reflecting older career theory (for example Super 1980). Returning to the analogy of a journey, as Nicholson and West (1989) suggest, travellers do not shape their terrain. Yet the women clearly shaped their environment whilst not in paid employment - although this was limited to their immediate community. In doing so they strived to gain balance between unpaid roles during their 'break' from perceived 'career' work. In this respect, the concepts of work and career can be seen to change meaning. Over time, this facilitated the change in plans with regards their working life. This sample is small but similar stories are being voiced in the media. A recent article in the Sunday Times echoes this change in perspective. Ann-Marie Slaughter (2012), a high flying American previously in the Obama administration, spoke earnestly about her changed beliefs with a family of 2 or more children and then commented on the positive response she received on the admission that in fact she did not want the career she worked so hard to achieve:

*I just got up there and started talking about how incredibly hard it had been and how it had changed my assumptions about my entire career trajectory. (Kinchen, 2012)*

This was described by the paper as a shock revelation and cited quotes to try and reinforce the surprising 'admission'. Slaughter calls for a better division of labour; more openness in the workplace about children causing barriers and a push for work schedules to match school days. Her story resulted in 160,000 comments on Facebook. The layman is ready for a new 'story'; feminist writing has laid the path and now society, organisations - and theories - need to catch up.

As was mentioned, the sense-making in part, appeared to be ongoing during the course of interviews, leading to antenarrative (Boje 2001), where sense-making was fragmented but over time, specifically between T1 and T2, reframing of the concepts of work, job and career became evident. The interpretation that the concept of career loses its relevance to the sample at second or subsequent maternity leave, is explored next.

## **8.6 Frayed concepts: work, job and career through transitions.**

Through a social constructionist lens, together with clear evidence of on-going sense-making, it is unsurprising that definitions and understanding of terms such as 'career' and 'work' change, supporting Lee et al. (2011) who write: "*Career narratives represent individuals' social constructions of this overall moving picture and sequence of events.*" (p.1548). Since the current research was longitudinal, evidence for a developmental change, reflecting first one, then two pregnancies, and work-orientated decision-making in context of these life events, was illustrated in the master themes. Lee et al.'s research (2011) offered a model of intertwining strands, of work, family, community and family life, with the intersection representing transition points. These findings however, also position the cultural expectations and mixed messages of 'ideal mothering' into the frame. Although Lee et al. (2011) criticise Mainero and Sullivan (2005) for a life stage theory approach, the current research concurs: an experience of returning to work after one child then experiencing a second maternity leave is by its very nature a sequence of events, which thus may well reflect stages.

### **8.6.1 Transitions**

Sense-making is based on experiences, and the experiences of note here are sequential. It is worth therefore exploring the transitions as described here and Tomlinson's (2006) description of transitions. Three forms of transition trajectory were offered by Tomlinson:

a. Strategic transitions: These only capture transitions *into "better employment in terms of pay, flexibility, opportunities or employment that is deemed most suitable for the specific point in the life course"*. (Tomlinson 2006 p.373). The end goal is often a better work-life balance, which turned out to be the case for the sample but rarely could this be considered a planned, strategic route intended at the start. The exception being Heather soon after her third pregnancy planned a fourth pregnancy to take advantage of her first employer who supported pregnancy and working mothers. For the rest, the transitions led to acceptance of unpaid work, despite its lower status of paid work. The current research agrees that previous career theory over-emphasises individual agency. Agency was a factor important for

individual women – some had never had a sense of agency, some always strived for agency.

b. Reactive transitions: reacting to unplanned changes. The example offered in the paper was where a woman has to compromise the use of her skills, experience, pay or status to accept a part-time job following maternity leave. Yes, this reflects the stories often portrayed in the media and in the statistics. In reality, all apart from Heather told stories of acceptance of chosen career trajectories. None apart from Summer were using skills, experience or status in a way which was reflected in pay equivalent to that achieved pre-motherhood in paid employment. The transition had led to considerable re-evaluation of their views on their working lives. The word 'reactive' reduces the significance of conscious reasoning and justification that took place around the time of the second or subsequent maternity leave.

c. Compromised choice transitions: this transition label infers a negative outcome, which does not reflect the stories in this sample of first maternity leave but is relevant to second or subsequent maternity leave periods.

The transition descriptors have limited value in describing the working life trajectory transitions. Instead, the type of transition which emerged from the narratives appear to be ones, which demonstrate reflection and consideration of their roles, especially after the women's experience of their first maternity leave return.

The current research suggests a fourth transition type: adaptive transitions. These could be defined as:

*Transitions in working life, which are the result of reflection on - and evaluation of - past experiences, perception of options and constraints of work roles, be they paid or unpaid. Typically, they occur at second or subsequent maternity leave and are correlated with self-development. Importantly, the transitions are not necessarily negative. (Author)<sup>10</sup>*

Ironically, the word 'adaptive' is borrowed from Hakim's (2008) categorisation of women but is done so purposefully to highlight a contrasting aspect of *conscious fluidity* in a woman's working life trajectory rather than a fixed type of working preference.

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<sup>10</sup> as demonstrated in the narratives of Tina, Martha, Summer and Sasha.



Interestingly, if 'lived life' stories only are considered, the transitions described do appear to support Tomlinson's descriptors much better. As demonstrated in the findings, the first and second maternity - or subsequent - maternity leave experience descriptions of transitions as offered by Nicolson (1986) fit well, too. The transition to motherhood supported Nicholson's stages of preparation; encounter; adjustment and stabilisation. The second maternity leave could be argued to have jarred at encounter and/or adjustment stage due to the largely experience of managing paid employment alongside new workload associated with unpaid domestic work. This provided the context for the outcomes of the transitions which led to concept meaning change.

Bearing in mind the importance of the transitions, support has been gained for the modified definition offered for the concept of a career: *"the transitions of a person's work related experience over time"* (Author).

Another finding relevant to the conceptualisation of transitions, and specifically, the notion of adaptive transitions, is that maternity leave for this sample of women did not represent a clear cut time period. Whilst for organisations and from a legal perspective maternity leave must have a clearly defined start and finish date, the women's discourse did not reflect this. This means that the different stakeholders have a very different view on the duration of maternity leave. It is perhaps not surprising then, that there is some 'jarring' at Nicolson's 'adjustment stage' when the impact of second or subsequent maternity leave becomes more salient in the workplace. This might be argued to be trigger the start of an 'adaptive transition' within a mother's career as management of paid employment reaches a critical stage. The first maternity leave avoids this tipping point as the maternity leave boundaries are more able to be congruent with the organisation's views, there is less 'leakage' of motherhood into the workplace and the strict boundaries of maternity leave can be adhered to. The good employee construct remains intact and full employment transition is avoided at first maternity leave.

### **8.6.2 Implications of the concept fraying for this sample?**

The three concepts of work, job and career were one before motherhood. The analogy of a case around a rope can be used to help understand the organisation's role in maintaining the tightly bounded rope which gives no room for alternative unpaid work roles to be easily accommodated and assumes a linear career path. The strands of the rope are no longer woven together after second or subsequent maternity leave because the organisation (and to a greater or lesser extent career theory) ejects the employee from the organisational casing. Once free, the mother's perceptions of work can more readily change as unpaid

work becomes salient in their lives. This period of no paid work provided time for reflection on growing disillusionment and simultaneously offers fertile ground for self-development. It seems this leads to the three concepts fraying apart.

(See overleaf)

Table 30: Concept fraying examples within case studies at T1

CF = Concept Fraying	Tina	Martha	Sasha	Summer No concept fraying	Heather
<b>Career</b>	After CF:  <i>a dirty word</i>	Before CF:  <i>When I went into work, I really believed that women have it all, women have careers, they have children and that's what I really thought'</i>  After CF:  <i>not your friend</i>	Before CF:  <i>...driven to be a specialist... I did everything I could to get to that point.</i>  After CF:  <i>I reached my you know, pinnacle.</i>	-	After CF:  <i>I haven't got one!</i>  And  <i>A career is working to your potential...</i>
<b>Work</b>	After CF:  <i>Work was always part of my identity and that wasn't there anymore...</i>	After CF:  <i>It's busy this [motherhood] work is!</i>	Before CF:  <i>I hadn't done enough work in order for my work to pay me maternity leave'</i>	<i>As a family we don't want to be working full stop....Someone's going to have to work.</i>	After CF:  <i>...out of work for a few years raising children'</i>  and  <i>'I think I would like to back to work full-time.</i>
<b>Job</b>	After CF:  <i>but then he [husband] sees what I do as a job [motherhood]</i>	-	After CF:  <i>Being a mum is like a full-time job'</i>	<i>Beautician is just a job.</i>  And  <i>I feel that's my <b>job</b> though, my job. I'm their <b>mum</b> to look after them.</i>	After CF:  <i>At the moment my job I've got is <b>huge</b>.</i>

The key findings of qualitatively different experiences of maternity leave and fraying of previously bounded concepts of work, job and career, led each woman to react in different ways. Their choices reflected what was important to them. The increasing emphasis on unpaid work led some of the women at T2 to talk about their 'job' and 'work' as a mother and so further reinforced a change in the women's understanding of work, career and job. There was clearly fraying but the fraying was not always into three distinct strands. Heather referred to her work as a mother and often as work in terms of paid employment. Notably she was also the one interviewee who longed to go back to paid employment. Perhaps then it is to be expected that work and job remain close together. Fraying of the three concepts for Heather was incomplete in this respect, offering an insight into the individual nature of the perception of paid employment. Similarly, Summer had never perceived having a career in the first place, nor was she exposed to organisational values. Fraying for her therefore could not be into three strands. Summer did however, shift her use of the words 'work' and 'job' to accommodate unpaid work after her second maternity leave.

This is where their narrative themes, which are largely consistent over T1 and T2, help us understand differences in outcomes. The figure overleaf identifies the differentiation of concept fraying as it was manifested in each of the women in the sample.

(see overleaf)

**Tina** – values her career. To maintain it, she positioned it alongside her unpaid community ‘work’, which recognises her professional identity. Status is important to Tina as identified by the narrative theme analysis. ‘Work’ therefore is shifted away from paid work; ‘career’ is arguably maintained to meet her narrative themes and her primary ‘job’ is as a mum.

**Summer** – never perceived her beautician work as a career – it was just ‘work’ as far as she was concerned and so her ‘job’ as a mum does not cause problems or conflict. Community roles have however, played a critical role in promoting self-development (a lack of formal education is reflected in a narrative theme for Summer).

