

What is '*me time*'? An exploratory investigation into the qualitative characteristics of me  
time for parents of preschoolers

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## Abstract

*Me time* (independent leisure) is one of the least researched phenomena in the leisure literature, with no current operational definition based on parent perspectives and descriptions. The aim of this thesis was to explore parent's perspectives of *me time*; more specifically, the qualitative characteristics of *me time* the leisure activities they participate in, and the frequency of and satisfaction in their *me time*. Seventy-nine parents of preschoolers were asked about their perceptions and experiences of *me time*. The results showed that 70% of parents believed that purposeful *me time* meant that it had to be a solo experience that left them with feelings of fulfilment and enjoyment. They reported this was because they were able to choose when to engage and what activities to do in their *me time*. 25% of parents believed *me time* replenished their physical, emotional, and spiritual resources, to better face the challenges of parenting and everyday life. When asked what types of activities parents engage in during *me time*, the majority (70%) of parents described mindful, artistic, physical, and media-related activities. Unsurprisingly, the amount of time parents engaged in *me time* was positively associated with their satisfaction in *me time*. Our study opens avenues for researchers to continue exploring *me time* and work towards operationally defining this phenomenon. Future work may wish to extend the novel protocol developed in this study, expand its questions to include outcome measures, and extend it to other parent populations. *Me time*, especially for mothers, is overlooked within literature and society; furthering this research could shift systemic and ideological perspectives on leisure that improves parents' psychological and physiological health and wellbeing. Further research should first focus on extending the protocol to understand *me time* more and to work towards a definition of *me time*. Additionally, there is a need to investigate *me time* experiences and outcomes for diverse populations, as this is severely lacking within the literature to date.

*Keywords:* Me time, leisure, phenomenology, thematic analysis, diversity

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Parent engagement in leisure activities can markedly impact their physiological and psychological health and wellbeing (Håkansson, et al., 2016; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Roggman, et al., 1994; Saxbe et al., 2011). Parents who engage in intentional and consistent leisure activities experience less stress and higher subjective wellbeing (Chen et al., 2019), an increased sense of self and self-efficacy (Lloyd et al., 2016; Pöllänen & Voutilainen, 2018), and increased levels of familial and social connections (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006; Pomfret & Varley, 2019; Valtchanov et al., 2016). Although leisure time is regarded as important to maintain positive affect and the overall health and wellbeing of parents, rates of engagement in leisure time are varied across countries (Craig & Mullan, 2012; Craig & Mullan, 2013), and may contribute to the ever-increasing levels of parental stress and burnout observed in individualistic, Westernised cultures (Roskam et al., 2021). Taking time for the self is considered a protective resource that uniquely predicts a reduction in parental burnout (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018).

### 1.1 The Impacts of Parental Leisure Time

Leisure time can have positive impacts on family systems, parent-child and parent-parent (i.e., couple) relationships, and child and adolescent development. Previous studies on samples of fathers of adolescent youth (Buswell et al., 2012) and mothers and fathers of 10 – 17-year-olds (Hodge et al., 2017; Trussell, 2017) have shown that leisure time is positively associated with increased family functioning, family quality of life and cohesion. Parents with high engagement in leisure activities report stronger familial relationships and perceived parental competency (Martín Quintana et al., 2018; Pomfret & Varley, 2019), and show

higher levels of positive parental functioning and positive mood (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Roggman et al., 1994). Additionally, family leisure time has been linked to a reduction in adolescent risk-taking and problem behaviours (Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012). Parents report that having time for couple leisure without children, strengthens and maintains a positive romantic relationship (Dyck & Daly, 2006).

Psychological and health literature exploring the leisure experiences of parents of preschoolers is limited. However, negative outcomes (e.g., reduced social support, increased stress, negative self-esteem and self-confidence) resulting from a lack of parental leisure time have been discovered (see Brown et al., 2001; Håkansson, et al., 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016). Much less is known about the positive impacts of leisure time on parents of preschool-age children with the exception of Lloyd and colleagues (2016). In their study, they examined the positive and negative effects of physical leisure experiences of mothers of young children. They found that autonomy to choose when, how often, and how much physical leisure mothers engaged in, increased their commitment to participation, and enjoyment they experienced from leisure activities (Lloyd et al., 2016).

Parenting young children can be challenging. Having younger children typically involves an increase in demands of parents (e.g., increased need for attention, increased need for consistent supervision, in need of parental assistance with self-care skills) (Lutz et al., 2012; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Mikolajczak et al., 2018; Roskam et al., 2021). Insufficient time for leisure can increase the likelihood that parents of young children report higher stress and fatigue and lower subjective health (Håkansson, et al., 2016). For parents of preschoolers, there is little research investigating leisure and its effects on the short- and long- term health outcomes of parents. Research by Luthar & Ciciolla (2016) analysing maternal adjustment and wellbeing across different stages of child developmental found that mothers of infants and young children were among the least affected by parental stress, and

reported higher life satisfaction, compared to mothers of older children. The researchers stated this is contrary to other studies investigating parental stress and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, the outcomes of leisure on these findings were not investigated. It is common for literature to exclude leisure as a confounding factor that impacts parental health outcomes, although links between high stress and low leisure participation for parents have been found in parents with older children and adolescents (see Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Chen et al., 2019; Offer, 2016).

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

Despite increasing evidence demonstrating the positive effects of leisure on parental psychological and physiological health and wellbeing, less is known about what “*me time*” (i.e., independent leisure time; hereafter used interchangeably) means to parents of preschool-age children and the types of activities parents participate in during their leisure time. Additionally, while researchers use the term *leisure* to refer to engagement in hobbies and individual interests (i.e., activities that people engage in alone), we are unaware of any studies that have examined the qualitative characteristics of independent leisure time of parents with preschool-age children. This topic is limited in the international literature, and notably in New Zealand, no known studies have investigated this topic. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to explore parent’s perspectives of *me time*; more specifically, the qualitative characteristics of *me time* the leisure activities they participate in, and the frequency of and satisfaction in their *me time*.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis begins with a literature review on the current leisure research. Further, the impacts of current literature on the concept and definition of me time are discussed, and research questions and hypotheses for the current study are stated. Following this, the research methodology and results are presented, with two results chapters – the first describing the qualitative results, and the second describing the quantitative results. Lastly, the discussion and conclusions are presented.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

The current literature review seeks to explore the various conceptualisations of leisure time by analysing research in the health and psychological disciplines. This review attempts to discover the multiple forms of leisure, its presentations, frequencies within family life, the function it serves for parents, its associations with psychological- and health-related theoretical frameworks, and its impact on parent's physical and psychological health outcomes. First, we explain our literature search procedure followed by a review of the theoretical frameworks that underpin leisure. Following this, we use the literature to define parental leisure, and group similar leisure experiences into leisure forms based on previous findings. Next, we explore me time further by attempting to define me time as described in the literature, and offer explanations as to why this is difficult. Finally, we present our research aims, questions, and hypotheses for the current study.

### 2.1 Literature Search Procedure

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the PsychInfo, Google Scholar, PubMed, and ERIC databases. Initially, the terms used in the searches were “parent\*<sup>1</sup> or mother or father or caregiver”, “leisure or activities or meaningful activities or hobbies”, “relaxation”, “stress or burnout or exhaustion”, “free time”, and “me time”.

The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles, published in psychology, leisure, health, wellbeing, and/or family journals, and were published between 1980 – 2021. A scan

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<sup>1</sup>The \* is used in database searches to find any similar plurals or suffixes for a word. Adding “*parent\**” to the search also finds articles containing the terms “parents”, “parenting”, and “parental”.

of abstracts of publications before 1980 indicated that it was unnecessary to include articles before this date because the focus of leisure was encompassed within childcare and homecare duties compared to leisure being a separate activity, especially for mothers. Articles were excluded if they did not discuss parental or caregiver involvement in leisure, or parental/caregiver health outcomes (e.g., burnout, stress). These initial database searches yielded between 180 – 230 articles, of which 42 were deemed appropriate based on the inclusion criteria.

Further database searches were conducted using PsychInfo and Google Scholar with combinations of the original search terms and “child\* challenging behaviour/behavior”, “child\* problem behaviour/behavior”, “child disorder or disability”, “child chronic illness or disease” terms added. This search was conducted due to the reoccurring theme emerging in the literature that parents who have a child with problem behaviour(s), a disability, disorder, or chronic illness were less likely to engage in leisure. This search yielded 34 articles, of which four met the inclusion criteria. In this search, articles were excluded because the focus of the research was on child leisure experiences, rather than parental leisure. An additional relevant paper was identified through conversations with the primary supervisor of this project. The final number of articles included in this literature review were 47. See Appendix A for a comprehensive table reviewing the characteristics of each article.

## **2.2 The Theoretical Underpinnings of Leisure**

Several theoretical approaches have been utilised to define and understand leisure and its association with health outcomes (e.g., parental burnout, see Mikolajczak & Roskam (2020)). The most utilised theories are the socio-ecological model (SEM) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), as well as Foucault-based thinking

(Foucault, 1980), constructivism (Narayan et al., 2013), and feminism-related (Brabeck & Brown, 1997) theoretical models. Overall, combining these approaches when investigating leisure time is common, but systems-related theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner's SEM) are among the most widely used frameworks to examine the forms and outcomes of parental leisure (See Dyck & Daly, 2006; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Soubhi et al., 2004). The following section will describe the theoretical models that underpin the study of parent's and caregiver's [hereafter referred to as parents] leisure time.

### ***2.2.1 Socio-ecological Approaches***

***Individual Level.*** Öztürk & Kora (2019) combined the socio-ecological model (SEM) with a feminist cultural approach to analyse the interactions between the systems of the SEM and women's participation in physical leisure activities. The study aimed to assess the similarities and differences over time of physical leisure participation in a sample of 144 Turkish women across three generations of families. At the individual and social levels, women's intrinsic motivation to participate in physical leisure was the strongest predictor for participation. For example, the women reported that social pressure from parents or peers to participate, social and familial support and encouragement, and fun and enjoyment (individual perceptions) were the strongest motivations that affected their ongoing participation in leisure (Öztürk & Kora, 2019). This finding differed across generations of women with expectations for participation in physical leisure activities being stronger in first and second generations, and engaging in physical activity for fun and enjoyment being stronger for the third generation of women. Social and familial support to participate in physical activity was important across all three generations (Öztürk & Kora, 2019).

An additional barrier to leisure participation is the parent's ethnicity, as described in literature from the United States. For example, "nonwhites" (Kimmel & Connelly, 2007), Hispanic and Black people (Passias et al., 2017), and "ethnic minorities" (Hodge et al., 2017; Swinton et al., 2008) all showed less time for leisure experiences in daily life. The authors attributed these findings to factors such as poverty and low income, and less opportunities for leisure due to lack of facilities in low-income neighbourhoods. Ethnicity is a factor that is absent from the literature on leisure and is rarely included in empirical studies compared to other demographic, structural and ideological factors such as a lack of money, lack of leisure facilities, and low SES. Hodge et al. (2017) states that "...internationally and culturally diverse perspectives of family leisure will strengthen the area as a whole." (p. 338). Building on the important gap in the literature, this study will examine and compare differences in parent's perceptions and engagement in me time across ten ethnicities.

***Family/Social Level.*** Family/social systems have many variables that may affect a parent's ability and willingness to participate in different forms of leisure. Social support from romantic partners (Dyck & Daly, 2006) and trusted others (Brown et al., 2001; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Roggman et al., 1994) have been a reoccurring reasons for participation in leisure activities, as well as having leisure time planned within day-to-day life (Chen et al., 2019), and parents being educated and in a moderate to high social position (i.e., SES) (Gracia, 2015). Structural (e.g., a lack of time, money, access, energy) and ideological (e.g., a sense of commitment to others or other activities) factors create barriers to leisure participation (Brown et al., 2001). Other barriers include having a child with a chronic illness (Hatzmann et al., 2014), the social conditions of which some families live within (e.g., low socioeconomic status (SES), low education rates) (Brown et al., 2001; Hatzmann et al., 2014; Soubhi et al., 2004), family and community environments (e.g., urban, rural, low versus high



income neighbourhoods) (Soubhi et al., 2004), and the contexts and arrangements for leisure for non-resident parents (e.g., contact type – daytime-only, holiday-only; family structure – separated, divorced) (Jenkins & Lyons, 2006; Swinton et al., 2008).

Parent's personal experiences and perceptions collected by Blažević Simić & Đurašin (2020) showed that having quality interactions, a chance for bonding and a relaxing experience, and the chance for children to have fun, are the most important benefits of family leisure time. Stress, fatigue, and difficulties finding suitable activities are perceived as the strongest challenges to leisure participation (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020). Participation in family and social leisure have been associated with higher subjective wellbeing (Chen et al., 2019), elevated parental moods (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004), potential reductions in young people's behavioural difficulties and adjustment problems (Denault & Poulin, 2008; Gardner et al., 2003; Torres et al., 2014; Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012), and increased family cohesion, adaptability and overall family functioning (Buswell et al., 2012; Hodge et al., 2017; Roggman et al., 1994). In recent literature, parents reported that more time for family leisure activities increased their sense of parental confidence and parent-parent positive communication. This gave them the ability to work together to provide positive and rich leisure experiences for their families (see Buswell et al. 2012; Chen et al. 2019; Pomfret & Varley, 2019). Trussell (2017) noted that there are reciprocal interactions between an individual's sense of self and the cultural and political ideologies they learn by being a member of society. These perceptions, learned and then enveloped by the self, can inhibit leisure participation for all family members. This may be detrimental to the psychological wellbeing of family units (Trussell, 2017).

*Environmental and Societal/Cultural Levels.* At the environmental level, various authors have suggested that leisure participation should be understood by taking one's living conditions into account (e.g., personal accessibility to facilities that offer leisure-based activities can affect an individual's sense of agency for freedom of leisure choice) (see Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019). Additionally, contexts and environments where leisure takes place are directly embedded in and can be influenced by the political and cultural systems within the SEM. To add to the above example, personal access to leisure-based facilities can only happen if local councils and governments invest in these types of venues and make accessibility equal among all members of the community it intends to serve (Öztürk & Kora, 2019). Political decisions (e.g., funding, availability of structures, public transport to venues) and cultural ideologies (e.g., mothering expectations, gendered leisure constraints) can have an impact on parent's participation in leisure activities outside of the family home and consequently, impact their self-concept. Lloyd et al. (2016) discussed how mothers' leisure participation is influenced by their perceptions of how they will be viewed as a mother if they and their children do not participate in the recommended levels of physical activity determined by the political health officials of their culture. Interviews with eighteen mothers from Australia showed that mothers who did not meet the recommended standards for weekly physical activity perceived themselves as bad mothers, negatively impacting their self-esteem and confidence. The authors note that self-care in physical leisure activities is an individual journey where mothers need to decide what is right for them to feel physically and psychologically healthy. This transformational experience is only possible when the political restrictions about what is expected are set aside (Lloyd et al., 2016).

Emerging evidence shows that making structural changes (e.g., increasing the amount of leisure facilities (pools, gyms) in communities) can benefit parental self-efficacy and confidence, increase parent participation in shared leisure activities and reduce stress levels.