**Sasha** – sees her mum role as her ‘job’. She perceives her ‘career’ as having reached its pinnacle before motherhood and she has no qualms about letting it go. She is driven by the need for paid ‘work’ though (narrative theme). Presently this drive is satisfied through her community ‘work’, which has rekindled her interest in art – perceived as a potential area for future paid ‘work’.

**Heather** – mourns the loss of her ‘career’ – which is largely due to gender discrimination (a narrative theme). Community ‘work’ has not satisfied her intellectually. She speculates that there are no ‘jobs’ in her male-orientated sector that would accommodate her ‘work’ of managing four children and that her future ‘job’ will necessarily be a carer for elderly relatives. She still strongly associates ‘work’ with paid employment.

**Martha** – never saw her work as a ‘career’, or at least mentions it was never her ‘friend’. She sees the community as offering ‘work’ now (unpaid) and possibly paid ‘work’ in the future. She is using her previous ‘job’ experience to help her manage her ‘work’ as a mum – causing conflict inadvertently (narrative theme).

Figure 31: Specific concept fraying examples.

When all five interviewees at T2 stepped out of their paid employment worlds, the traditional role of mothers and associated chores was naturally highlighted in their stories – and played a large role in their sense-making. It was interesting to note that their perception of their husband’s work, career and jobs did not change: *“the man just tends to go to work, do his job and that’s it.”* (Tina) and more comprehensively described by Martha:

*..and the father was then in this traditional bread winning role, he was doing, he was doing a lot of hours, his job was the only thing that we had it was the only thing that*

*we had, it was very important to him it was anyway but his career was the focus and he would do the hours and he's climbed that ladder.*

Although in reality, it could be argued that Martha's work could have led to the same situation of "climbing that ladder". There were also husbands' opinions repeated by the women on the community work their wives were involved in. Tina's husband was the exception, appreciating the unpaid work. He specifically linked it to his role as a farmer and appreciated its positive impact on the family, their social life and community generally. The rest of the interviewees suggested their support for unpaid work was undervalued by their spouses: "*you're doing your free work*" (Sasha repeating her husband's scorn).

The step out of paid employment into becoming mothers of two or more children according to their lived life story did not suggest complete agency, rather a change in working life trajectory because of circumstances, which then led to reflection and re-evaluation in the time and space community life offered. In this way, the findings support Marshall (2000) who links making sense of one's world through transitions and change. Tempering this, Boje's (2001) antenarrative reminds us that sense-making is on-going as well as retrospective. Whether this really means the women have full control of working life decisions at all stages is not implicit in retrospective sense-making. Yet, career theories, which attempt to accommodate women's working life trajectories, emphasise the: "*heightened role of agency in career construction within the post-industrial society*" (Huang 2006 p.64) or fixed 'types' of women, who would otherwise prefer to choose, for example, to be natural home-makers (Hakim 2002). Instead, Jung's explanation (as cited in Stevens, 2001) of a mother archetype, which introduces possible conflict, more readily accommodates the life-changing perceptions that motherhood brings about, previously below the level of consciousness for women. It might be argued that in fact the support of organisations during first maternity leave actually defers or limits this change in values and perceptions associated with work – or indeed, defers the need for a re-evaluation. The second or subsequent maternity leave seems to offer women time in which women, in Jung's words: '*Take stock, to see how one's life has developed up to that point*' (cwxvii, cited in Stevens, 2001). So whilst motherhood clearly marks a transition point in their lives, supportive maternity leave policies for women with one child minimise the impact of motherhood from a work perspective. This thus supports the relevance of the question: 'Are we nearly there yet?' when considering first time mothers. However, with a second child, increase in unpaid workload, and barriers to maintaining a 'career', resulted in a very different kind of transition. As mentioned, the generic question of equality of opportunity at the time of pregnancy: are we nearly there yet? changes to an individually relevant one: where am I going – where do I want to go? At this

stage, it is argued that the changes in values are not so deep-seated as to change the individual's perception of their life overall (as demonstrated by narrative thematic coherence in women's stories) but here it is argued that the transitions result in changes in the women's perception of their working life trajectory.

Whilst motherhood would only in jest be associated with acts of terrorism, the quote which follows supports the value of time to make sense of second or subsequent maternity leave transitions. The women had all reached a common theme of disillusionment but had not all given the impression of resolving their conflict over paid and unpaid work at T1. Stories of balance were however, uniform by T2, supporting the view of Colville and Brown (2012):

*Stories exert a simplifying latent power over what is seen and what is ignored, how do old stories lose their hold and a new story more in keeping with the times emerges? ..... the ultimate lack of sense is when you cannot produce a narrative to go with the situation. The shock of the new disrupts the taken for granted nature and exposes its assumptive basis. For example, the 9/11 Commission Report (2004) noted that CIA officials received a report headed 'Terrorists learn to fly' in the weeks before the bombing of the Twin Towers, but did not see this information as meriting further attention. We suggest that as this did not fit any pre-existing frames regarding what terrorists did, the officials had no means of understanding the significance of the situation: that is, they had no story to go with it and failed to make sense of it. (Colville and Brown 2012)*

The community life women become immersed in offered fertile ground for a slower pace of life which facilitated the creation of new stories and helped them make sense of their situations. It gave them time to spend in their gardens; take children for walks; spend time thinking and reflecting. This appeared (and was perceived) to be a healthy time for their personal growth too (Erikson, 2008). The inclusion of the community in their stories of working life therefore also supports Sargent and Domberger (2007). They highlighted the importance of being engaged in work that makes a contribution to society to help achieve work-life balance. The women's T2 stories required separation of the concepts of work (now unpaid and some paid), job (primarily as a mother) and career (something they may have had, but was no longer relevant at T2 stage of their lives). All the case studies suggested more paid work was a possibility in the future but there was no longer a natural link to career. As such, future paid work could mean lower pay; lower status, part-time and so on as the drive to choose work to fit in with a 'career' was no longer there. This sense-making of future work does not compromise new (frayed) values of work, career and job - and may

reinforce it. It may also go some way to explain why gender differences in pay still exist and may also contribute to why there remains such a 'thick' glass ceiling.

As mentioned, the link to the community in career literature is not new and here another example supporting sense-making links to community life returns the discussion to the bankers once more. Whittle and Mueller (2012) describe how in their search for legitimacy claiming discourse of bankers, one of the four themes was identified as: "*giving back to society (sharing success with others)*." Whilst the motivation of bankers and mothers are completely different, they shared this desire/need to give something back. The key difference is that whilst the bankers would largely be praised for such action, women felt their roles in the community were neither acknowledged by organisations nor would they be rewarded through recognition of skills learned during this time. This serves to reinforce the belief that their paid work reflects a man's world; unpaid work is charitable and lower status - and reflects their slower pace of life in the community which embraced a control over work-life balance. It also supports the women's disillusionment not just with their employers but also society. Such findings are clearly relevant to Buzzanell and Miu's research on maternity leave negotiations, highlighted as existing in a male-orientated workplace (2007). This section also offers some insight into findings such as Marshall's (2000), who found that women strived to maintain a viable sense of self (her findings' second cross-over theme). As Marshall explains, people's stories are constructed from permissible themes that exist in their culture. Stories are constrained as a consequence. Marshall's (1989) description of stories using differences in gender is a good example and in these findings, it might be argued that stories are similarly framed in expectations of role norms. Yet it is these role norms, such as those surrounding the domestic division of labour which the women question and need to reconcile and make sense of, (for example as described in Tina's apple pie analogy). Put together this line of argument can only be interpreted as further support for the use of a feminist lens. The community, a context which is not driven by male values and made up predominantly of women, offers an expansion of permissible stories and themes and these then help sense-making processes.

The following quote offers another example of how the current research has offered insight into the value of the community as part of a women's working life experience and sense-making:

*Many of the women wanted to feel more authentic and coherent, and this was a major motivation in moving on. ....some people would question whether coherence of self is possible in post modern times. But this call was not for a romantic unity of personhood. Rather it was for full access to the multiple aspects of themselves*



.....*But it is difficult to maintain a viable sense of self in hostile environments – and so sometimes the powerful choice is to leave, releasing energy as a result.* (Marshall 1999 p.20)

To summarise, the women's stories highlight the separation of the concepts of work, job and career after their second or subsequent child. In doing so, the 'rope' model of work breaks out of an organisational casing and strands of work and job are free to be re-framed – often in a supportive, largely female community setting. Whilst career theory recognises the importance of different 'strands' of a woman's life (Lee et al. 2011), it is argued that it is the individual woman's conceptualisation of work, job and career that changes after second or subsequent maternity leave. This process is fed through involvement in a female-orientated community rather than a male-orientated organisational network during their second or subsequent maternity leave. The literature's (and employer's) lack of recognition of this and their associated community based skill development is in part explained by what Arnold and Cohen (2007) describe as an "*unhealthy dependence*" on organisations. The issue of self-development, a master theme at T2 is explored next in light of career literature referred to in the opening of this thesis.

### **8.7 And I've learned along the way – a lot....but who cares?**

The link to the community in the women's stories as described above and how it appears be strongly correlated with skill development is not a new finding: the protean career is defined in part, by its emphasis on the value of 'continuous learning and mastery'. However, maternity leave is not considered part of a 'career' as argued earlier by either literature or by the women in the current research. It was suggested however, that Khapova et al.'s (2007) categorisation could be useful. Skill development of this sample, took place during the break from paid employment during *subjective* working life. Note however, there is a need to change Khapova et al.'s (2007) term from 'career' to 'working life' for the match to work. Importantly, the implications of this word change ensure that maternity leave is shifted away from the idea of a break in paid working life. Role conflict theories consider personal development, too. For example, the role enhancement model holds that multiple roles foster individual growth and better functioning in various life domains, while enriching the lives of individuals (for example Hyde 2001). While literature associated with multiple roles is congruous with role conflict, Hyde's work is not unique in its positive interpretation. Marshall's (2000) insightful analysis of women's working life stories offers points of similarity in this theme, as well as others which as she described are unhelpfully "*underpinned by notions of male-female differences*" (p.24).