For example, Valtchanov et al. (2016) interviewed twenty-two Canadian mothers who used a technology device application called “Momstown” which allowed mothers to connect online and in-person for friendship, support, and fun. They found that regular use of the application reduced maternal isolation and the presence of anxiety-inducing cultural restrictions (e.g., motherhood expectations to stay home and care for children) by allowing mothers to connect with other parents and engage in independent and social leisure (Valtchanov et al., 2016). Further, Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016) interviewed twenty-two women from the United Kingdom about their experiences participating in aquatic leisure with and without their children. They found that compared to fathers, mothers were engaging in parent-child leisure at swimming pools more often. Fathers were less likely to participate because their work hours often conflicted with the time this particular parent-child activity was scheduled (Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016). Additionally, the authors suggested that changing the schedules of a pool facility so that toddler swim lessons were later in the afternoon, may increase the likelihood of fathers participating in family and parent-child leisure (Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016). The environmental and cultural systems can be some of the hardest systems of which to instil change, and many authors cite that they are an ongoing limitation in parental leisure participation and satisfaction (Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Valtchanov et al., 2016).

### ***2.2.2 Socio-cultural, Constructivism, and Feminist Approaches***

Socio-cultural parenting roles refer to the presumed tasks of parents based on their marital, work, and gender characteristics (i.e., social standings and demographics), and the work and childcare expectations for mothers and fathers that stem from the culture(s) and societies they belong to (Craig & Mullan, 2012; Kimmel & Connelly, 2007; Offer, 2016).

Historically in Westernised cultures, a mother is presumed to be the primary caregiver and stay-at-home parent, whereas the father is to be in paid employment and the provider of resources for the family unit (Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al., 2018). Socio-cultural parenting roles can have long-standing negative impacts on parental and individual self-efficacy and self-confidence (Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019).

There are notable differences in the types and quantity of leisure activities that mothers and fathers participate in, with little change in these differences over the last 30 years (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Saxbe et al., 2011). For fathers, common leisure activities include playing games, sports, watching TV, or doing other activities with children or within independent leisure experiences (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Martín Quintana et al., 2018). For mothers, common leisure activities are similar to fathers, however, are almost always exclusively within childcare or within family leisure time experiences. Mothers experience significantly less independent and structured leisure time than fathers (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004), with being married (Kimmel & Connelly, 2007), working an out-of-home job (Craig & Mullan, 2012), having a child(ren) with challenging behaviours or illness (Hatzmann et al., 2014) decreasing the likelihood of engagement in leisure activities.

Gender-specific parenting roles may contribute to heightened risks of parental stress and burnout, with multiple studies suggesting that being fed up or exhausted within one's parenting role and being overinvested in the maternal role are ongoing inhibitors for parental health and wellbeing (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Roskam et al., 2018). Håkansson et al. (2016) surveyed 1562 parents living in Sweden and identified that insufficient leisure time was associated with increased risk of parental stress and greater subjective health concerns. This was especially the case for parents who were working and for mothers who were socially isolated and/or juggling multiple roles in and out of the family home (Håkansson et al., 2016). Researchers who combine the socio-cultural and feminist

culture, constructivism, and Foucault-based approaches in their studies attribute these differences to the gender-specific parenting roles created from political ideologies and the expected norms of society (see Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Valtchanov et al., 2016).

As well as discovering political and structural limitations to engagement in leisure activities, Valtchanov et al. (2016) and Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016) also found that the ideologies that a culture has embodied impede participation in leisure. More specifically, Valtchanov et al. (2016) found that mothers who were encompassed by the belief that their physical exercise should be experienced in private (e.g., only in the home) were more likely to stop participating in that form of leisure. The authors attributed this effect to the mothering or gendered norms (e.g., mothers should stay at home and care for children, mothers who participate in leisure do not put their children first) of the English culture (Valtchanov et al., 2016). Similarly, Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016) found that self-perceived deficiencies about one's physical form (e.g., body weight, shape, proportions) reduced participation in aquatic exercises. These deficiencies were socially constructed by the participants encompassing beliefs about what women should look like. These studies utilised Foucault-based thinking about self-perception and the power and knowledge of individuals versus those in places of power (e.g., governmental, health officials), alongside a socio-cultural and socio-constructivism framework.

### ***2.2.3 Use of Theoretical Perspectives in the Current Study***

As this review of literature suggests, socio-cultural, –constructivism, Foucault, and Feminism approaches are becoming popular frameworks to combine and use when qualitatively investigating parental leisure experiences (see Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016;

Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Valtchanov et al., 2016). For this thesis, one specific theory, or a combination of theories, is not used as the focal framework underpinning the project. Alternatively, we aim to use the above theoretical approaches alongside previous literature on leisure experiences to guide our exploratory investigation of parent's me time.

### **2.3 Defining Leisure**

The definition and purpose of leisure as described in the literature are unclear and at times vague. The definition has been debated for decades; however, no consensus has been reached on an explicit definition, nor a detailed evaluation of descriptors, of parental leisure time. Leisure itself is difficult to understand as a descriptive term because it appears to be beneficial for a wide range of outcomes (e.g., child behaviour, parental competency, family functioning, etc.), but the mechanisms behind precisely why it is beneficial are unknown. Öztürk & Kora (2019) and Passias et al. (2017) have provided a thorough discussion about how perceptions of leisure have shifted in recent years and how these changes in definitions and meanings have made leisure a difficult phenomenon to define. They argue that there has been a shift in societal perceptions and norms of what leisure time means, particularly in terms of gender roles and expectations. They explain that between the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the expectations and gender roles for women and mothers meant their leisure was seen as engagement in everyday childcare and house-related duties and occasionally beauty treatments (e.g., going to the hair salon) (see Horna, 1989).

Research from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present century has revealed that the activities of daily life are not leisurely; they are not sufficient enough to promote and maintain long-lasting resource replenishment (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Passias et al., 2017). A theme emerging from recent research (the 2000s and beyond) is that there is a need for a

wellbeing-focused definition encompassing leisure as a means for enjoyment, rejuvenation, and socialisation (Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al. 2017). The leisure-as-wellbeing theme is beginning to be recognised in empirical research, with studies describing leisure as a potential protective factor for parental burnout and wellbeing (see Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018). Nevertheless, the examination of the forms and functions of independent leisure is still absent from the literature. For the purpose of this thesis, the terms ‘forms’ and ‘functions’ represent the grouping of similar leisurely experiences and the functional impacts of such experiences. For our study, we utilise parent’s perceptions of the qualitative characteristics of me time, and how parents rate their me time in terms of frequency and satisfaction levels, for the purpose of refining me time further than that provided from literature-based descriptions.

Further, difficulties in defining leisure has been made more difficult by the various quantitative and qualitative measures and analyses used to examine the construct. More specifically, this literature review found approximately thirty-one different quantitative and fifteen qualitative measures that had been used to assess parent’s leisure time (see Appendix A for a comprehensive overview of the studies assessed in this literature review). A proportion of the studies analysed in this literature review (e.g., Kimmel; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Mikolajczak et al., 2018; Roskam et al., 2017; Sanik, 1993) treat leisure as a part of the *leftover* time parents have after completing their obligatory work, childcare, and home-related duties, or mention leisure as a “protective resource”, but do not explain the meaning of this. Sociologists argue that parental leisure is not as important for parental functioning compared to resources required for survival (e.g., monetary, food, water, etc.) (Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al., 2017). From this perspective, leisure is used for consumption purposes (i.e., similar to buying an item from a shop, using the item and not receiving adequate satisfaction from it) and does not benefit an individual’s physical, emotional, or monetary resources. In relation, an economist may view leisure as a

commodity, where the activity has to have some intrinsic benefit to the individual for it to be considered a leisurely experience (Passias et al., 2017). Recently, these perceptions have been contested as the leisure-as-wellbeing perspective becomes predominant within current literature (see Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al., 2017). These sociologist-based perceptions of leisure make the conceptualisation of leisure difficult and inhibit the formulation of a working definition that aligns with parent's current experiences of leisure.

Researchers have attempted to explain the qualitative characteristics of leisure by analysing it in various contexts. For example, some studies investigated physical activity (form) and family functioning (function), and others investigate couple leisure time (form) and enjoyment within intimate relationships (function) (See Buswell et al., 2012; Dyck & Daly, 2006; Mikolajczak et al., 2018). Although this gives us some information about what parents do with their me time, the meanings (i.e., the parental perceptions, thoughts, feelings, etc.) and functional impacts of leisure are difficult to understand across contexts. To add to the contrasting information surrounding leisure time, researchers use many different terms or labels for specific groups of characteristics of leisure. The next section attempts to provide a comprehensive review of parental leisure by grouping similar leisurely activities together based on literature (i.e., creating explicit and descriptive forms of leisure).

## **2.4 Forms of Leisure**

In this section, the grouping of similar leisure experiences were determined by the person or people involved, the activity or interest, and/or the context of the activity. Each leisure form was labelled based on these characteristics. Previously, forms of leisure were frequently categorised or labelled to fit an author's specific topic of interest. For instance, Håkansson et al. (2016) labelled independent leisure time as "hobbies or relaxation time"



whereas Offer (2016) uses “pure free time”. These labels vary – some labels are the same or similar across research disciplines, and others are novel. Psychological research utilises social or behavioural labels to describe forms of leisure. For example, independent leisure time was labelled “child-free leisure” by Craig & Mullan, (2013). In contrast, health research uses specific activity related labels. For example, Brown et al. (2001) and Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016) used “active leisure” to describe physical leisure time.

Several studies have combined multiple forms of leisure to represent the phenomenon. For example, Delle Fave and Massimini (2004) combined sports, hobbies, being idle at home, and walking into one category called “leisure”, but separated media use. As noted previously, the lack of congruence in the definition of leisure makes this phenomenon difficult to measure, impacting researchers’ ability to accurately predict how different forms of leisure affect parent’s health and wellbeing or compare these across studies.

The process of grouping leisure experiences involved coding the different forms of leisure examined by previous research. From this, seven categories were identified. Their defining features, contextual presentations, and alternative labels are discussed below in order of commonality within the literature. See Table 2.1 for the coding breakdown conducted to produce each leisure form’s label and description.

#### ***2.4.1 Family Leisure***

This involves activities experienced within a family unit. The literature depicts a family as parents and their child(ren). Family leisure time may involve home-based activities such as watching television, using media, playing games and reading together. It may also involve out-of-home activities such as going on family outings, doing outdoor adventure activities together, going on holidays, and attending special events. This category is one of

the most common in the literature on leisure time (see: Buswell et al., 2012; Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Karsten et al., 2015; Swinton et al., 2008), and has also been referred to as “shared leisure time” (Craig & Mullan, 2012; Martín Quintana et al., 2018; Roggman et al., 1994), “joint leisure” or “parallel leisure” (Horna, 1989), or less frequently as “child leisure” (Martín Quintana et al., 2018).

#### ***2.4.2 Physical Leisure***

This involves physical-related activities experienced individually or collectively in a group setting. This form of leisure is one of the most researched categories in the literature because it is important to both physiological and psychological health. However, there has been some debate regarding the function of physical leisure. Researchers in health psychology and fitness disciplines argue that current recommendations for the daily/weekly amounts of physical exercise, endorsed by people of power (e.g., government health officials), are unachievable and unrealistic for majority of parents, consequently causing harm to parent’s self-esteem and self-efficacy (see Brown et al., 2001; Lloyd et al., 2016). Physical leisure time may involve activities such as partaking in sports, exercise, aquatic activities, and indoor/outdoor adventure activities. Physical leisure time has also been labelled as “leisure time physical activity (LTPA)” (Brown et al., 2001; Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Pomfret & Varley, 2019; Soubhi et al., 2004), or “active leisure” (Brown et al., 2001; Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016).

#### ***2.4.3 Social Leisure***

This involves activities experienced by an individual and one or more of their friends or extended family members (i.e., people not residing in the family home). Social leisure is

another form of leisure that has been researched extensively. Social leisure time may involve activities such as outings with friends or extended family members, attending special events, and home-based socialisation activities (e.g., having a friend over for lunch). Social leisure has also been labelled as “friend-only leisure” or “relative-only leisure” (Håkansson, et al., 2016; Horna, 1989).

#### ***2.4.4 Parent-child Leisure***

This involves activities experienced between a parent and their child(ren). This involves either mother-child, father-child, or caregiver-child leisure activities. Parent-child leisure time may involve activities similar to that of family leisure time, but the difference is only one parent is engaging in the leisure activity with the child. Parent-child leisure time has also been labelled as “child-shared leisure” (Craig & Mullan, 2013), “TV leisure with children” (Craig & Mullan, 2013), and “father-child leisure” or “mother-child leisure” (Gracia, 2015; Jenkins & Lyons, 2006; Swinton et al., 2008).

#### ***2.4.5 Passive Leisure***

This involves activities experienced by an individual in order to fulfil a personal need(s) or the needs of others. This category is contested in the constructivist and feminist disciplines, and in mainstream online mother groups and forums, due to the growing evidence that these types of activities do not sufficiently replenish emotional and physical resources enough to promote long-lasting benefits to health and wellbeing (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Passias et al., 2017; Valtchanov et al., 2016). The term passive was taken from Passias et al.’s (2017) study investigating the associations between low levels of maternal leisure and marital status. Passive leisure time may involve activities such as grooming (e.g., having hair and

beauty treatments) and sitting down and doing something while actively caring for children and/or doing house-related duties. Passive leisure has also been labelled as “leisure within daily childcare” (Craig & Mullan, 2013), “free time with child(ren)” (Offer, 2016); “personal care” (Sanik, 1993), or “semi-leisure” (Horna, 1989).

#### ***2.4.6 Independent Leisure***

This involves activities experienced alone by a single person. Independent leisure time may involve activities such as media use, watching television, physical activities (e.g., exercise, aquatics), artistic pursuits (e.g., crafts, painting, writing), reading books, doing puzzles, and outdoor activities (e.g., gardening). Independent leisure time has also been labelled as “pure free time” (Offer, 2016), “single leisure time” (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004), “child-free leisure” (Craig & Mullan, 2013), “hobbies time” (Håkansson, et al., 2016), “relaxation” (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Håkansson, et al., 2016), or “socially isolated leisure” (Passias et al., 2017).

#### ***2.4.7 Couple Leisure***

This involves activities experienced together by people in a romantic relationship (Dyck & Daly, 2006). Couple leisure time may involve activities such as going on dates, holidays, engaging in physical exercise activities as a couple, and watching television/engaging with media together. Couple leisure time has also been labelled as “child-free leisure” (Craig & Mullan, 2013) or “spouse-only leisure” (Horna, 1989).

#### ***2.4.8 Using Leisure Forms for Further Analyses***

Table 2.1 shows the coding breakdown of the leisure forms, the various labels associated with each form and their defining features. Notably, there were several categories that overlapped, depending on the individuals who were engaging in the leisure activity and the context in which it took place. The most researched forms of leisure were family, physical, and social; most likely because they are explicit in their presentations and relatively easy to observe and measure. For most categories, the type of interaction between individuals defined each form, except for independent leisure time which is described as a form experienced alone.

Researchers have been able to give basic descriptions of the outcomes of these forms of leisure. For example, family leisure can increase interpersonal relationships between immediate family members (Martín Quintana et al., 2018; Pomfret & Varley, 2019) and physical leisure can have positive benefits for parent's self-esteem (Lloyd et al, 2016). Although the functions are less understood (i.e., the implications of leisure and their similarities and differences across forms are unclear), occasionally functional implications of leisure participation are discovered. For example, Öztürk and Kora (2019) found through qualitative interviews that younger people participated in physical leisure for fun and enjoyment.