The question arises as to what *type* of skill development the women referred to. Some skill development was clearly identifiable and could, in theory be measurable. For example, in Summer's narrative of committee work, she describes learning basic IT skills. Other skills were also tried and tested in a safe environment by the women, some consciously, others not reflected on – notably management, negotiation and team building skills. Although these were within the community and fulfilling unpaid work roles, it is argued they are transferable nonetheless. Narratives also demonstrated how the community provided a formal platform to facilitate the development of existing skills as evidenced in Tina's Children's Panel work. Alternatively, the community provided a means by which to remain engaged with new technology, as evidenced in Martha's foray with social networking calendar functions and associated information sharing networks and tools. Others (Heather and Connie) used skills already established to manage treasury roles and leadership roles. Finally, there were skills that were tried out to help explore future career paths: Sasha used her heritage work to help develop an understanding of art-related careers. All were exposed to the need to demonstrate how they could manage new levels of responsibility, accountability, time management, negotiation, prioritisation and logistical planning. This became pronounced with more than one child – and more so with three or four children as described by three of the women. These skills were often mentioned unprompted and so skill development was more often than not salient in their sense-making. Yet all felt these skills were devalued by both society and future employers. Taking it one step further, not only were the skills devalued, maternity leave was also considered to be a "*brain emptying process*" (Heather) so any return/changes to paid employment would relegate as irrelevant or even detrimental to the organisation. Yet, as mentioned, academic literature recognises the value of such learning to the individual: "*commitment to multiple roles allows expanded opportunities for positive self-experiences and validation*", (Ruderman 2002 p. 371).

There is here then, a clear difference in perceptions between academic writing and the reality of employment world, which is not to the woman's advantage. This difference in perception is not attributable to simply taking leave from paid work. As highlighted in the literature review when paternity leave is valued, so maternity leave becomes better managed and valued by employers. The link to a common perception of paid employment being linked to a male set of values is worthy of note at this point. The international survey by the World Economic Forum (2010) found that the highest rated barrier to senior leadership roles in their company was cited by women as being the 'masculine/patriarchal corporate culture' (Zaida and Ibarra 2010). Finally, the sense of self-development led more to than one woman to say she felt she was "a different person" (Tina) or would be a "better manager" (Martha and Heather). They believed that neither managers nor peers recognise this.

To summarise this section, skill development emerged as a master theme. The findings suggests that far from maternity leave being a break from a career, or even working life trajectory, it is a rich and enhanced period of skill development. Lee et al. (2011), suggest their theory starts to position the career for women into its proper (broader) context. These findings support the acknowledgement of the community role and the need to contextualise maternity leave in a broader context than an organisational level of understanding. Lee et al.'s (2011) theory refers to a career trajectory which is embedded in a broad life context. These findings suggest a further fine-tuning of this model. The findings hone into one particular time of the women's working lives. At this particular time the evolution of career, as described by Lee et al. (2011) meant that their working lives took on a new shape to accommodate new experiences, new skills - and specifically focuses on the fraying of concepts. For some, as evidenced here, careers are sectioned off - they are not entangled. The career strand is cast aside as a past experience, from which useful learning can be taken and added to, but not acknowledged by organisations - or society. So it could be said that yes, "*sense-making consists of entangled strands of work, personal, family, and community life*" (Lee et al. 2011 p. 1546).

The key point remains however: experiences outside 'paid work', specifically during second or subsequent maternity leave led to sense-making which resulted in once tightly bound strands of work, job and career becoming frayed. This is arguably a part of an individual's on-going self-development; again supporting findings from Lee et al. (2011). The question which must next be addressed therefore is how other theories of career can fit with this self-development and new understanding of 'career'.

## **8.8 Career theory re-visited**

Life development theories (for example Rapoport and Rapoport 1980) suggest a triple helix, entwined with occupation, family and leisure strands, where life transitions occur at the intersections. Whilst the transitions at intersections holds true, it is questionable whether leisure pursuits, in 2012 represent a separate strand, or whether they represent a transition point. The answer to this then might shed light on whether unpaid roles such as a caring role for an elderly relative represent a distinct strand too, otherwise it is unclear how such a role could fit into the model. The same holds true for unpaid working for a committee or organising a bag pack for fundraising purposes. Either of these examples could be construed as a leisure, occupation or family strand, according to the individual's values. (Summer perceived her unpaid work in the committee as a requirement of community life; Martha pursued it more as a necessary feature of managing a young family). Boundaries

between occupation, family and leisure are difficult to distinguish. Boundaries between work and home life blur as time has become a more precious resource and constant communication is possible (Eriksen, 2001). As mentioned above, Lee et al. (2011) try to accommodate this in their model:

*The key dynamics in the model are conceptualized as catalysts that precipitate change in the **life space** and directly drive the processes that determine the career trajectory.* (Lee et al. 2011 p.1546) [Emphasis added].

For this sample, the universal catalyst for transition was clearly second or subsequent second maternity leave – which offered time to reflect. The sense of fluidity and experiences of transition are omitted from Hakim's (2002) theory. Theories which accommodate movement to help achieve balance between family and career offer a better match. The kaleidoscope career, with its reference to authenticity and balance serve the purpose well – albeit without explicit acknowledgement of a qualitative difference between second and subsequent maternity leave. As mentioned the concept of a protean career offers a clear link to the community link – and indeed boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rosseau, 1996) place importance on decisions in paid work taking into account 'non-work'. Herein lies the problem with this and other theories which refer to 'work' and 'career': women do perceive unpaid work as work that is linked to careers, or indeed is such work recognisable by organisations as part of a career. Shamir and Salomen's (1985) concept of 'working lives' is clearly more appropriate. The implication runs deeper than definitions of work, career and jobs. At this point, it is worth returning to a point made in feminist literature: the notion of 'career success' remains firmly in the 'man's world'. It is based on a male model of work, as described by and became (for example Sasha) or always was (Summer) irrelevant to the sample. Hewlett's (2007) exploration of careers is pertinent. She argues against any career theory that places emphasis on upwards movement, ignores barriers or misses out on rationalisations, motivations. The current research suggests women **do** perceive self-development in their working lives; do not reflect on the need for upward movement as they embrace motherhood and they **do** see barriers in what they perceive as a man's world. The current research supports the argument that any theory which does not embrace the rationalisations of those who stay at home or accept paid work in 'lower' forms than ability and experience permits, is doomed to fail. Any theories that do not accommodate these 'non career' moves will fail to explain the current research's findings of 'told stories'. Listening to the voices of the women demonstrates the need to move beyond the 'lived life story', which tends to be interpreted in light of male models of career - and career success.

The current research's findings do however, offer robust support for O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2008) three stages:

- *Stage 1 idealism*: If it is accepted that this idealism might be real or perceived, then the notion of O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2008) idealism can be linked to congruence of work, job and career concepts for organisations and women.
- *Stage 2 endurance*: This was evident after two or more children. Endurance becomes a feature reflected in 'disillusionment' which legislative support cannot counter, especially when reinforced with negativity from organisations and a de-valuation of skill development during maternity leave.
- *Stage 3 reinvention*: This stage, if applied to these findings, stretches the stage from the fraying of work, job and career stage through to the point at which women re-frame their working life trajectory. The current research suggests this is an on-going phase which is not necessarily reinvention through new paid employment. Instead the trigger is the successful fraying of work, job and career concepts. Women can accommodate and gain a sense of value of their unpaid work. Community roles and a re-evaluation of motherhood as work is part of the process of reinvention.

The table below summarises the relevance of the model to the case study:

**Table 31: O'Neil and Bilimoria stages comparison to case studies.**

<b>Stage/ case study</b>	<b>Tina</b>	<b>Martha</b>	<b>Sasha</b>	<b>Connie</b>	<b>Summer</b>	<b>Heather</b>
<b>Idealism</b>	Yes	Far from ideal!	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Endurance</b>	Yes	Short-lived	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Reinvention</b> Note: none returned to full-time employment	After 2 <sup>nd</sup> maternity leave, leaving paid employment	After 2 <sup>nd</sup> child and repeated after each child, following life pattern.	Triggered after 2 <sup>nd</sup> child and on-going process towards art-related career.	After 2 <sup>nd</sup> child	No – continued as before working towards reinvention with regards self-sufficiency	Yes, after 3 <sup>rd</sup> child

The findings support the interpretation of significance of more than one child on the women's working life trajectory.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the inappropriate setting of the male model as the norm for working life trajectories, then comparing women against this 'norm', is adopted widely. It is true that studies exploring the difference between genders in psychology found key differences in sexual dimorphism yet it was not until 1994, that Hyde's meta-analysis triggered guidelines to question this as a norm to follow in research. It is now accepted, if not yet whole-heartedly adopted by all journal editors that there is a need to report research which does not find support for research hypotheses looking for gender differences. If only research which finds differences continues to be reported, and the norms set as being male, there will continue to be a skew in our understanding. It is argued then, that it is time to reconsider the value of second or subsequent maternity leave and time to listen to the women's stories, reporting what they say, and not try to shape this to what literature suggests others have said.

More fundamentally, the current research points to the need to reconsider the notion of a career. This is not to suggest that women's careers need to be re-considered as they are clearly affected by different variables. Instead, following the lead of Lee et al. (2011), this research supports the idea that there needs to be a shared, broader understanding of what careers are and how they fit into an individual life, an organisation's needs and our society more generally. Suggesting that careers are made up of different strands arguably misses the point that individuals' working lives are far more than single strands at any level of analysis. It also assumes that boundaries set, for example for periods of maternity leave are fixed and universally accepted by all stakeholders.

An analogy: At the start of paid employment, certainly, organisations benefit from the tightly bound 'rope' of work, job and career. The metaphor can be extended to casing around the rope which is strong and inflexible. Academic theory has reinforced this casing and although cracks are evident when considering women's experiences in particular, the 'rope' at best is portrayed as made up of different strands. Focussing on second or subsequent maternity leave, the casing dissolves and the rope naturally frays. What remains are the essential strands free to better shape themselves to a woman's life, who is free to support and be supported by communities. In turn the women's often unpaid roles contribute to our society by raising children with age appropriate care and an individual attention to family needs - not organisational requirements. The organisational casing, reinforced with legislation is appropriate for a limited time, for a limited group of people, which are more likely to be men

at present - and perhaps Hakim's 'work-centred women' if they are indeed a stable category.