Currently there is little evidence describing the functions of independent leisure for parents, and the outcomes associated with this form of leisure. Specific activity types have been observed within independent leisure time. Independent leisure is often combined with other forms of leisure, making it difficult to disentangle the outcomes related to each one. To combat these limitations, a qualitative exploratory approach to understanding independent leisure time may be warranted. For the current project, what me time means to parents, the

me time activities they engage in, and the frequency and satisfaction levels will be explored to assist in refining the core descriptors of me time further. We also aim to examine the goodness of fit between the discovered descriptors of the independent leisure form and parent's reports of me time experiences.

**Table 2.1***Coding Breakdown for the Forms of Leisure Time*

| Leisure Form | Previously Used Leisure Label(s) | # of Instances | Label Use by Author(s)   | Defining Feature(s); # and Type of People Involved   |
|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------|--|--|
| Family       | Shared leisure time              | 3              | Craig & Mullan (2012), Martín et al. (2018), Roggman et al. (1994) | Home-based activities (watching TV, engaging with media, playing games, reading together), Out-of-home-based activities (outing, adventure activities, holidays, special events); Two or more people, people who share the family home, extended family. |
|              | Non-TV leisure with children     | 2              | Craig & Mullan (2012), Craig & Mullan (2013)                       |  |
|              | Joint                            | 1              | Horna (1989)   |  |
|              | Parallel                         | 1              | Horna (1989)   |  |
|              | Child leisure                    | 1              | Martín et al. (2018)   |  |
|              | Quality time with children       | 1              | Mikolajczak & Roskam (2020)  |  |
| Physical     | Active                           | 2              | Brown et al. (2001), Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016)                | Indoor and outdoor sports, exercise, going to the gym, aquatic activities, indoor and outdoor adventure activities; One or more.   |
|              | Aquatic                          | 1              | Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016)                                     |  |

|              |   |   |   |   |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|
|              | Leisure Time Physical Activity (LTPA)       | 6 | Brown et al. (2001), Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016), Lloyd et al. (2016), Öztürk & Koca (2019), Pomfret & Varley (2019), Soubhi et al. (2004) |   |
| Social       | Friend-only                                 | 1 | Horna (1989)  | Outings with friends, attending events, home-based socialisation with friends; Two or more people, family, friends.   |
|              | Relative-only                               | 1 | Horna (1989)  |   |
| Parent-child | Child-shared leisure                        | 1 | Craig & Mullan (2013)   | Home-based activities (e.g., watching TV, engaging with media, playing games, reading together), Out-of-home-based activities (e.g., outings, adventure activities, holidays, special events); Two people, parent/caregiver and child only. |
|              | TV leisure with children                    | 1 | Craig & Mullan (2013)   |   |
|              | Father-child, Mother-child, Caregiver-child | 3 | Gracia (2015), Jenkins & Lyons (2006), Swinton et al. (2008)  |   |
| Passive      | Leisure within daily childcare              | 1 | Craig & Mullan (2013)   | Grooming activities (hair and beauty), sitting down drinking/eating while actively caring for children; One or more.  |
|              | Free time with children                     | 1 | Offer (2016)  |   |
|              | Personal care                               | 1 | Sanik (1993)  |   |
|              | Self-care                                   | 1 | Passias et al. (2017)   |   |



|             |                     |   |  |   |
|-------------|---------------------|---|--|---|
|             | Semi leisure        | 1 | Horna (1989)   |   |
| Independent | Pure free time      | 1 | Offer (2016)   | Media use, watching TV, playing   |
|             | Single leisure time | 2 | Blažević Simić & Đurašin (2020), Delle Fave & Massimini (2004) | games, independent physical activities (e.g., swimming, exercise), arts and crafts, reading, doing puzzles, outdoor activities (e.g., gardening); One person. |
|             | Child-free          | 1 | Craig & Mullan (2013)  |   |
|             | Hobbies time        | 1 | Håkansson, et al. (2016)                                       |   |
|             | Relaxation          | 2 | Blažević Simić & Đurašin (2020), Håkansson, et al. (2016)      |   |
|             | Socially isolated   | 1 | Passias et al. (2017)  |   |
| Couple      | Child-free          | 1 | Craig & Mullan (2013)  | Activities outside of the family home (e.g., going on dates, holidays, joint physical activities), home-based activities (e.g., watching TV, movies);         |
|             | Spouse-only         | 1 | Horna (1989)   | Two people who share a romantic relationship.   |

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*Note.* Leisure forms are listed in order of commonality within the literature, leisure form labels are derived from a coding procedure to identify common themes and then labelled depending on the type of activities and the type of people involved in the leisure experience, TV = television.

## 2.5 Defining Me Time

From the literature reviewed, it is clear that independent leisure involves any activity that a person engages in alone (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Passias et al., 2017). This form was one of the least investigated activities within the leisure-related literature. This may be due to the lack of a universal definition, as well as previous thinking surrounding parenting and mothering roles, and the lack of developed questions and protocols that assess the components of independent leisure.

Going forward, the current study will use the term *me time* when discussing parent's singular leisure experiences. Me time was coined through discussions with the project's primary supervisor and then piloted before deciding on its use in the current study. The discussions and pilot revealed that the term "me time" may be easier for parents of preschoolers to understand, and may reveal qualitatively richer information, compared to the labels "independent leisure time", "free time", or the singular use of "leisure".

Parents value the time spent with their children and receive various benefits such as enjoyment, fun, and bonding (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Pomfret & Varley, 2019). Yet spending time with children is qualitatively different to purposeful me time (Offer, 2016). Me time allows parents to have a break from the pressures of parenting and daily stressors, and replenish their physical and emotional resources without the presence of their children (Blanchard & Heeren, 2020; Håkansson et al., 2016; Offer, 2016). Without the time to replenish their resources, parents are more likely to experience stress which can lead to long-term chronic parental burnout (Roskam et al., 2018). Parents who are burnt out are at an increased risk of escape ideations, neglectful and violent behaviours towards their child(ren), and mental health disorders including anxiety, depression, and post-natal depression (PND) (Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Mikolajczak et al., 2019; Roskam et al., 2017). One study

from Séjourné et al. (2018) surveyed 263 French mothers to investigate the factors associated with developing maternal burnout. They found that 20% of mothers were in the clinical range for maternal burnout with the main risk factors being a history of mental health difficulties (especially PND and anxiety), having a child perceived as difficult, lack of social support, parental stress, and dissatisfaction with the balance of their professional and personal lives (Séjourné et al., 2018).

Dissatisfaction with the work-life balance is a common theme throughout the leisure literature. Empirical evidence from qualitative interviews with parents suggests some mothers desire more time for both me time and family leisure, but feel societal pressure to put childcare and house-related duties first (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). Concerningly, when mothers take time for themselves, they experience feelings of guilt and fears of being perceived as a bad mother (Brown et al., 2001; Craig & Mullan, 2013; Håkansson et al., 2016; Horna, 1989; Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). This is concerning given the importance of leisure time in protecting parents from negative health effects such as parental burnout.

## **2.6 Research Aims**

Me time lacks a common and accepted description in the literature, making it difficult for researchers and practitioners to understand the qualitative characteristics of this phenomena. There are few studies that investigate me time as a phenomenon, nor has research examined the types of activities that parents of pre-school age children engage in during me time. Parent-reports of me time frequency and satisfaction with *leisure* have been researched, but never together, and never with a focus on me time. Thus, this study aims to

investigate parents' perceptions and experiences of me time, as well as the rate of reported engagement and satisfaction levels and their associations with one another.

Qualitatively, we aim to better understand the characteristics of me time as a leisurely experience, as described by parents of preschool-age children. It has also been suggested that gender, ethnicity, and the socio-economic status (SES) of parents can impact parent's satisfaction and frequency in their engagement of me time. We aim to add to this knowledge by exploring the potential differences between these demographic factors and parent-reported frequency and satisfaction of me time.

## **2.7 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

In our exploration of the me time phenomenon, this thesis aims to address the following questions and hypotheses:

1. How do parents of preschool-age children define me time?
2. What types of activities or experiences do parents of preschool-age children participate in when they engage in me time?
3. How frequently do parents of preschool-age children engage in me time activities or experiences?
4. How satisfied are parents of preschool-age children with the current amount of me time they engage in?
5. Are there patterns within the frequency and satisfaction responses, where a specific frequency response is more likely to coincide with a specific satisfaction response?
6. Are there differences in the frequency and satisfaction of me time depending on the gender, ethnicity and SES of parents?

For question three, we predict, based on previous literature (Craig & Mullan, 2012; Craig & Mullan, 2013; Saxbe et al., 2011; Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012), that the frequency of parental me time engagement will be relatively low (i.e., the average engagement frequency will be once a week or less).

For question four, we predict, based on previous literature (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Séjourné et al. 2018; Swinton et al., 2008), that reported satisfaction levels for all parents will be relatively low (i.e., the average satisfaction rating will be somewhat dissatisfied).

Question five was based on exploratory curiosity, and created due to no studies to our knowledge researching such details about me time. We predict that parents who engage in higher frequencies of me time will rate their satisfaction levels higher, and vice versa.

For question six, we predict that a) the frequency of me time and reported satisfaction levels will be different for mothers and fathers, different across ethnicities, and different across SES, and b) the frequency of me time and reported satisfaction levels will be different for mothers and fathers, different across ethnicities, and different across SES, and c) mothers, people who self-identified as non-NZ European ethnicities, and people from lower SES will report less frequent me time experiences and satisfaction levels, compared to fathers, NZ Europeans, and people from higher SES, respectively. This research question was based on previous research investigating the differences between mother and father parenting roles and leisure (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Martín Quintana et al., 2018; Saxbe et al., 2011), differences in leisure participation for parents of different ethnicities (Kimmel & Connelly, 2007; Passias et al., 2017; Swinton et al., 2008), and for parents who are considered low SES who utilise community services (Soubhi et al., 2004).

## **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methods**

This chapter presents an overview of the research design and methodology of the study conducted for this thesis. It begins by presenting the research design and ethics, followed by a description of the method, participants, measures, procedure of the study, and data analysis.

### **3.1 Research Design and Ethics**

This thesis project is part of a large longitudinal study, THRIVE – Building Positive Social Relationships to Maximise Wellbeing in Early Childhood, led by Dr Cara Swit (School of Health Sciences, University of Canterbury). The THRIVE study explores how early social and emotional development influences and are influenced by early childhood teacher and parent health and wellness. Ethics approval from the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee at University of Canterbury has been obtained for the THRIVE study (2020/04/ERHEC).

This thesis will examine constructs related to parents' perceptions and experiences of me time. Open-ended and Likert-type questions pertaining to parents' perceptions and experiences of me time were piloted with parents of children enrolled at one Kindergarten (N = 20). Upon reviewing the data collected from the pilot, the Me Time protocol (discussed further in section 3.3.2) was retained for use in the THRIVE study. For this thesis, data collected in 2020 and 2021 will be analysed.

### *3.1.1 Study Design*

Personal perspectives about lifestyle phenomena are subjective in nature and are directly related to contextual factors such as a person's systemic influences and life experiences. Qualitative research is subjectively descriptive and takes into account potential influences outside of the participant's direct systems (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015). Creswell & Poth (2016) explain how phenomenology looks at a researcher's interest, develops questions to assess the 'what' of the phenomenon, and utilises participant's responses to form themes that contribute to describing and defining, or advancing operational definitions, of the phenomenon. Further, psychological phenomenology aims to focus the narrative of the research on the experiences of the participants, rather than the reflections and interpretations from the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In our study, we want to understand the lived experiences of me time for the parents and a way we can is through a phenomenological approach. We aim to explore commonalities within parents responses and use those to work towards a definition of me time, therefore psychological phenomenology is our primary methodology for this project. This approach is different as qualitative research and parent's voices in the leisure literature are lacking (see Appendix A for the current methodologies employed by researchers in the leisure space).

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to conducting Thematic Analysis (TA) was used for the analysis of parent's qualitative open-ended responses regarding the qualitative characteristics (i.e., perceived meanings) and activities that represent me time. TA is the process of searching and identifying for key themes that emerge from each participant's response (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA aims to identify the common themes across all participants as to best describe the phenomenon being assessed. The methodologies for the qualitative component were deductive and inductive approaches; a deductive approach incorporates examining participant's responses against prior expectations and reasonings that

are based on theory and literature (Pearse, 2019; Thomas, 2003), whereas an inductive approach utilises participant responses to create and develop themes, concepts, and descriptors of phenomena that do not align with theory (Azungah, 2018; Thomas, 2003). We used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches throughout the phases of TA, of which were predominantly inductive. We used a deductive approach when exploring parent-reported me time activities, basing our me time activity grouping strategy on the leisure forms developed from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

To gain additional insight into parents' perceptions and experiences of me time, quantitative, Likert-type questions regarding how often and how satisfied they are with their me time were included in the study. While many studies have relied on quantitative approaches to understand leisure (for example, Chen et al., 2019; Denault & Poulin, 2008; Passias et al., 2017), no studies, to our knowledge, have used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e., mixed methods), nor phenomenology, to capture the nuances of parents' me time. As noted earlier, leisure time has been poorly operationalised, resulting in a plethora of different labelled constructs and meanings. Thus, a pure qualitative approach alongside a pure quantitative approach will allow us to develop an understanding of the qualitative characteristics of parental me time and to map me time activities onto previously articulated constructs of leisure.

## **3.2 Methodology**

### ***3.2.1 Recruitment***

For the pilot study, all parents who had a child enrolled in the Kindergarten were invited to participate. Further recruitment opportunities were offered to all parents in 2021 when two additional Kindergartens agreed to be part of the THRIVE study. Parents were



approached by the principal researcher and research assistants during drop-off and pick-up times at the Kindergartens, and were given an information sheet about the study. A contact email address was provided if parents had any questions regarding participation or the research project. Written consent was obtained from the parents prior to the commencement of interviews (see Appendix B for the Information and Consent form for Parents/Primary Caregivers). Participation was completely voluntary and parents could withdraw participation at any time point. Where parents participated in multiple time points, data from the first wave they participated in was used for this analysis. This ensured that no duplicates of the participant's reported me time data were used in the final analyses. Where parents had multiple children at the same kindergarten, only one set of me time data was used for this analysis.

### ***3.2.2 Participants***

Seventy-nine parents (89.87% mothers;  $M$  age = 34.34;  $SD$  = 6.01) of a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years participated in this study. Children were enrolled at one of three community-based Kindergartens in three urban, moderate-sized communities in the South Island of New Zealand (NZ). Of the sample pool, four parents were removed from the final analysis due to missing data related to me time. All parents were given pseudonyms by way of random name generator software to preserve confidentiality. In NZ, a decile rating is given to any school based on five socioeconomic status (SES) indicators (Ministry of Education, 2021). The decile rating is given as a number from one to ten, with lower numbers being indicative of lower SES, and vice versa. Each Kindergarten participating in this study is connected to a primary school and was therefore given the decile rating of that connected primary school. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1***Sample Demographic Characteristics*

| Characteristic              | <i>n</i> | % of sample |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <b>Gender</b>               |          |             |
| Female                      | 71       | 89.87       |
| Male                        | 8        | 10.13       |
| <b>Age (Years)</b>          |          |             |
| 18-30                       | 22       | 27.85       |
| 31-45                       | 54       | 68.35       |
| 46-60                       | 1        | 1.27        |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>            |          |             |
| New Zealand European        | 53       | 67.09       |
| Māori                       | 12       | 15.19       |
| Samoan                      | 3        | 3.80        |
| Cook Island Māori           | 0        | 0.00        |
| Tongan                      | 0        | 0.00        |
| Niuean                      | 0        | 0.00        |
| Chinese                     | 2        | 2.53        |
| Indian                      | 2        | 2.53        |
| Filipino                    | 0        | 0.00        |
| Other                       | 7        | 8.86        |
| <b>Socioeconomic Status</b> |          |             |
| Decile 3                    | 20       | 25.32       |
| Decile 5                    | 29       | 36.71       |
| Decile 8                    | 30       | 37.97       |

*Note.* N = 79, for data analyses ethnicities were combined into four groups: New Zealand European, Māori, Pasifika (Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean), and Other (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Other).