Unpaid work, whether caring roles, motherhood, community work; the experience of chronic illness, disability, travel and maternity leave should all be embraced as not only challenges but also potential learning experiences, just as conscription and some career breaks are perceived as "character building". These life experiences and transitions can lead to self-development and are intrinsically part of a working life trajectory. Importantly organisations do not perceive the benefits of such experiences and are rarely perceived to accept that the learning changes the perceptions and skill sets of those involved. Second or subsequent maternity leave periods provide women space to reflect on their working lives and whether or not entirely free to choose, more able to experience work which is not bound by organisational norms. This experience permits a new level of sense-making. The perceived male-dominated paid employment context is in juxtaposition to a largely female community context. The latter is more accommodating and better suited to flexibility - and provides fertile ground for sense-making processes. Above all else, second or subsequent maternity leave and time in the community appears to offer the women time to reflect on what they took for granted with respect their perceptions of their work, their job and career, if not a time of agency, certainly a time for sense-making.

## **8.9 Limitations and future directions**

a. The evolved nature of the research paper's methodology has led to some epistemological insights as well as theoretical advancement. As part of this journey a great number of perspectives and ontological stances were embraced, rejected, skipped over and/or accommodated. Whilst for the researcher, this was insightful offering illuminating lines of thought, it was perhaps, at the reader's expense. Future research pursuing the findings should seek to streamline the process.

b. The idiographic nature of the research does not seek to present robust new theory. At best it can lead to questions about existing, dominant patterns of knowledge. The intuitively 'comfortable' finding that: one child is manageable; two represents a different story, warrants a larger scale study to explore the generalisability. Using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, the finding is credible. If it is a robust finding, proven quantitatively, in the very least it offers insight into the conflicting findings to date amongst career theory. At best, support for this simplistic outcome leads to questions about the efficacy of current legislation and human resource practice (see recommendations, see section 10.2).

c. The other key finding of the current research focuses on the women's personal journey of work, which they report as very much on-going throughout maternity leave. Again, the small sample size does not pretend to be representative. The fraying model which offers a visual metaphor of the sample's experience needs to be further tested. Future samples need to demonstrate saturation using a broader sampling frame. Importantly, future samples should include city dwellers, as opposed to more rural environments which have their particular features which may not be appropriate to generalise (Mauthner, McKee and Strell 2001).

### **8.10 Recap: what does the current research add?**

a. A new insight into second or subsequent maternity leave.

The fact that the sample of women interviewed all found second or subsequent maternity leave a period of time where they stopped to re-evaluate their working life trajectory is perhaps not really a surprise finding. Why then, has no career theory separated out the qualitative difference between managing one child and managing two or more when discussing working life? MacLean, Harvey and Chia (2012) suggest some actors are simply under-researched. Women who have successful first transitions and return to work are promoted as success stories. Women who face challenges and do not return are researched as either 'opt out' mothers, or are championed as 'working mothers', especially if they start up their own business and become entrepreneurs (Wallace et al, 2012). The latter are effectively escaping the 'man's world.' Occasionally, women find themselves in large organisations which can accommodate alternative working patterns and actively work to ensure parity in pay regardless of maternity leaves (for example BP and many parts of the Civil Service). In short, sampling usually forces categorisation of pre or post motherhood, employed, non-employed or self-employed mothers (for example, Marshall 2000). The reason for not hearing the voices of women who are still on second or subsequent maternity leave is simply because they have neither opted out nor have yet returned to work – they are at a 'pre-categorisation' time. Some mothers are well researched: "*voices of the field*" (Czarniawska 1998 p. 47). It means however, that the voices of this sample – and their sense-making, at what turns out to be a critical transition time, have not been heard until now. This small sample offers strong support for the idea that second or subsequent maternity leave sense-making offers much insight into women's perceptions of organisations and much more research needs to be done.

b. Further support for feminist perspectives.

Cost of childcare was an issue cited by some: typical full-time childcare costs of two children in Scotland are estimated at £30k a year (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 2012). Whilst the master themes of man's world and stay-at-home rationalisations are linked to feminist



arguments, they are also reflections of women's 'lived stories' reflecting our culture in 2012. Stories, Czarniawska (2004) proposes, should be viewed as 'important cultural resources'. Social commentaries, such as those posted by Slaughter (2012), follow in the tradition of Greer (1971) and more recently Moran (2011) in sharing views on motherhood to an audience of women keen then and 30 plus years on, to seek guidance/reassurance. Often, women hear messages which the readers already knew but needed a figurehead voice to be heard. Messages are mixed but as Slaughter (2012) suggests, "*we are at a tipping point*". Neither the stories nor their interpretations in this research set out to offer a political stance. Instead, they mirror the reality of women's reflections, which are inevitably fed and constrained by society as well as their working life experiences at the time of their storytelling. Career theory must continue to accommodate the perceptions of those it intends to describe. The finding that transitions captured 'lived life' story descriptions rather than 'told story' descriptions reinforces the need for theories to scrutinise evidence used to support them. Evidence must contextualise the experiences women living in the culture theories aim to describe. Our culture presently sends out mixed messages about being a 'working mum', for example Cherie Blair's (June 2012) attack on stay-at-home' mothers, at the same time as valuing stay-at-home mothers. The landscape of women in the workplace has progressed from acceptance of gender inequality in the workplace to a time when the assumption has become that women 'can have it all' - as supported by legislation. Whilst academics can discuss:

*the fulfilment of self through the expression and experience of living authentically and sharing in the (re)creation of organizations and society.* (Lips-Wiersma and McMorland 2006, p.148)

The reality at present is less idealistic and must also be written down. The current research captures a time when a feminist perspective is readily relevant to offer a framework of understanding to address the question: why was the change not filtered through as equality legislation infers it should? Listening to women's voices helps explore answers.

c. A new way of understanding the transition and change of work, job and career concepts.

The discussion of the concepts of work, job and career crosses psychological perspectives as well as using business and management literature research and evidence. As such, there is clearly strong support for Arthur, Hall and Lawrence's (1989) statement that careers offer 'a *nexus for interdisciplinary study*' (p. 8). Recent attempts at drawing together disciplines support the argument here, that there is still much to learn (Chudzikowska and Mayrhofer, 2011). Socially constructed sense-making, explored longitudinally, is at the crux of the current research and exposes the common experience of the three concepts starting off as

one, then fraying over time. The role of perceived self-development through this process is critical and maternity leave clearly offers time to reflect on their working lives, often for the first time in many years (Women Like Us, 2012).

#### d. The role of community

This is already acknowledged by both life development theories and increasingly career theories. The card sort during T2 further offered an insight into sense-making at T2: all the women's responses reflected their belief that unpaid work, typically community roles as well as domestic roles associated with two or more children, was neither recognised nor valued by society or organisations. This was in contrast to their perception of value associated with men's parental status. Fatherhood was not expected to affect men's employability, in fact the sample perceived parental responsibilities to increase their status. The current research suggests that community roles and having time to be part of the community was crucial for sense-making. It might be argued that time within a community helped women to understand their frayed strands of work and jobs, at a time when it had become disengaged from organisational meanings. The community work helped the women in the sample to re-contextualise their working life trajectory. This insight lends itself to be used to call for support for the valuable self-development in a safe environment, (see recommendations). Furthermore, the new skills learned during this time were not automatically perceived to be transferable. This notion of parental transferable skills was explored in a post-graduate (Veltze, 2004). It is recognised by career counsellors - reflecting the aforementioned post-graduate's profession. Importantly, self development during time off is neither recognised academically in career theory nor explicitly by organisations or community. The women too, do not readily associate the skill development during maternity leave with paid employment. This is reflected in the fraying model.

The lack of acknowledgement of skill development gained in unpaid community roles is arguably more palatable than a mute or hostile reaction experienced by the women's from their (ex) employers. Marshall discusses this devaluation of women's decision making not to return full-time: "*Women are sometimes portrayed as not tough enough, not willing to give the commitment considered 'normal'*" (p.209) Marshall's (2000) sample strived to gain what the women in this sample appear to have found in the community. Importantly, the value of the community was a positive phase for all bar one of the sample in the current research. Community roles were not perceived as a permanent feature in their working life trajectory. Perhaps if maternity leave time spent contributing to the community was valued time, women would be better placed to position themselves to be perceived by organisations as being 'tougher'.

## Chapter 9 Comment on analytical tools used

### 9.1 Emotion

The expression of emotions are traditionally viewed as an impediment to sense-making (Maitlis and Sonnenshein 2010) and associated with (negative) feminine traits in the workplace, especially where the woman is a senior professional (Bolton 2005). The interviews did contain many tears (Heather, Sasha, Summer, Tina, as well - as the interviewer's, in empathy). The tears were all linked in some way to narratives reflecting issues surrounding the 'man's world' master theme or motherhood 'stay-at-home' rationalisations. This outpouring of emotion had firstly a cathartic effect (Freud 1933). Three of the interviewees were explicitly grateful for the opportunity to tell their stories. Secondly, the emotion supported the depth and resonance of feelings associated with working life trajectory change, be it positive or negative. It can be interpreted as support for existing research which associates qualitative interviews involving personal transitions, as imitating therapy, as discussed in an article by Birch and Miller (2000). The emotion also went beyond the interviewee-interviewer relationship, for example, decisions made by the women were at times emotively questioned by the kick-start panel - see appendix 6. The interview method, using a BNIM (biographic narrative interpretative analysis) style opening question proved to be a powerful tool with unexpected consequences. Finally, at times, for example after the interview with Sasha, the emotion felt by the researcher could be argued to be an example of transference (see for example 6.4.4 and 6.5.4) where the researcher feels the emotion of the interviewee.

### 9.2 Analysing a story – trapped within a web?

Marshall describes stories as *"trapped in a web of frames of meaning underpinned by notions of male-female differences"* (p.226) But how far was this true? Certainly there was a strong perception of gender differences in all the women's stories of working lives - and this was evident in their sense-making. It could be said that IPA (interpretative phenomenological analysis) tapped into a web of the perceived male employment world - and the narratives exposed the effect of this on women's sense-making. This then, permitted the frayed model to be formulated. On the other hand, BNIM explored the individuals' perceptions of their life and captured an understanding of that person's reflection of who they are (their perceived identities and important values and cognitive frameworks) – through the identification of narrative themes. The double layer of analysis BNIM and IPA appears to have tapped into distinct spheres – or webs: an individual's narrative identifying a sense of self *and* their

perception of work and their orientation to it. Another way, perhaps of considering the differences is to draw on Doucet and Mauthner's (2008) discussion of what is inside and outside the narrative. Wengraf's (2007) stance would follow Benhabib's (1995) notion of subjects *situated within* social environment. IPA on the other hand, would arguably represent subjects as *constituted in* the situation (Butler, 1995). The match is imperfect but does offer interesting similarities. The researcher grappled with the importance or relevance of agency. The polarities represented by Benhabib et al. (1995) and Butler's (1999) stances have considered the role of agency in their subjects, too. Doucet and Mauthner (2008) describe the unsatisfactory solution of a 'soft' postmodern position (Fraser, 1995) and the psychoanalytic framework, adopted for example by Frosh et al (2003). Doucet and Mauthner (2008) maintain the question which has *not* been addressed is: are we giving voice to research subjects or to research subjects' stories? The current research explores one through an understanding of the other. Decanting one from the other also overlaps with Doucet and Mauthner's (2008) first two readings of stories: first, they recommend seeking relational and reflexive constituted narratives. Here, the visual similarity of IPA's three columns (see appendix 4) with the recommendation that the interviewee words in one column with the researcher's reactions in the other, is striking. The second reading, 'tracing narrated subjects' and to a degree 'reading for structured subjects' can be linked to BNIM analysis; it is similar to the outcome of the 'told story' narrative themes. This comparison is admittedly speculative and 'post hoc'. To do this justice, it warrants further consideration outwith a research paper. Suffice to say that there is an argument that the current research incorporates viewpoints from different webs. In Doucet and Mauthner (2008) four readings of narratives they say their analysis: "*offers a way of operationalising epistemological concepts of relational narrative subject*" (p.407). The two analyses adopted here provide a multidimensional understanding of the individual within - and the individual as part of their socio-cultural setting - accommodating the researcher's standpoint, too. Doucet and Mauthner (2008) suggest that "*we cannot come to fully know them*" (p. 407) as researchers. The current research suggests it is at least helpful to explore perceptions and reflections of women's stories by understanding who they are as individuals, as well as their understanding of their working life: the spider, the web and where the web has been woven - and for whom.

It is also worthy of note that the IPA method of analysis results in 'master' themes, an irony not picked up by the researcher until highlighted by the supervisory team on submission of a draft of this thesis. It is then of interest, that it is possible to sit in a web, embrace the associated discourse and not be aware of it.

### 9.3 The role of the interviewer:

Whittle and Mueller (2012) discussed the importance of knowing who the interviewer was, as a story cannot exist without a listener. They had followed their participants over a number of years and this was perceived to be an advantage, facilitating the telling of the story. Certainly the interviewees opened up even more at T2 as evidenced by a 10% increase in average number of words overall. This was all the more interesting when considering that T2 interviews covered what had happened in terms of the women's working life over the last 3 years as opposed to at T1, which was closer to reflecting on 20 years of working life history. The aforementioned tears (section 9.1) were shared *between mothers*, not as interviewer and interviewee. This further supports the dynamic nature of sense-making; Boje's (2001) antenarrative, as well as the inclusion of 'terse narratives' in the women's stories. For some, the latent realisation and expression of the enormity of meaningful transitions led naturally to the discussion self-development during second or subsequent maternity leave. This supports recent comments by MacLean, Harvey and Chia (2012):

*Meaning-making (re)affirms the unity of the individual by joining together fragments of experience into a coherent whole through the espousal of personal values and convictions. (p. 33).*

The clear narrative consistency, as expressed through the individual narrative themes, demonstrated that a coherent whole *is* perhaps strived for. This is incongruous with Wengraf's (2007) position which encourages questioning to follow the storyline so as to preserve it. What is being preserved if the story changes with every telling? It is clear that the case studies here used the experience of the interview to help form understanding – and as a result, possibly reinforced the fluidity of their story.. The process offered an opportunity to reflect and gave permission to express sense-making, thus also supporting the notion of the experience itself imitating a therapeutic relationship. The role of the interviewer was clearly pivotal. See also reflexive analysis, section 10.5.

## Chapter 10 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 10.1 Conclusions

Pre motherhood, the concepts of work, job and career are one and the same for all interviewees. This is what organisations expect. There is an alignment between organisations and employees – and this is what society expects. Notably, this is in alignment with a male model of career and meaning of work: your (paid) work is your job and this should be closely linked to your career aspirations. This alignment is illustrated in the ‘good employee’ master theme at T1. The good employee theme is also relevant post first maternity leave as the organisational policies, legislation and women’s expectations and alignment strive to continue.

First maternity leave, from an employment perspective can be perceived positively – this contradicts existing research findings (for example Alban-Metcalfe and West 1991; King and Bosford 2009). By the second maternity leave ‘disillusionment’ replaced the ‘good employee’ master theme as expectations were not met; working life plans started to erode and childcare and traditional divisions of labour took their toll. Well-cited ‘role conflict’ research supports this finding. ByT2, interviewees had some time away from work and this facilitated the separation of the three concepts (work, job and career). This seemed to be because work was no longer solely associated with a paid job. The bond between work and career therefore also dissolved. This concept fraying led to reflections which triggered change in the meaning of work. This finding is a new interpretation of working life trajectories.

Fraying, according to the interpretations based on this sample, is speeded up in four ways:

- More children. Unpaid work increases with 2 or more children. The master theme outlining stay-at-home rationalisations (master theme) supports the on-going traditional division of labour at home, regardless of previous paid work status.
- Involvement in community work (master theme). This experience opens women’s eyes to other forms of work, which can be managed around family roles and importantly, is not linked to career but permits self-development (master theme). Community work is linked to reciprocity as the various community groups, such as mother and toddler groups. The groups are an invaluable means of support and networking; it is largely female-orientated, in contrast to the world of paid employment.

- Negative/lack of communication from organisations during maternity leave. Organisations do not recognise any form of unpaid work the mothers do and this reinforces the perception that they are generally anti-mothers (master theme). This reflects the mixed messages society sends out to working mothers.

## 10.2 Recommendations<sup>11</sup> for organisations based on findings

a. Organisations need to be more aware of the legislative requirements and amended legislation<sup>12</sup>. This must be filtered down to all managers so that they are aware of - and accept - organisationally held values to help promote legislative aims. This includes ensuring fair pay remuneration whilst on, and returning from, maternity leave.

b. Be prepared to treat second maternity leave mothers differently, accommodating changes in both their perspectives, priorities and preferred career trajectories on their return. Since employers have a duty of care to keep in touch with employees whilst on maternity leave to discuss return to work, managers should therefore be encouraged to discuss time off before leave begins. This permits time to reflect on what is important and how leave can best be managed with a flexible plan, rather than offer a reactive strategy to return to work mothers. In short, organisations should encourage discussions **before** a return to work is expected.

c. Acknowledge self-development that may take place during second or subsequent maternity leave in particular. Explore options to capture and use new skills and perspectives. Consider a stance whereby organisations seek to mirror this self development through the legislative provision of up to 10 days paid work. This could be incorporated into a strategy with which to help other women and educate managers maternity and paternity leave benefits.

d. Conduct a pay survey, as originally intended by section 77 of the Equality Act (2010) irrespective of organisation size. Larger organisations should lead by example and publish results.

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<sup>11</sup> All recommendations are based on an assumption that this idiographic study can be proven to be a robust challenge to existing thinking.

<sup>12</sup> For example, employers need to take into account case law from the European Court of Justice (amended in 2008) regarding continuation of conditions and benefits through both ordinary and statutory maternity leave.

- e. Set aside staff development budgets for mothers and offer funds as a norm - beyond the 10 days mentioned above. Encourage women who do not take up this optional provision to carry over the 10 days on their return to work irrespective of their employment pattern before or after.
- f. Encourage women to talk about children and childcare to facilitate the 'normalisation' of a female values and concerns in the working environment. Permit 'leakage'! (Gatrell 2008).
- g. Facilitate better management of part-time worker by educating managers and all men - as well as female peers.
- h. Sharing feedback on strategies and listening to women *who chose not to come back*, as well as those who do, will broaden understanding of what works, and what does not work. Adoption of the Athena Swan charter and associated standards should be compulsory – and extended to all areas of work.

*You can't object to anybody wanting to get on with their life and expanding families...it's all part of life. You just get on with and deal with it. (Connie).*

### **10.3 Recommendations for women based on findings**

- g. All employees, men and women need to be more knowledgeable about parental legal rights and these should be made clear to all before parenthood. Encourage women to disseminate information, knowledge and experience of maternity leave.
- h. The barriers organisations create, for example, the long hours working culture, should be reported – with assurances expected that such reporting will not be detrimental in any way.
- i. Take the time to consider the benefits of maternity leave and how this might be transferred to the organisation. Voice the benefits of community roles and other unpaid work.
- j. Beware of part-time working hours automatically being assumed to be an easy solution. Be willing to voice concerns, refer to legislative provision to support concerns and barriers:



*...and everybody says best really work part-time.....no it's not the best of both worlds:  
'I do half the mum job, half the housework job and half the actual job so... no, it's not  
the best of best of both worlds at all ...because one person suffers and it's me. (Tina).*

#### 10.4 Recommendations for government based on findings

k. Re-consider legislation that infers more than one child is easier/cheaper, for example: less child benefit for the second child.

l. Support exploration of a means by which to capture skills developed in community roles and accommodate community work into portfolio accreditation for example in SVQ frameworks and as part of CPD.

m. Fund more professional bodies to support fellowships, such as those offered by the Daphne Jackson Memorial Fellowships Trust (1992) to ease transition back to return to work individuals.

n. Fund collation, dissemination and expansion of good practice to support Athena Swann standards (2005). This option should consider further how to capture the skill development during periods of unpaid working life.

o. Recent research by the company Women Like Us (2012), reinforces the fact that few women receive career guidance after motherhood and that which has given in the past, is out-of-date, not reflecting women's current position and circumstances. The current research would further add, that any career advice offered pre-motherhood is unlikely to address or prepare women for the transitions that lead to a fraying to the three concepts. Re-recruit career counsellors into the public sector and facilitate normalisation of career guidance as part of maternity leave arrangements.

p. Fund research into the best way to educate women, and men, on parental rights and details of legislative provision available to them. Raising the level of knowledge will reduce the opportunity for unfair or discriminatory practice and help introduce best practice into everyday discourse. As it stands, legal knowledge is associated with negative experiences, complaints and legal challenges.