### 3.3 Measures

#### 3.3.1 Demographics

Demographic information regarding parent's gender, age, and ethnicity were collected during parent interviews.

**Gender.** Parents were asked by the researcher to report their gender from the following choices: Male, Female, or Other.

**SES.** Parents were assigned a decile rating based on the kindergarten their child was enrolled in. Given that most parents lived within a small kilometre radius of their kindergarten, the assigned deciles were observed as accurate reflections of their economic positions. SES in this study is explained further above in section 3.2.2.

**Ethnicity.** Parents were asked by the researcher to report their ethnicity from the following choices: New Zealand European, Māori, Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Chinese, Indian, Filipino, or Other. These choices aligned with those recommended by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities and Statistics NZ (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2021; Statistics NZ, 2018). For data analyses, ethnicities were combined into four groups: New Zealand European, Māori, Pasifika (Samoan, Cook Island Māori, Tongan, Niuean), and Other (Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Other).

#### 3.3.2 Me Time

For the purpose of this study, two open-ended questions and two Likert-scale items were used to assess parents' perceptions and experiences of me time.

**Qualitative Characteristics of Me Time.** Parents were asked to describe the qualitative characteristics of me time. More specifically, the researcher asked the open-ended

question “*What does “ME” time mean to you?*”. Parents’ responses were recorded verbatim for further analysis.

***Me Time Activities.*** Parents were asked to describe the types of activities or experiences they participated in during me time. More specifically, the researcher asked the open-ended question “*What things do you do during your “ME” time?*”. Parents’ responses were recorded verbatim for further analysis.

***Frequency of Me Time.*** Parents were asked to report how frequently they engaged in me time. More specifically, the researcher asked, “*How often do you get time for yourself to do these things/activities?*”. Parents reported on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = less than once a week, 2 = once a week, 3 = several times a week, 4 = once a day, and 5 = several times a day. Higher scores indicated greater parental engagement in me time.

***Current Satisfaction with Me Time.*** Parents were asked to report their current satisfaction level with their me time engagement. More specifically, the researcher asked, “*How satisfied are you with the amount of leisure time you have?*”. Parents reported on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = extremely dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 = somewhat satisfied and 5 = extremely satisfied. Higher scores indicated greater feelings of satisfaction with their current me time engagement.

### **3.4 Procedure**

Consenting parents participated in a structured interview with constructs that examined a variety of health, wellbeing, and development factors. See Appendix C for an ordered list of the constructs used in the interview; the Me Time Protocol was in approximately the middle of the interview, following questions assessing parental burnout.

Parent interviews took approximately 60 – 90 minutes and were administered by either the principal researcher or a trained research assistant. Parents had the option to bring a support person to the interview if they desired; parents were able to bring younger dependents with them to the interview if they needed to. Bringing the child that the parent would be answering questions about was discouraged. The interviews were conducted in a private space, either within the kindergarten or somewhere within walking distance to the kindergarten (e.g., a school, a community space). Parents were given the option to complete their interview face to face, via Zoom (a video calling/meeting online platform), or telephone. These formats allowed the research to continue during COVID-19 restrictions. For all methods of interviewing, the researcher read the questions to the parent and marked their responses or wrote their open-ended questions verbatim. Responses were recorded on a paper version, or an online Qualtrics version, of the questionnaire.

All parents who participated in the interview received a \$30 grocery voucher for each time point they completed as a small koha (gift/thanks; language origin: Māori) of our appreciation.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

#### ***3.5.1 Part One: Qualitative Analysis***

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide to conducting Thematic Analysis (TA) was used and described below.

*Phase one: familiarising yourself with your data* involved reading and re-reading parent's qualitative responses to check and edit them for spelling and grammatical errors. When the quotes were free of errors, they were read and re-read again. A deductive approach was used initially, where I highlighted the quotes if I believed that they may represent, or be

in relation to, an idea or concept identified in the literature review or theories (e.g., gendered roles, parenting roles, etc.). Following this, an inductive approach was used, where I took various notes to code words and themes that related to parents' perceptions of me time that were unique to this study population (i.e., these themes were not evident in previous research).

*Phase two: generating initial codes* involved identifying features of the data that were interesting and/or connected with the me time phenomenon. To begin, I coded the participant's responses pertaining to the meaning of me time against codes generated in phase one. Figure 3.1 presents the initial thematic map, with eight sets of initial themes and their associated codes. Initially, there were eight sets of codes identified that were related to specific responses, with some responses relating to multiple codes. Next I coded the participant's responses pertaining to me time activities against the leisure forms identified in the literature review. Figure 3.4 presents the initial, and subsequently, final thematic map for me time activities, developed from the literature review. It is not uncommon to have responses that fit within multiple codes, or no codes at all, at this phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 3.2 presents a non-exhaustive list of examples of the qualitative characteristics and leisure forms and their associated activities.

*Phase three: searching for themes* involved sorting the long list of codes identified in phase two into overarching themes and subthemes. At this stage, it is not expected to have the themes finalised, or to have any overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I developed a table to organise the responses, with the parent code, the parent's quote, what the response was coded for, and what the potential subthemes were in each column. At this phase, I did not identify any overarching themes for the meanings of me time. Appendix D presents the list of initial subthemes and associated code(s) developed in this phase accompanied by examples of parents' quotes.

*Phase four: reviewing themes* involved refining the subthemes to better represent the data set. At this phase I had refined the themes into nine draft subthemes and had begun to attribute the codes to each one. There was some overlap with the codes where a code could fit within one or two of the subthemes or two subthemes were essentially describing similar me time/self-care concepts. In discussion with my primary supervisor, we assessed each subtheme for goodness of fit with the responses, and refined the subthemes to be associated with the parent reported meanings of me time. For example, the code “positive affect” was attributed to parent’s reports of feeling happy or gaining enjoyment from me time, but it aligned with the “Using me time to replenish resources” subtheme better than any others. Figure 3.2 presents a further developed thematic map with refined codes. Appendix E presents the list of the phase four subthemes and refined code(s).

*Phase five: defining and naming themes* involved identifying what the descriptors of each subtheme were and what aspect of me time it captures. Once identified, those aspects of me time became the overarching themes for the final analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006) liken this step to storytelling, where each overarching theme is neither too detailed, nor too diverse and complex, so that it accurately represents the quote it is derived from. This ensures the participant’s voice and perceptions are clearly linked to the ideological and theoretical concepts examined in the current research. There were six overarching themes finalised in this phase. Figure 3.3 presents the final thematic map, with the six refined overarching themes and their associated codes.

*Phase six: producing the report* involved the write up of the final analysis of the research. This included directly linking data extracts to overarching themes and evaluating the sufficiency of the evidence for each overarching theme. The themes were then evaluated against the research questions discussed above, as to explore potential differences in parents’ perceptions of what me time means and what activities represent me time.

**Table 3.2***Thematic Analysis Phase Two – Generating Initial Codes*

| Categories and Initial Codes       | Extract Example                               |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Qualitative Characteristics</b> |   |
| Time to self-regulate              | "Listen to music and calm down."              |
| Being alone                        | "Having some space to focus on myself..."     |
| Escapism                           | "Escaping children at times."                 |
| Reduction of demands               | "Time without responsibilities."              |
| Unsure what me time is             | "What is me time?"                            |
| <b>Leisure Activities</b>          |   |
| Physical                           | "Running, Pilates..."                         |
| Social                             | "Go out for lunch with a friend once a week." |
| Passive                            | "Tidy the house, chores..."                   |
| Independent                        | "Watch TV, vape, go on my phone."             |

*Note.* This is a non-exhaustive list of initial codes. Many parent responses were attributed to multiple themes in this phase. For me time activities specifically, there were 7 leisure forms identified in the literature review which were used as themes for the me time activities analysis throughout all phases.

**3.5.2 Inter-rater Reliability**

Inter-rater reliability was conducted for the thematic analysis (Elliot, 2018; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). The primary supervisor, who was the lead researcher of the THRIVE project, independently coded the me time interview data for twenty ( $N = 20$ , 25%) randomly selected, de-identified participants. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa ( $k$ ; Cohen, 1960), where a coefficient between zero and one is produced. A coefficient above 0.80 indicates reliability is near perfect. Data was recorded as an agreement if the same code(s) were applied by both coders. First, I, independently coded the interview data; the



primary supervisor and myself compared the two sets of coded data and calculated the level of agreement. Initial coding of the data related to the qualitative characteristics of me time, demonstrated 87.5% agreement between the two raters ( $k = .64$ ; substantial agreement), with three responses requiring further discussion. For activities related to me time, initial coding demonstrated 83% agreement between the two raters ( $k = .55$ ; moderate agreement), with four responses requiring further discussion. Instances of disagreement were discussed and resolved using a process of negotiation and discussion. All disagreements were reconciled and 100% agreement was reached across all participants ( $k = 1$ ; perfect agreement).

### ***3.5.3 Part Two: Quantitative Analysis***

The relevant data for this thesis was extracted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet from the THRIVE study's entire dataset, more specifically the demographic and me time responses from wave two, 2020, and wave one and wave two, 2021. This data was then organised into columns and visually scanned for missing data. Any missing data was discussed with the principal researcher of THRIVE and added if available. Following this, the organised data was extracted and analysed using The International Business Machines Corporation's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS; version 28).

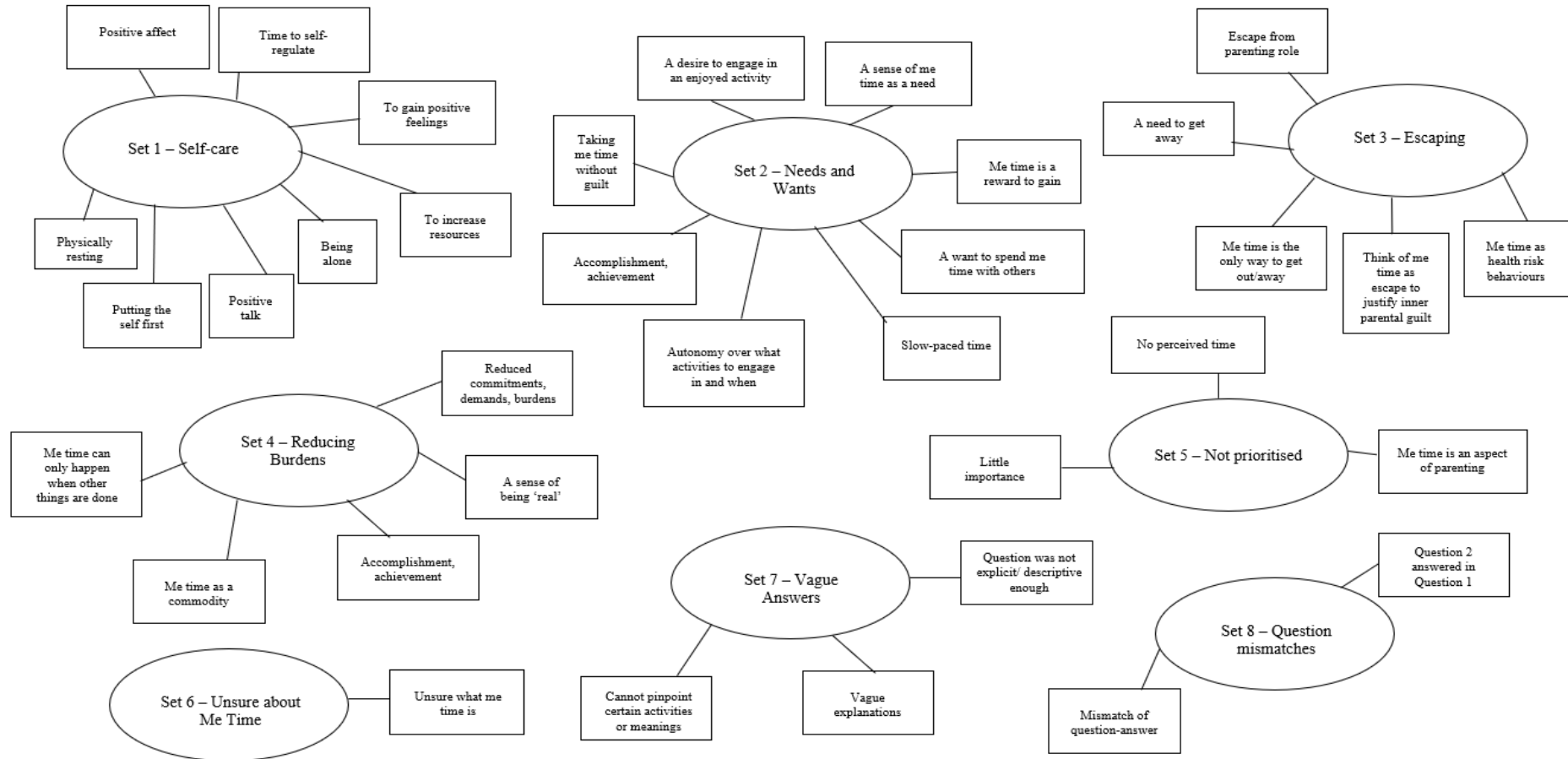
First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and ranges) and visualisations (histograms, mean plots) were computed for the two dependent variables; me time frequency and satisfaction. To explore commonality patterns across me time frequency and satisfaction responses, a crosstabulation and visualisation (bar graph) were computed. Third, Zero Order Bivariate correlations were computed to examine the associations between all continuous study variables. Lastly, oneway ANOVAs were computed to assess whether parent's

frequency and satisfaction in me time was significantly different for SES and ethnicity groups.

In all analyses, an alpha level of .05 was used to detect statistical significance across variables. To assess the magnitude of effects, Cohen's *d* was used, where 0.20 indicates a small effect, 0.50 a medium effect, and 0.80 a large effect (Cohen, 2013).