*If I ever go to work again, you know, by Jove I'll be a much better people manager, much better at organising **my** time and much more realistic of goals and things like that. (Martha).*

## 10.5 Recommendations for researchers

q. Consider gender mix of kick-start panel, if used.

r. More research needs to be conducted to explore the idea of concept fraying and transition style with a larger sample. Samples should consider different industries and sectors, which are more or less traditionally associated with male-orientated professions. The question that needs to be answered is how great is the gender variable in this alternative view of career and working life.

s. The role of fathers and partners needs to be explored. Their role was considerable in shaping the perceptions of these women's acceptance of traditional division of labour. Also, the question as to why fathers do not appear to experience the same 'fraying' is of interest. Is this a societal factor needs to be asked. Research should establish whether concept fraying occurs in Scandinavian countries where there are different approaches to parental leave.

t. Other aspects of research to be considered include the relative impact single parenting might have around sense-making of working life trajectories. Questions need to be asked such as: does concept fraying and adjustment transition occur after second or subsequent maternity leave occur in the same way and whether the same holds true for female bread-winners.

u. Explore ways which individual's pregnancy, paternal rights and organisations' duty of care can be brought into everyday discourse (see 10.4, recommendation p.)

## 10.6 Final comment – reflexive analysis

*I think it will help mums like me feel like we actually have a voice, you know because people like me seem to be forgotten. (Heather)*

I kept a diary throughout the time of the T1 and T2 interviews, which I referred to during the analysis. In between I used email correspondence with my supervisors to sound out - and pour out - my thoughts between meetings. I also shared and listened to friends' and colleagues' many anecdotal stories. Having a circle of female friends which includes a psychotherapist, career counsellor, 'high-flyer', stay-at-home mother and home educator, GP, cleaner, carer and ex university PA/administrator gave me a solid grounding for checking the authenticity of my findings. I actively sought more stories from family members too, which reinforced my feeling that the findings which emerged were authentic and credible. I justified this informal sharing and listening as following in the footsteps of feminist researchers such as Belenky et al.(2007). I gained satisfaction of accepting this as part of the epistemological framework embraced for the current research in a similar way to that expressed by Doucet and Mauthner (2008). If not true collaboration, it was as close as the research process permitted - and it felt comfortable. The excerpts below comes from my final entry:

*The current research, both formal and informal, made me aware that our culture defers to a male model of work fairly **universally**. It is simply more salient in some sectors than others. Our culture remains one which is aligned to notions of career and career success tied up with financial gain and power. As such, unpaid work of any form is unlikely at present to be recognised as equal to one, which attracts financial reward. I haven't changed my values but recognise them now as firmly rooted in the feminist camp. It seems incredulous that Germaine Greer's writing at the time of my birth is still so resonant 43 years later.....*

*We swapped our city life for a small-holding, which included giving up a potentially lucrative career in London for a better quality of life. My husband found work in a very traditional male sector, after working in a traditionally female one, which too, has been informative. I have come to learn that satisfaction from my choice of work does not come from promotion and pay rises. Living rurally, I am acutely aware of other's economic lack of choices. Did this affect my analysis? Undoubtedly, but I worked hard to preserve the women's voices. I have experience of more than one lifestyle and worked in public and private sectors; worked in organisations where as a woman I was in the minority and others, where I was in the majority; employed and self-employed; as a well-paid professional and unskilled worker; full-*

time and part-time<sup>13</sup>. I am perhaps unusual in my breadth of experience and acknowledge that in my experience there are advantages and disadvantages of each. As much as my experiences will inevitably colour my interpretation, one outcome is that my perceptions have also developed and arguably changed over the years of this project. Is this the same as saying I have learned a new way of looking at the same experiences? Can my experiences change retrospectively as stories change? A story is only true for the listener and the storyteller at the time of telling the story. As such, it is perhaps no surprise that my story has changed over time. My story from the perspective of a novice PhD student had to change as over time - I am near the end of my story of the current research project. How will my story change over time?

I did not set out to develop a new definitive theory. I began with a strong feeling that any theoretical explanation that offered set stages was deterministic and failed to capture the diversity of individual experiences. Yet, perhaps this was naive as I started with a sample of women on second or subsequent maternity leave, specifically so that I could explore their perceptions of the same sequence of events. Not surprisingly then, the women's stories reflected incremental learning in line with their experiences of becoming a mother of one, then two plus children. I learned, through a very convoluted journey, how to best capture, in considerable depth, the perceptions and reflections of six ordinary women who had worked full-time, then become mothers. I set out on a straight path using BNIM, yet side-stepped into IPA in order to find answers to the questions I was seeking in a way I felt comfortable with and felt captured the women's experiences in a way which they wanted to tell me their experiences naturally, not restricted by my choice of questions. A strong belief in the value of stories developed over time into a strong belief in the need to hear – and understand - the voices telling the story. The work of Reissman (2003), Belenky et al. (1997) and others took on new meanings. The difficulty I faced was that a line had to be drawn to end this journey. As I type now, I realise, even this section is rather like a photo, a snap shot of an ever evolving line of thinking. I started off with the intention of conducting and writing up a research project, with a clear start, middle and end. The start was clear, the middle fizzled out and an ending is necessary but in a way, feels frayed. What else did I learn? I dropped a parallel strand of the initial research investigation, which intended to link emotional intelligence to my sample's stories. The advice to do so was completely appropriate, if not at the time appreciated. I gain some satisfaction nonetheless from the fact that the topic of

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<sup>13</sup> It is through this research I have learnt that I was in a position to take legal action against discrimination I suffered as a part-time employee. This fact too, is informative - there should be easier ways to learn your rights as a female employee!

*emotion cannot ever be removed from a qualitative research process – although the emotive nature of the interviews was far more challenging than anticipated by any of those involved.*

*Am I nearly there, I ask myself as I complete this project? No. I would have been but I've changed the destination I'm travelling to. For me personally, the women's insights forced me to accept what I implicitly knew - more children means more unpaid work and part-time paid work needs a very supportive manager and team to fit in – to make it work. It is not possible to pretend otherwise – no matter how much fellow employees or employers infer and may pressurise you to act otherwise. I am a very slow learner; I battled for years to manage children, ill-health, home and various paid part-time work – some well managed, some a disaster. In my defence, seemingly 'obvious' truths are neither acknowledged in theories, nor by organisations. As long as motherhood doesn't 'leak' beyond the designated special leave days offered as token gestures for emergencies there seems to be no problem. The problem, I think we need to be more prepared to admit, is rarely with the individual only. If someone accidentally bumps into me walking down a corridor, I've found myself apologising to them. We are conditioned, in our culture, to be apologetic.*

*The current research gave me much needed time to stop and reflect on what work really means to me. With the support of two persevering, tolerant and wise supervisors, an ever supportive husband and children who have grown up knowing their mother as an eternal student, this journey was as much about my sample of women as it was about what my stance is. I was able to explore this effectively in a safe, supervised process. For some the transitions in working life associated with motherhood are unnecessarily traumatic, unsupported and mothers' experiences and contributions, under-valued.*

*One constant that I have held, is that I do not believe for that all mothers must stay at home. The ability to offer a caring, stable and age-appropriate alternative to a full-time mother should always be the priority. Options should be available to provide this in whatever way she sees fit. Choices made should be supported by the community, government and employers. The current research provides the insight that for some, the decision will in part depends on whether there is fraying of work, career and job concepts – as well as individual preferences and circumstances.*

*So what of Yardley's (2008) principles? My method emphasised sensitivity to context; commitment to a five year journey and rigor is (I hope) reflected in this write up and 'transparency and coherence' has been tested with friends as mentioned and will be tested again in the viva - and over time. Finally, 'impact and importance' of this research:*

*unquestionable for me and it seems true for my participants, too. Next, it is my role to ensure the impact spreads through further research and dissemination of my findings.*

*I have come to believe more so than ever, that everybody be they parents or not, should have time away from paid work to help keep their life and their interpretation of work, in perspective. I've learned that community roles appear to have offered my small sample some respite from what organisations have come to demand, expect and/or value - time to fray! I've come to understand, that time to think, be it through doctorate or through a second maternity leave is, often missing in women's lives and I see this lack of time to 'mull' is true too, for my students. Perhaps that is why some people turn to art, a 'hobby' and perhaps source of income which gives permission to take time (a future research project perhaps). It is only when you regain time, do you realise how valuable it is.*

*Basically I think in a nutshell, you get more in touch with life when you stop working you're not just roboting along and you do have to think what on earth you're up to..... and that's a good thing. (Martha)*

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## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 Consent form (generic)
- Appendix 2 Kick-start panel example workings (Sasha)
- Appendix 3 Charity bag-pack (Summer)
- Appendix 4 Example of section of IPA analysis table
- Appendix 5 T2 interview follow up letter
- Appendix 6 Kick-start panel comments (Heather)

## Appendix 1: Consent Form



THE  
**ROBERT GORDON**  
**UNIVERSITY**  
ABERDEEN

### CONSENT FORM

The research aims to explore perceptions and management of maternity leave in context of your personal work history. Having children and decisions made about returning to work are emotional decisions and important for the individual, organisations and the economy, yet to date, there has been little research conducted in this area. This project uses a small sample of women and aims to follow up on their experiences and perceptions over the course of a year, through two interviews. An on-line questionnaire provides further data for the project. More details about this will be provided later.

#### Your participation in this project involves two stages:

- a. A recorded interview focusing on your experiences of work and an on-line questionnaire.
- b. A second follow-up interview to take place in approximately one year's time.

In accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics, I would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Your participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and withdraw the right to use any data collected without consequence.
- Anonymity is guaranteed; data collected will only used for the researcher's purposes and all data kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

## Appendix 2: Kick-start panel example workings

Please sign to confirm that you have read and understood the

above:

Name of participant .....

Contact Details .....  
.....

Signed .....

Date: .....

Please inform me when a copy of the completed research is available. YES / NO

### • Contact Details:

Researcher: Basia McDougall  
Position: PhD Student and Ad hoc Lecturer  
Address: Robert Gordon University  
Aberdeen Business School  
Phase 2, Gathdee Road  
Aberdeen  
Email: [prs.mcdougall@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:prs.mcdougall@rgu.ac.uk)  
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Ethics Officer: Robert Newton  
Associate Dean and Head of Research  
Address: Robert Gordon's University  
Garthdee-6ws04  
Garthdee Road  
Aberdeen  
Email: [r.newton@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:r.newton@rgu.ac.uk)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

14 May, 2009.

### Description of process

The following segments were offered to the kick start panel and the question asked: what might the interviewee say next? Encouragement was given to think as freely as possible. Three panel members had no previous knowledge of the interviewee. Each guess was recorded without judgement.

The next segment of speech from the interview segment was then given. A collective decision was made whether the guesses were correct or not.

The panel was also asked to form hypotheses about the interviewee with respect to interviewee's personality, motivation, aspirations etc. These were written on blue post it notes.