**Figure 3.1**

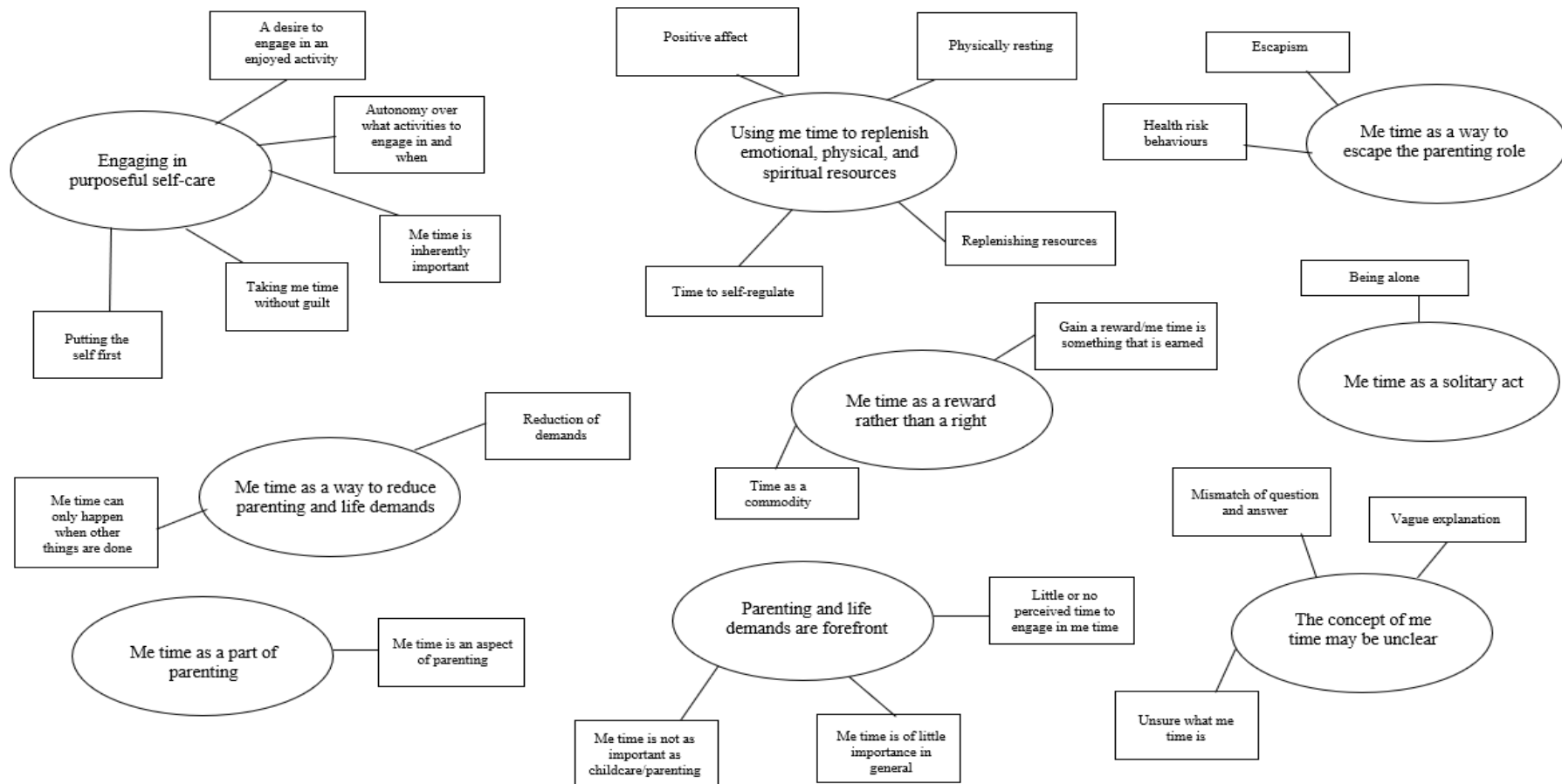
*Initial Thematic Map for Me Time Qualitative Characteristics (Phase Two)*



*Note.* Number of initial themes = 8, number of codes = 35.

Figure 3.2

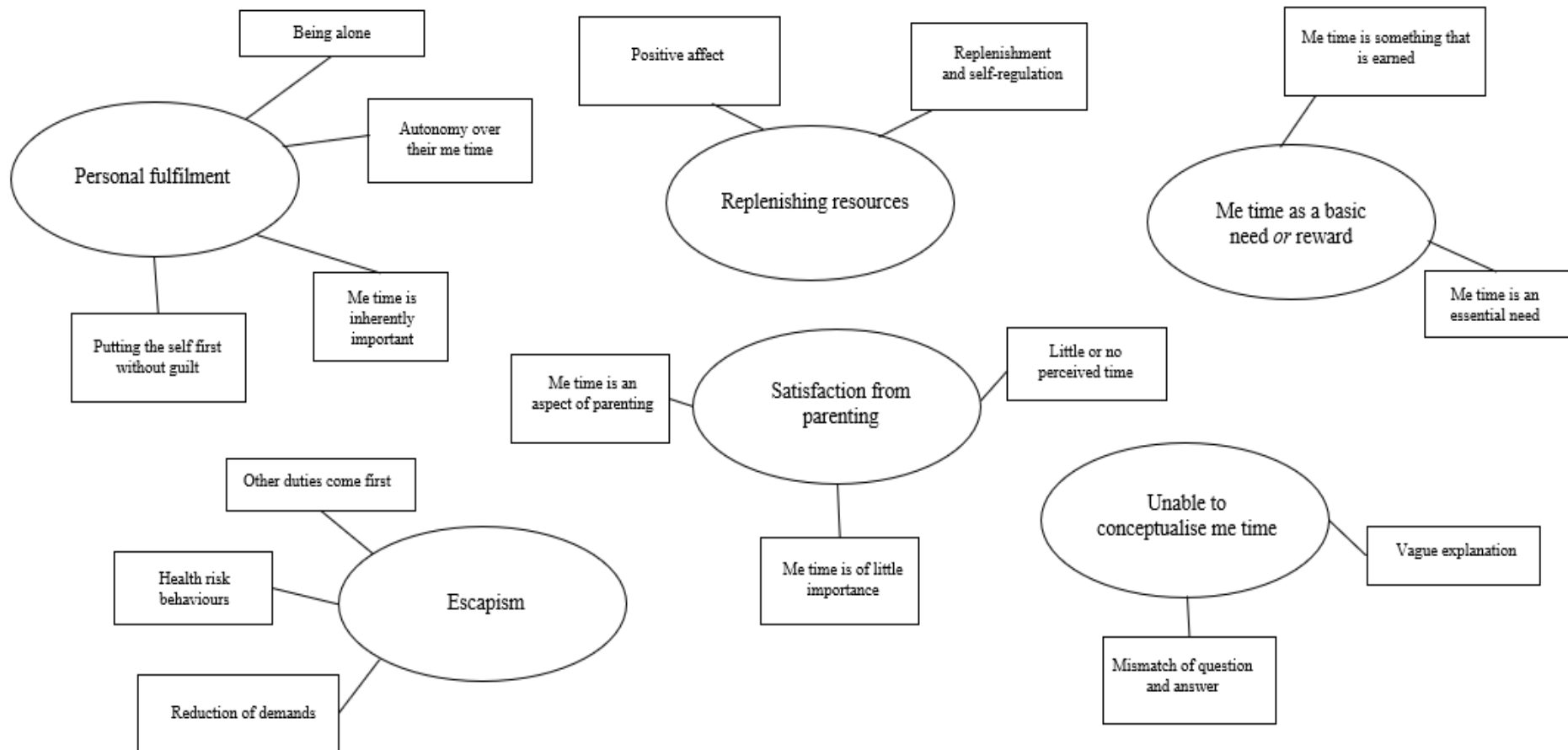
*In-development Thematic Map for Me Time Qualitative Characteristics (Phase Four)*



*Note.* Number of in-development themes = 9, number of codes = 23.

**Figure 3.3**

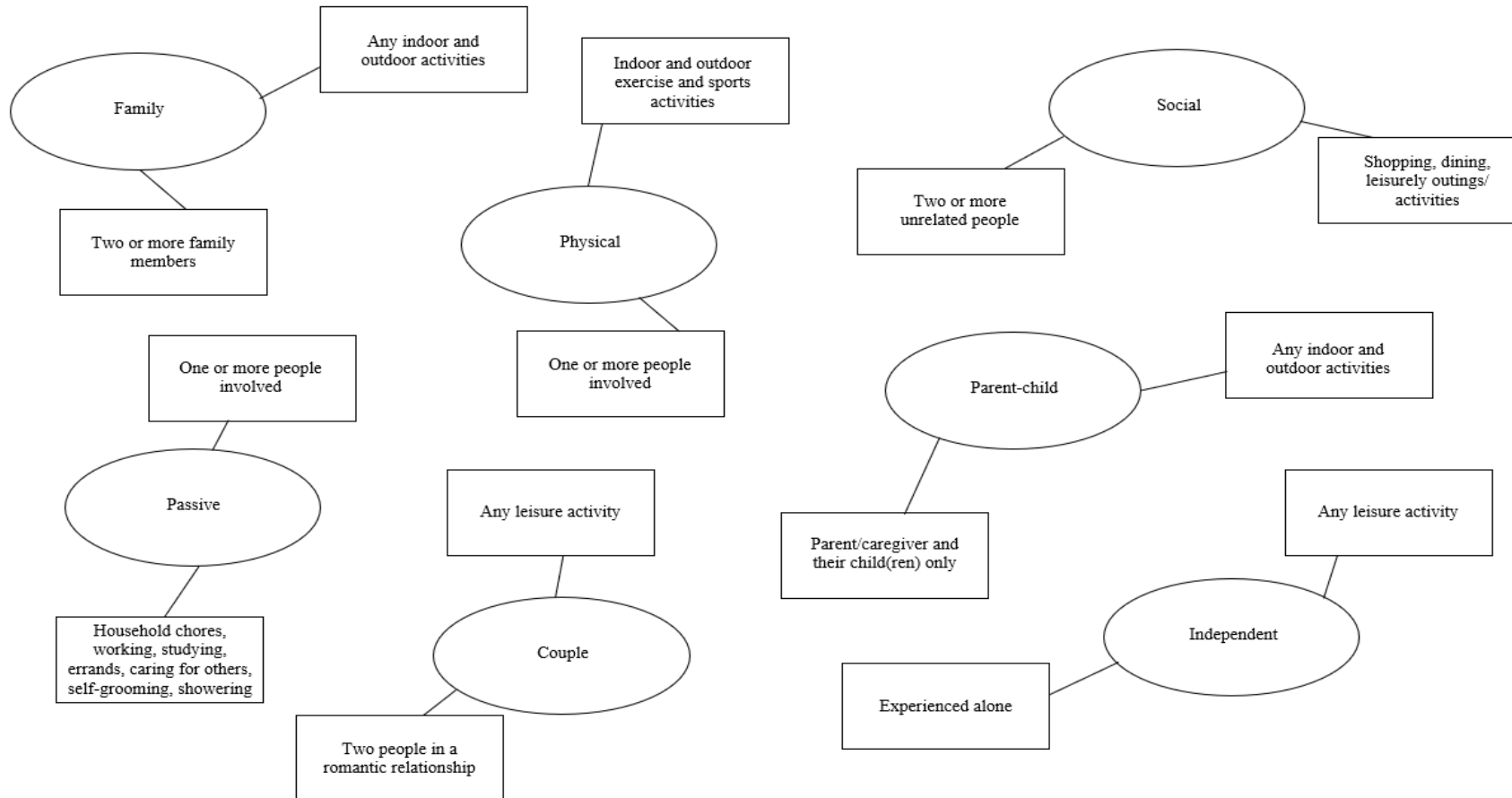
*Final Thematic Map for Me Time Qualitative Characteristics (Phase Five)*



*Note.* Number of finalised themes = 6, number of finalised codes/descriptors = 16.

**Figure 4**

*Initial and Final Thematic Map for Me Time Leisure Activities (Phase Two)*



*Note.* Number of finalised themes = 7, number of finalised codes/descriptors = 14, Couple Leisure was excluded from analyses, as no parent responses indicated engaging in me time activities with a romantic partner.

## Chapter Four: Qualitative Results

This chapter presents the qualitative results for the current study. First, the frequency of the themes across the dataset are reported, followed by part one – the results for the qualitative characteristics, and then part two – the results for the activities of me time.

*“It is very, very important to have me time because everyone needs it, no matter how it looks. It is good for parents because at the end of the day, you are you, as well as being a parent, so you have to look after yourself.” – Alyse<sup>2</sup>.*

### 4.1 Theme Frequency within the Dataset

Table 4.1 presents the frequency of each theme, for both qualitative characteristics and activities related to me time, across the data set. In regard to overlap across themes, 45.57% ( $N = 36$ ) of qualitative characteristics and 64.56% ( $N = 51$ ) of activities had multiple themes attributed to them. Frequency and commonality of each of the themes are discussed below in Parts One and Two of the qualitative results.

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<sup>2</sup> All parent names in text are pseudonyms, anonymised to maintain THRIVE confidentiality standards.

**Table 4.1***Frequencies of Me Time Responses*

| Themes                                   | <i>n of instances</i> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Qualitative Characteristics              |                       |
| Parental Fulfilment                      | 55                    |
| Replenishing Resources                   | 20                    |
| Me Time as a Basic Need <i>or</i> Reward | 8                     |
| Escapism                                 | 12                    |
| Parenting is Prioritised                 | 6                     |
| Unable to Conceptualise Me Time          | 21                    |
| Activities                               |                       |
| Family                                   | 5                     |
| Physical                                 | 31                    |
| Social                                   | 32                    |
| Parent-child                             | 1                     |
| Passive                                  | 25                    |
| Independent                              | 55                    |

*Note.* In between 40 – 65% of parent responses were attributed to more than one theme, with a maximum attribution of three themes per response.



## Part One: The Qualitative Characteristics of Me Time

### 4.2 Overarching Themes – Me Time Qualitative Characteristics

Using TA, six themes were discovered that described the qualitative characteristics of me time. Each theme's frequency within the dataset is reported, as well as the defining core descriptors and functions. Accompanying each core descriptor are quotes from parents.

Figure 3.3 represents the final thematic map for the qualitative characteristics of me time.

#### 4.2.1 Personal Fulfilment

Personal Fulfilment highlights parent's perceived characteristics of purposeful me time (i.e., engagement in an enjoyed activity, planned or spontaneous). Personal Fulfilment was observed in 55 (70%) responses, with a substantial number of mothers ( $N = 52$ , 95%) reporting this characteristic in their definition of me time compared to fathers ( $N = 3$ , 5%). Four core descriptors related to Personal Fulfilment are described below.

***Being alone.*** Initially highlighted as a potential descriptor of me time from the literature review, being alone encompasses how parents perceive me time to be in relation to time with others. Parents reported descriptors such as "I am alone", "by myself", or "without children", among others to describe their perception of me time.

*"[Me time] means that I am able to go somewhere on my own..."* – Elizabeth.

*"[Me time] lets me sit and just be with me."* – Tyla.

*"It's just me by myself."* – Shawna.

***Autonomy over their me time.*** Parents reported that having me time meant they could do something they chose to do, compared to having experiences that were more enjoyable for others (e.g., children's activities). Parents reported an overall desire of being able to do what they wish without being dictated or directed by others. Further, parents were able to have fun and enjoy their me time because they could explore their interests and hobbies. These quotes specifically depict functional descriptions of me time.

*"Time on my own to do what I want."* – Ali.

*"It's time for myself. I'm able to be engaged in something that I am interested in..."* – Delma.

***Putting the self first without guilt.*** To engage in purposeful me time, without experiencing feelings of parental guilt or feeling pressure to think of others instead of the self, was perceived as an important factor to parents. Taking time away from their family, although some parents reported missing their children, was seen as an act that benefits the self.

*"Self-care is not selfish."* – Mia.

*"I can do what I please without having to worry about the kids. I just need to worry about myself."* – Amanda.

***Me time is inherently important.*** Finally, many parents described that after having children, taking time for themselves was even more important than they realised. This was especially true given that childcare and household duties take up a substantial amount of their time. As Alyse described in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, me time helps parents feel fulfilled within themselves, instead of feeling like the only role they have is one of a parent.