As the panel worked through the segments of interview, the post it notes were sorted as 'unsupported', 'incorrect/unlikely' or 'possible'.

The 'possibles' were re-written as over-arching hypotheses, used from one interview section to the next.

### Results:

#### *Working hypotheses*

H1 Sasha perceives herself as a nuisance and is too demanding because of her maternity leave

H1 Sasha has to go back to work ✓ for financial reasons?

H1 Sasha questions herself worth with respect to work: 'am I worth it?'

H1 Sasha makes her strong decisions based on experiences

H1 Sasha seeks affirmation ✓

H1 Sasha is worried about going back to work ✓

H1 Sasha feels the need to go back to find out about her work ✓

H1 Sasha is going through a challenging time regarding her identity

H1 Sasha sees having a baby as a challenge x

H1 Sasha is looking for a purpose ✓

H1 Sasha sees work as somewhere she is valued.

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Overarching hypotheses:

Sasha questions 'who am I?'

Sasha wants to be needed

Sasha feels maternity leave *is* worth taking

Sasha questions what her work colleagues think of her, now she is a mother.

The overarching hypotheses will be compared to my reflections immediately after the interview.

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Notebook Comments:

*It was commented that perhaps the guesses of what Sasha might say next offered an insight into the kick start panel's own personal thoughts and feelings. The experience of returning to work after having had children was one shared by panel members. This led onto a discussion of similarities and differences, barriers and expectations – and a comparison of experiences over 30 years ago, 14 years ago and more recently. Would the same happen if the kick start panel was male or included adults without children? Either way, the overarching hypothesis were helpful in ensuring I kept an open mind in the following stages of analysis.*

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INTERVIEW SEGMENTS USED FOR TRIAL KICK START PANEL

Before I was obviously going to art college, erm ....I mean that was all I was ever going to do.....

*And I got this phone call, it's obvious it would be s, in summer to say that erm, I hadn't been accepted [laughs, draws breath]*

Erm, my name was obviously on the short list, you know, should anyone drop out or whatever, but I hadn't been accepted.

*And obviously, it was everything that I had based my whole thing on and I just didn't...then, I didn't have a clue [laughs] I just, I was , I was in a state of shock.....*

Because I didn't know what on earth I was going to do it was so frustrating.

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And I remember speaking to the matron in the hospital, at the time, she said you know, has nursing ever been a career path you've thought of?

*Of course, Oh my God...no way.*

My sister was a really, n – not poorly kid but she och she would have a nose bleed at the slightest thing, she used to just, you know, vomit at the slightest thing...

*And oh, I just couldn't think of anything w, I hated it, and it was, you know,*

I've no empathy for her, No, nothing, I would just scream [screams quietly] Oh Gillian's been sick again.....

*I applied for a job as an auxillary there, and I got it, I was thrilled, you know, cause I'd got this job as an auxillary, erm, and my application was in for, you know, next years, erm intake if you like of students, so erm,*

I couldn't be happier....

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...and then about a week later, when I got already accepted this job, I got word from the er college about the art, to say there was a place....

*So in one whole thing, my whole, you know, what I wanted to do, erm, and then I had to change everything I was going to do....*

...and you know from that day, I never, I decided not to do the art.

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I applied for jobs, there was nothing in the city hospital, erm, so I had to go down south, so I went to erm, Manchester and I worked in the accident and emergency there and then...

*I was homesick from being away,*

New job in the city, as a trained specialist

*It was probably the most laborious, cause it was the same every day, you know it was just medicals, medicals, medicals all day, and vaccinations and medicals, so you know just a combination of all, but it was....*

the most busy, quick, quick, quick

*And I dinna think I ever got up once in the morning and thought...*

Oh god I've got work. I loved it.

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*I often think that there's a path laid out for you*

..it just depends which route at the time you take, you know, erm, it seems everything was changed one way or another

*...and I don't regret anything I've ever done, you know I've made the choices, I've made have been the right ones.*

So it's going to be a big thing form me to decide what I'm going to do now, you know....

*[deep breath] this is er, you know, it's quite funny that you're here, speaking about this, cause, you know I....*

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...Oh god, what am I going to do, what am I gonna do now, you know, cause its just like....If I was running a company...I don't want to be processing a time sheet for someone who, you know....

*Maybe they really missed me and there's a pile of work like this, I've no idea there might be, or there might be nobody to cover it, I don't know.....*

I haven't been in touch with them because....

[laughs] *half of me doesn't want to.....long pause.*



### Appendix 3: Charity Bag Pack (Summer)

I took part in the charity bag pack Summer mentioned in the interview which Summer had organised under her role as Fund Raising Secretary. The reasoning was not entirely altruistic; it gave me the opportunity to observe Summer's management skills in action. The bag pack – in aid of funds for the toddler group was a morning event in a local Marks and Spencer's food section. I had agreed my time slot and turned up to see a small group of mums all busily packing bags, identifiable by their professionally made matching sashes with the toddler group name. Summer hurried towards me and very apologetically explained that there had been a new manager appointed to the store who disapproved of charity bag packing, but Summer had convinced him/her to allow the session to be honoured. As such, she was at pains to tell me, and the others who had mustered for the next shift that we were to go out of our way to be as friendly and professional as possible. **Nothing**, she stressed must happen to annoy the staff or customers and if someone did not want their bag packed, we were to move a respectful distance and do our best to be invisible until the next customer's turn at the checkout. Summer's briefing was professional and she checked everyone was happy with the arrangements she described. Her usual joking and warm countenance was replaced by a stern, no-nonsense – and very upright – character. The change was marked.

I observed Summer for the hour (in between packing customer's bags) regularly checking with each of the team that all was well and chatting to anyone whose services were not required – saving the mum an awkward wait. She used her professional, friendly, warm banter to interact with the customers and their children, too. She then stood straight to observe the manager and other staff observing us, intervening at any sign of unhappiness. In between, Summer also came to re-position my sash, which had slipped – “you have to look like you can cope” she whispered and grinned as she swept away to help a customer with his bags. I felt as though I had been reprimanded by a friendly teacher.

Her manner was professional, competent and she switched from friendly mum on a charity bag pack to an authoritative, respectful organiser seamlessly. Management skills were clearly evident that I would have had difficulty otherwise believing - and a substantial sum of money was raised. After the shift, I took the opportunity to chat to a couple of the mums. One described how she had three children under five years of age and she enjoyed the fact that she was able to give something back to the group that offered her so much support. This view was supported by others present. They were grateful for Summer's leadership and showed their commitment by travelling the thirty+ miles to support the event.

Appendix 4: Typed up example of section of IPA analysis

The experience enriched and reinforced my understanding of

Summer's ability to generalise the skills she had developed. Furthermore, it offered some insight into the value other mums placed on the voluntary work. Most appeared to have more than one child and therefore the logistics of organising care at a week-end involved some effort. (There was no shortage of helpers, despite Summer's initial fears raised at the interview). In addition, the experience was also a useful contributor to my own journey into method of data collection. Never having been part of what was essentially a participant observation, I was acutely aware of how difficult it was to make mental notes as the use of a notepad and pen was not an option!

Emerging Themes	Transcript	Descriptive comments <i>Linguistic comments</i> <u>Conceptual comments</u>
<p>Working = learning</p> <p>Coping with individual needs</p> <p>Woman as multi-tasking, coping individual</p> <p>Balance</p> <p>Career decision and work expectations reflected on</p>	<p>B. <i>As I said, I'm researching women's career paths. Can you please tell me all the experiences and events, which are personally important to you up to now. Start wherever you want. I won't interrupt you; I'll listen first and take notes for later. So, please begin and tell me your personal story of how your working life has developed.</i></p> <p>N. OK, Err, I suppose I started working probably when I was about 15 and I mainly sort of waitressed and did things like that I kinda of thing teaches you how to deal with incredibly <b>grumpy</b> drunk people and how to <b>multi-task</b> [laugh] skills that I think teach actually help you in later life. ....and also how to erm....deal with <b>incredibly wealthy</b> people and just your regular kind of guy off the street as well, em,</p>	<p>“teaches you how to deal with incredibly <b>grumpy</b> drunk people and how to <b>multi-task</b> skills that I think teach actually help you in later life”. <u>Associates working life with learning straight away.</u> People can be difficult....</p> <p><i>Into emphasising words 'incredibly'</i></p> <p><u>Multi-tasking features early on too</u> (because her twins are running around, so salient?)</p> <p><i>Very fast speaker, moves from one topic top the next with no break – reflects the speed of her life in order to fit everything in?!</i></p> <p>NB to her = qualification status</p>