*“Me time means a lot to me, especially now the kids are at school and I only have one baby at home now.” – Teuila.*

*“I cherish it [me time] – I never did before having my child. It is very important, it is self-care.” – Neve.*

#### **4.2.2 Replenishing Resources**

Replenishing resources relates to the perceived gains parents obtain from engaging in me time. Replenishing Resources was observed in 20 (25%) parent responses, with a substantial number of mothers ( $N = 19$ , 95%) reporting this characteristic in their definition of me time compared to fathers ( $N = 1$ , 5%). Two core descriptors related to Replenishing Resources are described below.

**Positive affect.** When asked what does me time mean to them, parents frequently used emotive language and reported feeling happiness, energised, or relaxed, among other feelings. Parents would often relate the experience of me time with overall increases in positive affect and inner peace/calm. Further, parents described me time as a cathartic activity, where they could achieve a release from negative feelings such as frustration and anger.

*“It’s about having a release of all the mind chatter. It [me time] gives you that time to deal with that chatter and burn it out. It gives you a chance to re-energise, to deal with kids, work, or anything like that.” – Jaz.*

*“Me time gives me a way to get into a peaceful zone, to switch off and focus on my crafts because that’s what I*

*enjoy. [Me time] gives you a bit of a reset. People assume having me time is not a hard thing to do, but it is.” – Xanthe.*

***Replenishment and self-regulation.*** Engagement in purposeful me time may replenish parent’s physical, emotional, and spiritual resources. Parents reported that me time is required to be able to self-regulate and reflect. The emotional and spiritual elements of me time were also as important as taking time to physically rest and nurture the body. Parents reported that following me time, their bodies and minds felt rejuvenated and they felt prepared to face parenting and life challenges. Some parents reported that me time ‘fills up their tank’.

*“I enjoy it [me time]. I come out energised. I get to engage in contemplation, especially when I’m able to run or read. Me time helps me be encouraged, to take helpful things in. It helps me connect to my spiritual side, and it makes me feel like myself.” – Beverley.*

*“[Me time] re-energises me – I get to sleep, I feel really good for when the next time I’m with the kids, I’m not tired, and it makes sure I’m keeping in good spirits.” – Ngaire.*

#### ***4.2.3 Me Time as a Basic Need or Reward***

Me time as a Basic Need *or* Reward was observed in 8 (10%) parent responses, with all of them being mothers. This theme includes two subthemes, *need* and *reward*.

**Need.** Parents reported believing that me time was a necessity in day-to-day life, just like needing to eat, drink water, and sleep. Parents with this perception of me time often believed me time makes you a ‘better’ parent, as described by Alyse below.

*“It is very, very important to have me time because everyone needs it, no matter how it looks. It is good for parents because at the end of the day, you are **you**, as well as being a parent, so you have to look after yourself.”* – Alyse.

**Reward.** Parents reported believing that me time is something that can be earned from being a ‘good’ parent (e.g., focusing on children’s needs and pushing the self’s needs aside for children, and completing household and work duties). Once parenting duties are complete, parents felt they could engage in quality me time without feelings of parental guilt and thoughts of selfishness, as described by Mia below. Although there were a small number of responses attributed to this theme, many parents reported putting childcare and household duties ahead of their own me time needs, which is often referred to by parents as ‘work’.

*“...Me time is the reward I get for all the hard work I have been doing as a parent. Self-care is not selfish.”* – Mia.

#### **4.2.4 Escapism**

Escapism exemplifies how the pressures and demands of parenting impact parent’s perceptions of me time. Escapism was observed in 12 (15%) parent responses, with a considerable number of responses from mothers ( $N = 10$ , 83%) compared to fathers ( $N = 2$ , 17%). Escape was a common response throughout the sample, with 12 responses indicating that me time meant they could escape the pressures and demands of the parenting role. There

were three core descriptors developed for Escapism that contribute to the working definition of me time.

***Other duties come first.*** This describes a thinking style that solidifies me time as a luxury commodity; something that can only happen when other things (e.g., household chores, childcare, study, work, etc.) are completed. Parents often reported that having me time was only possible when children were asleep, at school, or when they were looked after by the other parent or family members. One parent reported they could not “switch off” until the chores were done.

*“When the kids are in bed early and there are no more chores to do, or when they are at their mums.” – Tama.*

*“When she is in bed and it is nice and quiet I can do absolutely nothing...It [me time] makes you feel like you’ve accomplished something because you have time at the end of the day and nothing is rushed, everything is done, and you can look forward to that time alone. Night-time is my time.” – May.*

***Reduction of demands.*** Parents described their desire to put their self ahead of others and any household or work commitments, a direct link to the theme of *Personal Fulfilment*, but parenting expectations and demands were adding to the pressure to not take time for themselves. Parents in this theme would often use statements like “time without the responsibility of parenting/childcare”, “no parenting”, or “escaping children” to describe what me time meant to them. A modest number of responses ( $N = 2$ ) were just the word “escape”, showing that *escape* may be the only word that encompasses their feelings of encumbrance and being overwhelmed.

*“[Me time] is doing anything where you are not actively trying to keep someone in the house alive; you are also not grocery shopping, running errands.”* – Advika.

*“When I am not responsible for anyone in that moment. There is no schedule. I am only responsible for me.”* – Marian.

***Engagement in health risk behaviours.*** Parents occasionally described what me time meant to them by reporting what activities they use to escape the parenting role. Although we recorded them as being a mismatch of the question to an expected answer (i.e., we expected parents to answer with a response attributed to the qualitative characteristics and meaning of me time rather than activities) in the *Unable to Conceptualise Me Time* theme below, these responses were also directly related to the Escapism theme. Engaging in health risk behaviours (e.g., smoking, substance use, and isolating the self) seemed to be a way to help reduce the demands of parenting and everyday life. This is discussed further in Chapter Six: Discussion, and has clear links to the literature on parental escapism, discussed in Chapter Two: Literature Review.

*“Drinking beers, lying down doing nothing...”* – Ataahua.

*“Sit down...have a smoke, have a drink by myself...”* – Luna.

*“...Having a vape and a drink, relaxing.”* – Edmund.

#### 4.2.5 Satisfaction from Parenting

Satisfaction from Parenting encompasses the enjoyment parents get from parenting. It is best described as a competing view of me time (compared to all previous themes) where me time can also happen with children.

Satisfaction from Parenting was observed in 6 (8%) parent responses and was the least common theme across the sample. Satisfaction from Parenting is an opposing theme to *Personal Fulfilment*, as evidenced in our sample where a substantial number of parents ( $N = 55$ ) reported that me time should be spent without the company of children, compared to the six parents in this theme who believed me time was best enjoyed alongside children. Within Satisfaction from Parenting, 50% of responses were from male participants ( $N = 3$ ).

***Me time is of little importance.*** A common response was that me time was not as important as childcare and was therefore not prioritised in day-to-day life. Further, me time was of little importance to some parents in general, especially when compared to the importance of the role of the parent.

*“Unfortunately, I am enjoying being a parent – my life is about my children now. Me time now includes my children. You would not have children if you just wanted me time.”*  
– Chris.

*“It’s only half an hour by myself, then I miss them [the children].”* – Marilyn.

***Me time is an aspect of parenting.*** Parents would describe me time as congruous to *parent-child leisure* (described in section 4.5) where it was an aspect of parenting and happens within childcare scenarios, compared to me time being outside of the context of the



parenting role. Some parents reported activities they engaged in with their children within me time, rather than what that time meant to them.

*“Sometimes it is just sitting with the kids playing...jumping on the trampoline, etc...”* – Gerrard.

***Little or no perceived time.*** Parents reported they also have little or no time to engage in me time; usually putting the parental role and duties in the forefront before me time (a direct link to the theme of *Escapism*).

*“There is not really any me time.”* – Samson.

*“I don’t really have time for me time.”* – Tahlia.

*“There is not much me time.”* – Mallory.

#### ***4.2.6 Unable to Conceptualise Me Time***

There were 21 (27%) parents who were unable to conceptualise Me Time, with a substantial number of responses from mothers ( $N = 19$ , 90%) compared to father ( $N = 2$ , 10%). Most parents in this theme ( $N = 19$ ) used colloquial language such as “stuff”, “nothing”, or “things” to describe me time (coded as ‘vague explanations’), or parents would also list me time activities rather than discussing what me time means to them (coded as ‘a mismatch of the question and answer’).

Several parents ( $N = 3$ ) replied with “what is me time” or “what is that”. This was almost always answered with sarcastic and joke-like undertones, followed with laughter. One parent responded this way and did not elaborate, while the other parents usually followed up by listing leisure activities.

**Vague** “*Being relaxed, doing something for myself.*” – Fiafia.

**Vague** “*Doing nothing.*” – Montana.

**Mismatch** “*Hanging out with my best friend even if that means doing nothing, that and Netflix.*” – Adelina.

**Mismatch** “*Going onto the computer and gaming...going out with the boys, going fishing.*” – Gerrard.

### 4.3 Summary of Findings

The parents in this sample attributed rich and meaningful information to help us answer the first research question ‘How do parents of preschoolers define me time?’. As one of our aims was to expand on the me time data in the literature by projecting parent’s voices, the responses we received have revealed a unique and extensive description of the qualitative characteristics of me time, as perceived by parents.

The themes with the highest numbers of parent responses attributed to them were *Personal Fulfilment*, *Replenishing Resources*, and *Unable to Conceptualise Me Time*. The themes with the least number of parent responses were *Me Time as a Basic Need or Reward* and *Satisfaction from Parenting*. The themes with the largest amount of overlap (i.e., parents who were attributed to multiple themes) were *Personal Fulfilment*, *Replenishing Resources*, and *Escapism*. Overlapped responses were usually detailed descriptions of me time, encompassing the emotions parents experienced during me time, what benefits me time had for them, and what me time looked like by explicitly stating activities and experiences.

## Part Two: Me Time Activities

### 4.4 Overarching Themes – Me Time Activities

Previous literature defined various leisure activities into specific groups, although many activities were combined to create an overall picture of what leisure looks like for parents. Through the literature review and the process of TA, I separated each leisure activity group into seven leisure forms and converted them into themes for the analysis of the question “What things do you do during your ME time?”. See Table 2.1 for an extensive list of the leisure forms and their associated activities. Figure 3.4 represents the final thematic map of the activities parents described represent their me time.

Overall, 51 (64.56%) parent responses were attributed to more than one activity. The definitions and descriptors of these activities are given below, accompanied by quotes from parents, and are presented in order of commonality within our sample.

#### 4.4.1 *Independent Leisure*

Independent Leisure involves engagement in any activity experienced alone by the parent. Independent Leisure time is synonymous with ‘me time’. Independent Leisure was observed in 55 (70%) parent responses, with a higher number of responses in this theme from mothers ( $N = 48, 87\%$ ) compared to fathers ( $N = 7, 13\%$ ).

Parents described activities such as reading, gardening, having a coffee, playing video games, scrolling on their smartphones, engaging in creative expression (drawing, painting, crafts), watching television, taking a bath, listening to music, and meditation as some

common me time activities. Other descriptors of independent leisure activities were “zoning out”, “doing little projects like DIY (do-it-yourself)”, and “sitting quietly”.

*“Going out by myself, shopping or lunch. Being at home with no noises and reading. Taking a bath. Watching a show. Being in a place by myself not being interrupted.”* – Frankie.

*“Watching TV after dinner. Surfing the net.”* – Samson.

*“...Meditation, self-development, excessive amounts of coffee, have a nap.”* – Marian.

*“...watch movies, read novels and eBooks, listen to music...go out for food, and just sitting in the sun drinking coffee doing nothing.”* – Neve.

*“Read, garden, play games on my device, and take the dog to the river.”* – Tina.

*“Running, reading to learn and be challenged, art, woodcut prints, just a lot of creative stuff...”* – Beverley.

#### **4.4.2 Social Leisure**

Social Leisure involves activities experienced by the parent and one or more of their friends. Social Leisure was observed in 32 (41%) parent responses, with a higher number of responses in this theme from mothers ( $N = 29$ , 37%) compared to fathers ( $N = 3$ , 4%).

The parents described activities such as going out to see friends, having meals and drinks with friends, inviting people over for gatherings, and group classes (e.g., art classes), among other social activities.

*“Catch up with friends, socialising.” – Tania.*

*“...Games nights with friends, going out for dinner with friends.” – Jordan.*

*“Spend time with my friends – we have drinks once a month or so... – Madhav.*

*“Talk to friends and be with friends.” – Nyla.*

*“Bike riding with friends, drink wine with friends.” – Agatha.*

#### **4.4.3 Physical Leisure**

Physical Leisure involves engagement in physical-related activities experienced individually or collectively in a group setting. These can be either indoor or outdoor exercise or sports activities. Physical Leisure was observed in 31 (39%) parent responses, with a higher number of responses in this theme from mothers ( $N = 30, 97\%$ ) compared to fathers ( $N = 1, 3\%$ ).

The most common activities described by parents were walking, running, hiking, cycling, and attending group exercise classes and gyms. One parent described her physical leisure time as a chore – *“I work out, but that doesn’t feel like me time, I know it’s still a part of self-care, but sometimes I think that it [exercise] is a chore...”* (Neve). Although

*independent leisure* includes physical activities if engaged in alone, several parents reported sharing this activity with others.

*“Play sports – touch rugby and adventure racing. Training with the team...”* – Renee.

*“Go for a walk on the beach. Do some exercise.”* – Gena.

*“I go to the gym; it’s how I find time for leisure because it’s something that I want to do and it feels good...”* – Hailee.

#### **4.4.4 Passive Leisure**

Passive Leisure are activities experienced by an individual to fulfil a personal need(s) or the needs of others. Passive Leisure was observed in 26 (33%) parent responses, with only one father’s response indicative of this theme (4% of the total Passive Leisure responses).

For the present research, any parent-reported activity that described completing household chores, caring for others (e.g., children, romantic partners), sleeping, eating, showering, grooming activities (appointments for hair, nails, etc.), working, or studying, were coded as passive leisure. Bathing, compared to showering, was included in the Replenishing Resources theme as this was deemed through discussions between the researchers as a self-regulation activity.

There was one parent who explicitly denounced housework as not being a part of their me time – *“I read when I don’t have the kids, I blob out and ignore the housework, I watch a movie in my pyjamas.”* (Ngaire).

*“I clean, I get the housework done before the kids get home. Grocery shopping. Once a month I go and get my eyebrows done.” – Pikitea.*

*“There’s not a lot of me time at the moment. It is all about family life and helping others.” – Chris.*

*“I will lookup recipes...do things for the next day like meal prepping lunches and doing the housework.” – May.*

*“Working or studying.” – Winnie.*

#### **4.4.5 Family Leisure**

Family leisure involves activities experienced within a family unit or with extended family members. Family Leisure was observed in 5 (6%) parent responses, with four mothers (80%) and one father (20%) indicating they include their family in their me time activities.

The parents reported that talking to family members on the phone, engaging in outdoor activities as a family, and going out for meals and drinks with family were ways they engaged in me time. One parent discussed how their family time was their me time and coined a new term “us time” during their interview.

*“Go out for dinner with my family, it’s ‘us time’.” – Madhav.*

*“Ringing my Grandmother without the kids in the background.” – Esther.*

*“Going out for a coffee with mum...” – Winona.*

#### **4.4.6 Parent-child Leisure**

Parent-child Leisure involves activities experienced between a parent and their child(ren). This involves either mother-child, father-child, or caregiver-child leisure activities. Parent-child Leisure may involve activities similar to that of family leisure time, but the difference is only one parent is engaging in the leisure activity with the child. Parent-child Leisure was reported by only one father (1% of the total activities responses), Gerrard; his response is shown below.

*“Spending time with the kids...”* – Gerrard.

#### **4.5 Summary of Findings**

Based on research question two, we aimed to explore what parents’ perceptions of me time activities were and what activities they engage in. This was not an exercise that focused on whether they would fit within what we, the researchers, thought me time (i.e., independent leisure) to be, hence the addition of multiple themes describing different leisure activities that were not necessarily independent leisure-related. By separating each form, we were able to view independent leisure alongside other leisure forms, to observe associations and defining characteristics that were specific to, and also not descriptive of, me time.

A substantial number of parents ( $N = 55$ ) reported that some of their me time activities were synonymous with the independent leisure activities found in the prior literature review. Parents also reported that engaging in social and physical activities were important aspects of their me time. From parents’ perspectives, family and parent-child



leisure activities were not relevant to the concept of me time, evidenced by the small number of responses attributed to these themes.

## Chapter Five: Quantitative Results

This chapter presents the quantitative results for the current study. First, the descriptives are reported, then the results from the Zero Order Bivariate correlations, followed by the crosstabulation and the ANOVAs. Our research questions and hypotheses are referenced and discussed where appropriate.

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Research questions three and four aimed to explore the frequency of participation and perceived satisfaction levels of me time for parents of preschoolers. Visual inspection of frequency and satisfaction indicated a normal distribution. We hypothesised that the average me time frequency rating would be once a week or less, and the average me time satisfaction rating would be somewhat dissatisfied. Table 5.2 shows the descriptive statistics of the me time frequency and satisfaction variables.

The majority of parents reported engaging in me time once a day ( $N = 28, 35.4\%$ ) and few parents reported engaging in me time several times a day ( $N = 4, 5.1\%$ ). Additionally, the majority of parents reported they were somewhat satisfied ( $N = 41, 51.9\%$ ) with their current me time and few parents reported being extremely dissatisfied ( $N = 4, 5.1\%$ ) with their me time.

Part of research question six aimed to explore the differences for mothers and fathers on the dependent variables. We hypothesised that mothers, compared to fathers, would report less frequency and less satisfaction. This was not confirmed within our sample. Descriptives showed that mothers average reported frequency ( $M = 3.13; SD = 0.99$ ) and satisfaction ( $M =$

3.63;  $SD = 1.12$ ) levels were higher than fathers average reported frequency ( $M = 3.00$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ) and satisfaction ( $M = 3.51$ ;  $SD = 1.01$ ) levels. Mothers were more likely to report engaging in me time once a day ( $N = 25$ , 35%) and reported being somewhat satisfied with their me time ( $N = 38$ , 54%). Fathers were more likely to report engaging in me time several times a week ( $N = 4$ , 50%) and reported being somewhat satisfied with their me time ( $N = 3$ , 38%).

## 5.2 Bivariate Correlations

Zero Order Bivariate correlations are shown in Table 5.2. To test our hypothesis for research question five, we computed a correlation on the independent variables. Me time frequency and satisfaction were found to be moderately positively correlated, suggesting that parents who engaged in me time frequently were also more satisfied with their me time, confirming our hypothesis. The association between the study variables and parent gender were not significant.

**Table 5.2**

*Total Sample Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for the Study Variables*

| Study Variable       | <i>n</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1      | 2      |
|----------------------|----------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Me Time Frequency    | 79       | 3.01     | 1.14      | -      | .391** |
| Me Time Satisfaction | 79       | 3.52     | 1.02      | .391** | -      |

### 5.3 Me Time Frequency and Satisfaction Crosstabulations

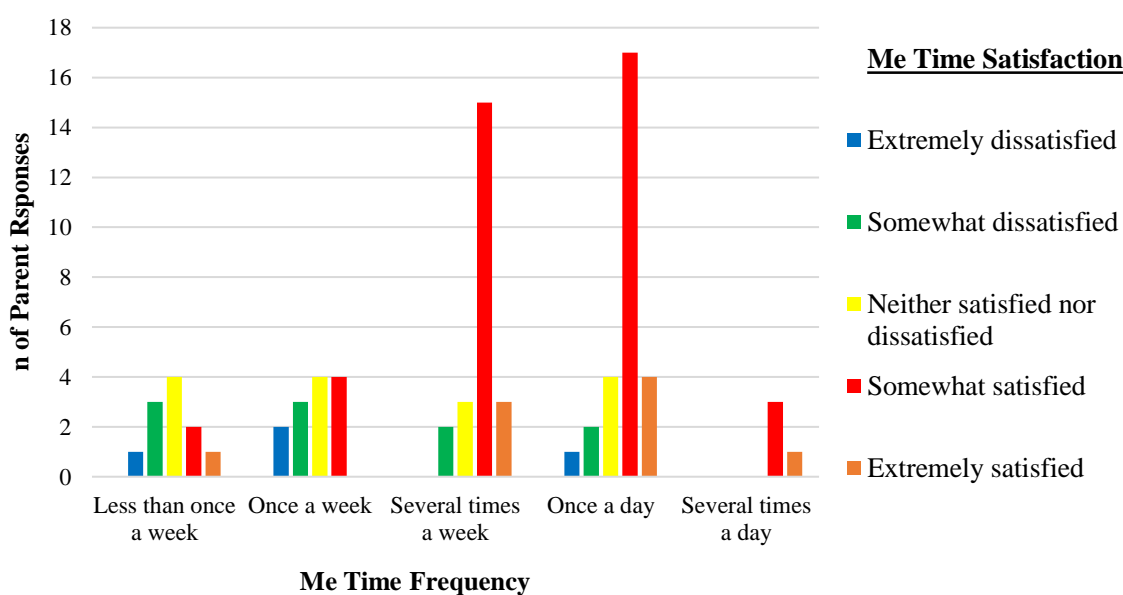
Research question five aimed to explore the patterns within the frequency and satisfaction responses, more specifically if higher frequency responses were more likely to be reported alongside higher satisfaction responses, and vice versa. This was congruous to our hypothesis.

Parents who engaged in me time less than once a week were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ( $N = 4$ , 36%). Parents who engaged in me time once a week were equally somewhat satisfied ( $N = 4$ , 31%) and neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ( $N = 4$ , 31%). Parents who participated in me time several times a week ( $N = 15$ , 65%), once a day ( $N = 17$ , 61%) or several times a day ( $N = 3$ , 75%) were somewhat satisfied with their me time.

Overall, patterns were difficult to observe as our sample reported they were predominantly relatively satisfied ( $N = 41$ , 52%). See Figure 5.3 for a visualisation of me time frequency and me time satisfaction responses.

**Figure 5.3**

*Patterns of Me Time Frequency and Me Time Satisfaction*



#### **5.4 Comparisons of Independent Variables with SES and Ethnicity**

Two One-Way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were computed to examine whether the demographic characteristics of SES and ethnicity had an influence on me time frequency and me time satisfaction. With regard to research question six, we hypothesised that parents from the two lower decile kindergartens would rate lower on both dependent variables, compared to parents from the highest decile kindergarten. We also hypothesised that parents of non-NZ European decent would rate lower on both dependent variables, compared to NZ European parents.

Table 5.4.1 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA conducted for me time frequency and satisfaction and parent SES. Table 5.4.2 shows the results of the one-way ANOVA conducted for me time frequency and satisfaction and parent ethnicity. Overall, there were no statistically significant differences ( $p > .05$ ) in parent's me time frequency or satisfaction among the different decile groups or ethnicities. Therefore, post-hoc tests were not conducted for each variable. Our hypothesis regarding ethnicity was not confirmed for responses from parents who self-identified as Pasifika and Other; this was confirmed for responses from parents who self-identified as Māori.

#### **5.4 Summary of Findings**

We aimed to investigate the association between the independent variables and demographic characteristics. Additionally, we aimed to compare the independent variables against one another, a first in research to our knowledge.

Parents were more likely to report engaging in me time once a day and rating their satisfaction as somewhat satisfied. Mothers were more likely to engage in me time frequently and rate their me time as more satisfying, compared to fathers. There were no significant

differences in me time frequency and satisfaction for all study variables. Parents who self-reported their ethnicity as Māori were less likely than any other ethnicity to engage frequently, and be satisfied, in their me time.

Me time frequency and satisfaction were found to be significantly positively correlated, indicating that parents who engage in me time more frequently, were more likely to rate their current me time as satisfying. The impacts of these, and the qualitative, results are discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 5.4.1**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Decile and Me Time Frequency and Satisfaction*

| Variable | Decile 3 |      | Decile 5 |      | Decile 8 |      | F;<br>[95% CI]        | Sig. | Eta Squared |
|----------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|-----------------------|------|-------------|
|          | M        | SD   | M        | SD   | M        | SD   |                       |      |             |
| MT Freq  | 3.20     | 0.95 | 3.07     | 1.25 | 2.83     | 1.15 | .673;<br>[.000, .093] | .51  | .017        |
| MT Sat   | 3.60     | 0.88 | 3.52     | 1.18 | 3.47     | 0.97 | .107;<br>[.000, .034] | .91  | .003        |

*Note.* df = 2, N = 79, MT Freq = Me Time Frequency, MT Sat = Me Time Satisfaction.

**Table 5.4.2**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Ethnicity and Me Time Frequency and Satisfaction*

| Variable | NZ European |      | Māori |      | Pasifika |     | Other |      | F;<br>[95% CI]         | Sig. | Eta Squared |
|----------|-------------|------|-------|------|----------|-----|-------|------|------------------------|------|-------------|
|          | M           | SD   | M     | SD   | M        | SD  | M     | SD   |                        |      |             |
| MT Freq  | 3.17        | 1.09 | 2.33  | 1.16 | 3.67     | .51 | 2.82  | 1.25 | 2.311;<br>[.000, .192] | .08  | .085        |
| MT Sat   | 3.47        | 1.01 | 3.17  | 1.12 | 4.33     | .91 | 3.91  | 0.83 | 1.757;<br>[.000, .163] | .17  | .065        |

*Note.* df = 2, N = 79, MT Freq = Me Time Frequency, MT Sat = Me Time Satisfaction.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to explore parent's perspectives of me time. More specifically, the qualitative characteristics of me time, the leisure activities they participate in when engaging in me time, and the frequency of, and satisfaction in their me time. Our aim was developed from a lack of research in national and international literature on the leisure experiences of parents of preschool-age children. Further, we discovered that the conceptualisation of independent leisure is vague and unclear and that parent's voices were not typically included within findings.

Research on independent leisure is important as leisure engagement has been shown to reduce rates of parental stress and burnout (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Offer, 2016; Roskam et al., 2021), and aid physical recovery (Håkansson, et al., 2016; Saxbe et al., 2011). Specific independent leisure outcomes are less likely to be separated from other leisure forms (e.g., physical, independent, media, and social are often analysed as one category called 'leisure'; see Appendix A for examples of this) in past research making it difficult to unpack the impacts of independent leisure. Our study made attempts to remedy the lack of diverse ethnic and sociodemographic voices within samples by investigating differences across various demographic factors, although our findings were not significant given the low power for each group. Trends are discussed further in this chapter. Overall, when exploring the qualitative characteristics of me time, we found that most parents believed me time to be a solo experience that should be fulfilling and enjoyable. When exploring me time frequency and satisfaction levels, we found that when parents engaged in me time more frequently, they were also more satisfied with their me time. Further, most of the parents in this study rated themselves as somewhat satisfied with their current me time.



When asked what me time meant to parents, they responded with statements related to the six themes of: Personal Fulfilment, Replenishing Resources, Me Time as a Basic Need or Reward, Escapism, Satisfaction from Parenting, and Unable to Conceptualise Me Time. The parent responses, alongside a review of terms and labels used in leisure literature, created unique descriptors for each theme; these procedures were both inductive and deductive in nature. Figure 3.3 showed the six themes and their core descriptors discovered from this approach. The themes were relatively unique to our study, with some similarities to studies that focused on wellbeing and self-care outcomes (for examples see Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al. 2017). Although our study did not specifically assess the functional outcomes of me time, we found that parents reported enjoyment, happiness and having fun during and following engagement in me time experiences. In our literature review we noted that there were studies that found that positive parenting (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004) and enjoyment within relationships (Buswell et al., 2012; Dyck & Daly, 2006) were common functional impacts of parental leisure in general. Further research is needed to investigate the life course effects of independent leisure for parents, especially parents of preschool-age children.

Within the theme Personal Fulfilment, seventy percent of parents believed that purposeful me time meant engaging in activities and experiences that were fulfilling. For me time to be fulfilling, parents described that having the choice of what to do, when to do it, and being alone when they do it, were essential. Additionally, parents believed that engagement in me time meant putting themselves first without feeling parental guilt or worry, as well as me time being inherently important to include in day-to-day life. These descriptors had a

trickle-down effect to some of the other themes, such as Replenishing Resources. Parents described a number of me time benefits in the short- and long-term; for example, experiencing increased positive affect, and the ability to take a moment to replenish their bodies (e.g., by physically resting, or engaging in exercise) and minds (e.g., connecting with spirituality, or engaging in mindfulness practices) during and following me time experiences.

Research has found that parental guilt (Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018) and low self-esteem and shame (Lloyd et al., 2016) influence parental participation in leisure experiences. Literature grounded in Feminism and socio-cultural theoretical frameworks, especially studies investigating maternal leisure engagement (e.g., Brown et al., 2001) and maternal stress and burnout (e.g., Séjourné et al., 2018), have suggested that parental guilt is especially prolific when parents, especially mothers, take the time to enjoy activities and experiences by themselves (Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Valtchanov et al., 2016). In our study, some parent's mind-sets were that me time should be viewed as a necessity (much like eating, drinking water, etc.), as they attributed Me Time to Basic Needs or a Reward. These parents, who were all mothers, were also more likely to describe me time that related to two other themes, namely Personal Fulfilment and Replenishing Resources. It is possible that these mothers perceive me time as inherently important and do not view having me time as a selfish act because they have experienced the benefits of me time, and see how these benefits positively affect other aspects of their lives (e.g., the ability to self-regulate, parenting, familial relationships).

Our finding that ninety-eight percent of parent responses across Personal Fulfilment, Replenishing Resources, and Me Time as a Basic Need or Reward were from women that believed that engagement in purposeful me time had many personal benefits and was an important part of their everyday lives, was incongruous to the parent perspectives of leisure previously reported in literature. Given the pressure on mothers to take on the primary parent

role, uphold that role across children's lives, and put familial duties before the self (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Horna, 1989; Passias et al. 2017; Saxbe et al. 2011; Valtchanov et al., 2016), and therefore engage in leisure less than men/fathers (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016), our findings show a possible change in some parent's perceptions on leisure engagement and entitlement. The link to leisure as well-being (see Chapter Two, section 2.3; see Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Passias et al. 2017) is highlighted in our study.

Parent perceptions that me time is a reward for all the hard work and parenting they do makes up the second part of the Me Time as a Basic Need or Reward theme, and these parents were all mothers. These mothers described engaging in me time only when other duties, such as household chores or parenting tasks, were completed. By completing all these tasks, parents may get a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment, that allows them a sense of freedom to then do something for themselves. In the research, there are large discrepancies between gender and household and childcare duties, with mothers more likely to take on both roles and engage in leisure less frequently, compared to fathers (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Horna, 1989).