<p>and justified</p> <p>Difficult decisions – conflict</p> <p>Subscribes to short term sacrifices for longer term gain sense-making...’things balance out in the end’ belief with work/family’</p> <p>Mothers need to take bigger pic = reflection and active sense-making process – this is her ‘old’ existing sense-making here which is in conflict.</p> <p>Paid work as conflict with motherhood</p> <p>Rare ? balance achieved and ideal = ‘solution’</p>	<p>I went to university when I was seventeen and.... a half and did a 4 year degree in...tsk...[<i>toddler comment</i>] teaching an hours degree [<i>in take of breath</i>] and then erm, the job prospect when there was 170 of us graduated they were taken on because they made changes in teaching 4 years earlier and they had expected a natural... decline and a lot of folk to retire which they obviously <b>didn’t</b> [tsk] ...so I think 3 of us got jobs when we left university two ...of my colleagues when down south to teach, down south, but by this time I was already married and ahm, I didn’t really want to do that .....so I went straight to the <b>private</b> sector which everybody thought was a bit <b>crazy</b> to be honest but that’s actually worked out and I total... benefit so I stated to work in private organisation as a primary teacher erm not so well paid as if I’d gone straight to the state sector</p>	<p>Element of bad planning affecting other people’s outcomes....</p> <p><u>Marriage changes options</u></p> <p>Further sense-making justification – planned or fell into it?</p> <p>In hindsight, all OK – despite being thought of “a bit crazy” “<i>Totally reaping the benefit</i>” <u>Work options are excellent now: flexibility - valued</u></p> <p>Suffered at first to benefit later, unlike her peers</p> <p><u>Work as ‘career’</u></p> <p>Compares this with peers lot - flexibility allows favourable comparison. Teaching sector=inflexible. <u>Sector differences. Wrong sector=dropout</u></p> <p>No mention of father as primary caregiver, why? Chicken pox example – problem compounded with 2+ kids.</p>
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<p>Not just kids but wife/family and husband's role = potential conflict with work.</p> <p>Org. approach based on <u>individual</u> psychological contract - PROACTIVE on mother's side</p> <p>Sense making = balance of effort put in = reward/benefits received</p>	<p>but then I'm totally reaping the benefit now I have children</p> <p>so I can take I now work part-time flexi-hours, ahm</p> <p>in fact it its now the situation if don't want to go to work for a week I don't actually <b>have</b> to,</p> <p>so you know it probably.... suited me for the years earning less money</p> <p>its probably a a more long term career</p> <p>in general with a lot of my friends who taught in the state sector</p> <p>have now just totally given up because their work's unable to be flexible</p> <p>cause when you have a child and especially when you have two at a time they get chicken pox,</p> <p>you know, that's your work for two weeks,</p> <p>but then [tsk], these guys haven't had it yet</p> <p>but the likelihood of them both contracting it on the same day</p> <p>would be a bit unlikely</p> <p>so a friend of mine with twins they had chicken pox in their house for 5 weeks</p> <p>so you need a pretty</p>	<p><u>Reality of understanding employer.</u></p> <p><u>No mention of supportive network</u></p> <p>Work decisions = saving on childcare = NB</p> <p><i>Reinforcing value of saving money and flexibility – on-going</i></p> <p><i>rationalisation/justification? To me?</i></p> <p><i>“this lovely situation” lovely for who? Not Luke!</i></p> <p><u>Grateful for agency</u></p> <p>How many mums get this level of flexibility – not representative?</p> <p>Again, reinforces how fortunate she is, perhaps more salient as she sees the opposite every day at nursery. <u>Story emphasises her agency as compare to others.</u></p> <p>2x6months; 1x15 months mat</p>
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<p>Rationale and justification for her career path is important to put across.</p>	<p>understanding employer to be off for 5 weeks with chicken pox.          So, <b>yeah</b>, we've sort of reaped the benefits of that now          so I'm erm that's what I've done.          I actually take my children to work with me as well erm, I'd be £32 a day childcare fees that you don't pay that, well ,          well that would be with for one baby          so that would be what ....£70 for a day for the both of them          so, er I don't <b>pay that</b>          so I now work <b>flexi</b> time and free child care          and take my family with me          and there was this lovely situation the other day, where Luke wasn't ill          but there was obviously something brewing          and I am able to say to my colleagues I don't need to be here          and they came and said to me they... "we don't know what's wrong with your son but he just wants to sit on someone's knee all day and cuddling"          and so I said "well, I'll go</p>	<p>leave.          "a very progressive employer" <u>An employer who works to keep their staff despite maternity leave breaks is considered 'progressive' , i.e.: not the norm!</u>  <u>Benefits of being 'progressive = longer tenure</u>  <i>Contradicts and questions her assumption</i>  <u>Sense making in action.</u>          Is this based on 1-1 relationship – <u>psychological contract</u>          Nikki's confident about the value she's adding to the org. Boss is responsive and realistic – no knee jerk reactions. <u>Org policy and legislation are not features of decision-making</u>          Nikki sets herself challenges and seeks variety.</p>
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	<p>home then”.</p> <p>So, <i>[laughs as child sings]</i> suits me ...well you’ve got everything on the plate <i>[laughs]</i>...</p> <p>so life changing did you say events that have happened within that.....? mmm.....</p> <p>I don’t know really, <i>[quietly]</i></p> <p>I suppose I’ve had been off for maternity leave twice once for six months</p> <p>and then with my twins I took my full year</p> <p>actually took 15 months with the twins, erm,</p> <p>I think I work for a very progressive employer as well cause my husband works farms <i>[away from home]</i></p> <p>and he was going <i>[away]</i> for eight months one year</p> <p>and I got five months off my work to go with him, erm</p> <p>and my boss is definitely of the opinion</p> <p>where be good to your staff and they give them their freedom</p> <p>and they actually stay for longer ...in the long run erm</p> <p>...</p> <p>and I suppose why I’ve actually worked for the same place for 13 years</p> <p>and I think <b>why</b> I’ve done that</p>	<p><u>Job enrichment and supported self motivation</u></p> <p><u>Nikki declares she has agency; she is proud of this</u></p> <p>Officially still on mat leave...</p> <p><u>Boundaries are flexible</u></p> <p>Self promoted into a management role practically?</p> <p><i>“she calls me a fire-fighter”</i></p> <p><i>Story is very fast – with some bits seemingly told before. She’s good at selling herself and perhaps this is some of her repertoire given to prospective parents or employees?</i></p> <p><i>[gestures that she’s finished and nods to the Dictaphone] – she tries to control the interview too!</i></p>
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	<p>is</p> <p>because I my boss is <b>very smart</b> and she's obviously very child friendly, but she isn't actually... [pause] no she's not she's not to everybody .....</p> <p>I think .... she's likes to keep me in her organisation and .....has on a number of times bent over backwards to keep me</p> <p>but also every few years I get a bit bored and bit itchy feet so I just share this with my boss</p> <p>and she says well, can you give me three months to create something</p> <p>and erm, normally my jobs changed, sort of, every few years</p> <p>I just actually used to just teach a pre-school class and then I was taught the pre-school class and I managed the nursery and then I taught my class and managed <b>two</b> of the sites and then I stopped teaching and managed <b>four</b> nurseries and now I l've just got back I just</p> <p>my title is quality assurance co-ordinator</p> <p>which is a quite a fancy title</p>	
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	<p>for someone who just wonders round saying hmm, why are you doing it that way? <i>[laughs]</i></p> <p>Have you thought about doing it this way?</p> <p>and I suppose my boss she calls me a fire-fighter</p> <p>so when there's a little fire somewhere</p> <p>I'm supposed to go and put it out</p> <p>so that's basically what my job is now</p> <p>yeah.....<i>[gurgle, shout from toddler],</i></p> <p>that's about it.....<i>[gestures that she's finished and nods to the dictaphone].</i></p> <p><i>B. No not at all, no.</i></p>	
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Notebook comment:

*Tina seems to represent an ideal bridging point between organisation and maternity leave experiences, yet she works very hard and putting this point across. Why? It represents her sense-making process of what she's gone through but comes across as 'the party line'. Is this to justify her decisions to me? Why does she feel the need to do so? Answer comes at the end. The role of an ambassador for her organisation and her role in it makes up a large chunk of her story. Only at the beginning, the waitressing experience does she offer an alternative perspective, one of learning how to cope with difficult people and challenging situations, which she reflects, helps set her up for her current role. Note: in second part, pay attention to sense-making beyond the discourse associated with a 'in control working mum who has her career and whose work-life balance is in control and idealistic'.*



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8<sup>th</sup> June, 2011

Hello [name of interviewee],

In January, 2007, you very kindly agreed to take part in my research which formed an early part of my doctorate. The interview was invaluable in shaping the direction of my exploration into reflections of working life experiences during maternity leave, thank you again for your time.

I conducted several more interviews after yours - although I dropped the emotional intelligence angle due to the volume of data gathered at the interview stage. Then, my lecturing work took over and the research took a back seat. I did however, present at an international conference on biographic narratives in 2009 and published a working paper on the first two interviews. I have now resigned from working in the Business School to help ensure that I can finally complete my research. It is for this reason then, that I am writing to you now. The original plan was to get back in touch roughly a year after the first interview. It's been three and a half years now and the extended time makes it all the more interesting to hear how your working life has progressed since we last spoke.

If you can spare an hour or so, do please call/email me – contact details are at the top of the page. I will bring along the transcript of the first interview along with a summary of my analysis. Your thoughts on how your perceptions may or may not have changed plus an account of your experiences to date would form the basis of the interview.

Before contacting me, may I remind you that all my research is conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics. A reminder of the content of the consent form follows:

- Your participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- **You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time and withdraw the right to use any data collected without consequence.**
- Anonymity is guaranteed; data collected will only used for the researcher's purposes and all data kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

I hope you feel you can spare me an hour or more of your time at a place to suit you – either before or during the summer holidays. I'll call later this week in case your email address has changed.

Kind regards,

### **1. Subjectivity and the value of non-verbal communication (NVC)**

One panel member took a negative view of Heather's working history and decisions. We discussed why, as this was incongruent with my first impression of her story. We discussed broadly the extent to which, our own experiences affected our interpretation and how this subjectivity might influence the overall analysis. During the interview, Heather broke down and asked for the recorder to be stopped. Since I paused it, it was not possible to tell how long it was off for, and obviously the conversation in the pause was not recorded. During the pause, Heather gave personal details about her family life. The break lasted some 10 minutes so the panel lost out on lots of information, I was privy to. Had this affected my perception of her so greatly it had swayed my opinion so much so as to make it positive while the panel member's was negative? If so, how does this affect the validity of my interpretation? Academically, where do I stand in justifying my interpretation without the inclusion of NVC and based on narrative analysis – which largely based on content. Not to take it on board may, going by the kick start panel experience, have a big affect on the analysis ....

The kick start panel is meant to ensure the analyst's subjectivity is challenged and aims to open up alternative perspectives. In fact the first kick start panel on the first post interview also revealed the panel's own experiences, too and the panel process kick started the same topic of conversation. It seems that the interview process is not only a powerful tool for the interviewee but also third parties involved. This trigger for reflexivity is interesting and the question was raised as to whether the use of a male kick start panel would make a difference to the result, or indeed whether a father, on the kick start panel, would interpret behaviour differently. Again, drawing on personal experiences, we both found it difficult to avoid the perceptions of our own partners, who are both 'active, hands-on' fathers.

### **2. Impact of interview on third party**

One panel member also commented that she had been affected by the interview in that she had mulled over details in her own time, questioning the interviewees actions and stance on women's right to have a job changed to suit their motherhood demands and needs. She was indignant about the fact that Heather had manipulated the timing of her pregnancy to ensure maximum time off and maximum maternity leave with minimum work in between for her third and fourth child. The fact Heather's manager had been supportive offering paid time off for yoga maternity leave only fuelled her dislike of Heather's actions further.

We discussed the possibility of there being a close similarity between Heather and the panel member's own experiences up to a point. She also had a clash of interests between her career and motherhood. She gave up her lucrative career to re-train as a teacher so as to be at home more, especially during the holidays.

**Conclusions:**

- a. Read up about subjectivity.
- b. Include the above conversation in my thesis as part of my reflective analysis to be considered at the IPA stage.
- c. Consider the implications of an all female kick start panel? Bit late, this was the last one!