This theme can also be closely connected with Escapism, as mother's responses were often attributed to both. Overall, Escapism was more relevant to mothers (eighty-three percent of responses) and parents from the two lower SES groups (sixty-seven percent of responses). For all parents in this theme, putting other duties first, reducing the demands of parenting and life, and engaging in health-risk behaviours, were all aspects of their me time. Mothers especially were more likely to put childcare and household duties ahead of me time engagement and reported me time as being able to sit down and relax at the end of the day

once everything was done. Other responses included reducing the parenting demands by having me time only when children were cared for by others or when children were asleep. A finding that has not often been discussed within literature was the number of parent responses that indicated engagement in illicit activities, such as substance use. These activities, although not necessarily an answer that most would consider indicative of a meaning, seemed to be the only way some parents could describe what me time meant to them. These activities (e.g., smoking cigarettes, having an alcoholic drink) are usually associated with relaxation because of the neurological effects of substances on the brain and central nervous system that mimic pleasurable and relaxing experiences (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015). So, it is plausible that such behaviours would be described following the meaning question (i.e., reporting health-risk behaviours could be another way of stating that me time means 'relaxation' for these parents).

The Escapism theme was more deductive in its creation as we utilised previous research to highlight and develop the core features and descriptors of parent's experiences of me time through concepts such as parent stress, burnout, and exhaustion. In our literature review we discovered that leisure participation can increase self-esteem and self-concept for mothers, as well as decreasing stress and the need to escape the parenting role. On the other hand, research from Hubert and Aujoulat (2018) found that an overinvestment in the maternal role leads to exhaustion and increased feelings of perfectionism, self-pressure to be a 'good' parent, and emotional projection. Meeussen & Van Laar (2018) found that pressure to be a perfect mother exacerbated maternal burnout, mediated by maternal gatekeeping (i.e., an ideological belief that the female should be the primary caregiver of the children and ensure that role is upheld by her alone). Further, Mikolajczak et al. (2019) found that parental burnout strongly increases parental escape ideation (i.e., wanting to remove the self from the parenting role, dissociation from the parenting role, and disrupted and disengaged emotional

responsiveness towards children). Although parental burnout was one of the aspects of the THRIVE study, we did not use that information in our analyses. However, we observed that fifteen percent of parents in our study had responses that linked to Escapism, congruous to literature investigating escapism and parental burnout where twelve (Roskam et al., 2017) to twenty percent (Séjourné et al., 2018) of parents were determined to have escapism ideology and parental burnout. Further research is required to assess the outcomes of leisure on parent's feelings of escapism and diagnosed parental burnout using valid assessment tools such as the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) (Roskam et al., 2018) alongside leisure assessment protocols.

Within the theme Satisfaction from Parenting, six parents discussed how me time is not something they necessarily consider in their everyday routines, as the parenting role and family socialisation experiences are more important to them. It is possible that parents in this theme conceptualise me time differently than the large proportion of parents who described me time as alone time. These parents may feel satisfied and fulfilled within their current functioning as a parent and do not see a need to have independent time that does not include their children or family. Although we had six parent responses that fit within these perceptions, a number of studies (see Craig & Mullan, 2013; Gracia, 2015; Swinton et al., 2008) have shown that leisure time with children, or sometimes referred to as parent-child leisure, does not produce the same outcomes as engaging in purposeful independent leisure (e.g., emotional and physical replenishment, time to calm the self and self-regulate).

Our study had a substantial number of female participants, compared to male, so much so that in almost every identified theme, female voices and perceptions were over-represented. The Satisfaction from Parenting theme had a good proportion of fathers at fifty-

percent; still, we cannot make the assumption that they represent the population of fathers of preschool-age children as within this proportion was only three fathers. Therefore, we cannot make gender-based assumptions and generalisations from our sample for this theme. Future research should recruit more fathers to determine whether me time experiences are similar for mothers and fathers.

The last meaning-related theme was Unable to Conceptualise Me Time, of which twenty-seven parent responses fit within. Parents were attributed to this theme when they had difficulty explaining what me time meant to them, or when they answered by listing the activities they engage in in me time. Congruous to our findings in the literature review, parents were unable to conceptualise me time. We believe this could be due to the lack of an operational definitions of leisure and independent leisure across the literature, and because of the societal perceptions of parental leisure. More specifically, the term me time is relatively new, termed in the last 40-50 years, and there is a lack of societal support for me time engagement (e.g., low numbers of leisure facilities, little advertising and education around parental me time, and me time is rarely discussed in health and psychological literature) (Evans & Allen-Collinson, 2016; Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Kora, 2019; Valtchanov et al., 2016). Further, when answering the interview question ‘what does me time mean to you’, several mothers laughed and joked, with sarcastic undertones, “what is that [me time]?” or “what me time? [laughs]”. These responses may stem from feeling overwhelmed within one’s parenting role and having time out to engage in me time is so unusual to them that their response is to just laugh it off. This may also be a common theme in broader society. Further research is needed to unpack these specific perceptions of me time and what the barriers to me time engagement are.

When asked what me time activities parents engaged in, they responded with statements related to the six leisure themes of: Independent, Social, Physical, Passive, Family, and Parent-child Leisure (listed in order of commonality within our sample). The unique descriptors for each theme were developed from the literature review where we collated similar findings across literature to develop leisure into seven specific forms; this procedure was deductive in nature. Figure 3.4 showed the six themes and their core descriptors used in analyses; the seventh theme, Couple Leisure, was excluded due to no responses that involved activities with a romantic partner (e.g., going on dates).

The majority of parent responses were indicative of some aspect of independent leisure, with seventy percent of parents reporting they engage in one or more activities. A common description alongside reported me time activities was alone time or being “by myself”, similar to what we discovered in the literature where independent leisure could also be described as “single leisure time” (Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004) and “child-free leisure” (Craig & Mullan, 2013), and in the responses aligning with the Personal Fulfilment and Replenishing Resources themes.

In our study, common me time activities included everyday activities, such as having a cup of tea or coffee, reading books or listening to eBooks, gardening, or taking baths. Some parents described engaging in self-reflective and -regulation activities, such as meditation, mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and quiet time for the body and mind. Further, parents described particularly unique me time activities rarely discussed in literature (see Pöllänen & Voutilainen, 2018 for an example), such as arts, crafts, knitting and crochet, and DIY/hobby projects. A small number of parents reported engaging in media use, such as scrolling on their phones, watching TV, or playing video games. Media use, especially social media use,

is become increasingly prevalent in New Zealand (Statista, 2021), so it is possible that the parents in our study see technology as a way to relax and unwind. This finding may provide evidence of the significant and important role technology plays as a leisure activity for parents today. Outcomes of media use on affect and fulfilment are under-reported in the leisure literature. Overall, the reported me time activities attributed to Independent Leisure are both unique to our sample and extended on previous research (see Table 2.1 for a breakdown of Independent Leisure and its associated activities within literature).

Social Leisure was the second most common activity, with forty-one parents indicating activities related to this theme. Parents described such activities as attending gatherings and events, having friends visit the family home, and going out to cafés, restaurants, and bars common me time activities to them. Given the positive effects social support can have on people (e.g., the chance to unload and talk through problems and worries, to decrease stress, and to have opportunities to laugh and have fun) (Adams et al., 2011; Coleman & Iso-Ahola, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Park, 1996), and with the limited time parents have told us they have in their day-to-day lives, this may be one of the only ways parents can engage in me time. For some parents, they may believe this is enough to replenish the self, whereas for other parents they require alone time to reset and regulate. Further, a cultural lens may need to be applied when exploring me time and Social Leisure, especially given that thirty-three percent of parents in our study were of non-NZ European decent. The large number of social activities reported could be linked to collectivist views of being, where emphasis is put on socialisation, connection and homeostasis, and that those experiences are fulfilling (Lu & Gilmour, 2004; Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011; Yetim & Yetim, 2014).



Common Physical Leisure activities reported by parents were walking, running, hiking, and pilates. Previous studies have reported independent and physical leisure activities together as co-existing; physical leisure can be experienced both alone and with groups and have been considered as me time from parent's perspectives (see Table 2.1, or Blažević Simić & Đurašin, 2020; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2004; Lloyd et al., 2016; Soubhi et al., 2004). These reported activities link directly to what parents reported when asked about the meanings of me time, where having purposeful me time by engaging in mindful and physical activities allowed them to gain a sense of inner calm, control their emotions, and respond to future pressures more effectively. Similar experiences are also described in physical leisure-focused literature (see Lloyd et al., 2016; Öztürk & Koca, 2019).

For Passive Leisure, thirty-three percent of parents reported engaging in household, childcare, work, or study activities as a part of their me time. For these parents, time spent looking after children, doing chores, and preparing for the next day by meal prepping and planning routines, were reported to be their time. Research has found that time to catch up is not the same as time to pause and stop, and parents who use their leisure time to work, study, or complete housework are less likely to feel fulfilled and happy with their current leisure time (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Passias et al., 2017; Valtchanov et al., 2016). Further, our findings may link directly to the perceived gender and parenting roles that are instilled through societal norms and expectations, which prevent parents, especially mothers, from engaging in me time. In our sample, ninety-nine percent of the parents who responses aligned with this leisure form were mothers. Further, mothers reported having to engage in “hard work” (i.e., childcare, housework, etc.) to be able to have me time; a direct link between Passive Leisure and Me Time as a Reward.

There were six responses attributed to Family and Parent-child Leisure. These parents believed that having me time meant experiencing activities together with family or with their

children. Literature has discussed the benefits of Family and Parent-child Leisure, where it can increase family cohesion and functioning (Buswell et al., 2012; Pomfret & Varley, 2019), ensure positive adolescent adjustment (Hodge et al., 2017; Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012), and assist in social and cognitive development in young children (Gardner et al., 2003), but within these studies me time concepts were not assessed. Our findings suggest that the majority of our parents described me time as time that should not include children or family; a direct link to the Personal Fulfilment theme, where parents perceive autonomy over choice of activity and alone time to enjoy their preferred activities as core descriptors of me time.

Overall, when taking into consideration the number of parents who believed me time should be a solo-activity within the Personal Fulfilment theme, and replenishing to the body and mind within the Replenishing Resources theme, it is curious that me time activities in the context of childcare, family gatherings or housework were also reported. In our study, there was considerable overlap across responses on the six themes of leisure activities, with thirty percent of parent responses also attributed to activities that did not align with the developed description of independent leisure. Given the breadth of the responses we received that align with other forms of leisure not indicative of typical me time activities, me time for parents of preschool-age children could be observationally different to what has previously been described in literature (i.e., the manifestation of me time through specific activities could be better described by looking at leisure broadly for these parents). Future research is needed to unpack the complexities of each activity type and whether the perceived benefits are confirmed for similar, and other, populations of parents.

Given that parent-reported me time frequency and me time satisfaction rates have not been investigated together in literature that we are aware of, the following interpretations are discussed with caution, and come from a curious, exploratory approach. We offer potential implications of our findings and suggestions for future research.

When parents were asked to report their frequency level of me time engagement and their current satisfaction with their me time, they responded more often as engaging in me time once a day, and being somewhat satisfied with their current me time. Given that parenting young children can be challenging and can lead to higher subjective reports of stress and fatigue (Lutz et al., 2012; Mikolajczak & Roskam, 2018; Mikolajczak et al., 2018; Roskam et al., 2021), we hypothesised that the parents in our study would have less time for me time and find it less satisfying. This was not confirmed.

Most parents who reported they were extremely satisfied with their current amount of me time reported they engaged in me time several times a week, once a day, or several times a day. These parents may be engaging in purposeful me time, given their high ratings of satisfaction, and their continuous engagement in me time within their weekly routines. There were two parents who reported engaging in me time several times a week, and three parents reporting once a day, who rated their satisfaction levels as either extremely dissatisfied, or somewhat dissatisfied. It could be possible that these parents have different perceptions of me time compared to the population, where they may be aware of the benefits of me time and feel they should be engaging more, but face barriers to participation. Patterns and trends across our data were difficult to visualise, as every frequency rating, except for once a week, had parents who rated their satisfaction level as extremely satisfying. We would expect that parents who were engaging in me time less than once a week would not rate themselves as extremely satisfied with their current leisure engagement. Overall, we found a significant positive relationship between me time frequency and satisfaction, indicating that when

parents engaged in me time more frequent also reported being more satisfied with their me time. With a larger sample, we may be able to see differences on these variables based on gender, SES, and ethnic groups, but we did not have the power to achieve this in our study.

In regard to gender differences, as the number of mothers was significantly higher than the number of fathers, we could not ascertain gender differences on the me time frequency and satisfaction variables. However, literature has found trends where mothers are less likely to engage in leisure in general, compared to fathers, and are more likely to experience distress within the parenting role (Craig & Mullan, 2013; Horna, 1989). Future research should attempt to recruit an even sample of mothers and fathers to explore the effects of gender on me time participation and enjoyment.

In regard to decile differences, there was a ten-parent gap between the decile 3 and the decile 8 samples, which made it difficult to visually assess for patterns and differences. There was a trend for decile 8 parents to rate their frequency and satisfaction lower compared to the other groups. Decile 3 may be the most accurate observation of me time frequency and satisfaction because they had the least spread of all three groups. Parents in this decile were more likely to rate their frequency as several times a week and rate their satisfaction as neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. It may be that these parents who engage in me time at these rates, are happy with their current me time in the context of also balancing parenting, childcare, household duties, and work or study.

In regard to ethnicity differences, there was an over-representation of NZ European parents in our sample and we did not find significant differences. We did find potential trends, that with larger sample sizes, could show differences. For Pasifika, satisfaction rates were higher compared to all other ethnicities, and for Māori, they were relatively low

compared to all other ethnicities. Given that Pasifika people are more likely to have more social and familial support, community support, and collectivist cultural strengths that protect people from stressors (Enari & Faleolo, 2020; Kapeli et al., 2020), they may be more likely to engage in me time. These aspects of collectivism could be why Pasifika parents in this study rated higher on both frequency and satisfaction in me. It is possible that for Māori, leisure providers are not meeting the needs of Māori within their facilities and programs, as discussed in Harvey (2002). Further, little is still known about Māori leisure participation rates, specific activities that Māori engage in, and what leisure outcomes are specific to Māori. Future research on Māori leisure participation should use the lens of Māori hauora (health) models or frameworks to discover the nuances of Māori's perceptions of me time and how me time fits within their collectivist ways of being and living.

### **6.1 Towards a Definition of Me Time**

In our exploratory investigation into me time, we aimed to refine the concept of me time to work towards a definition of me time. To our knowledge, no studies have specifically used the term 'me time', instead opting to use terms such as 'independent leisure' and 'pure free time'. We believe by using 'me time' we can start to bridge the gap between the academic understanding, and parent's understanding, of me time. As noted in our methodology, *me time* was understood by most parents in our study, compared to the other terms previously used in literature.

Further, our study allows momentum for research to pick up the need to define me time for this population, and for other parents (i.e., parents with primary school-age children, and so on). We have established core descriptors of me time that have produced reliable perspectives of me time, due to the repetitiveness of similar descriptors across parents and

because parents use of descriptive and emotive language, in some cases, have been observed in the literature and used to develop definitions of other leisure forms. To move towards a definition of me time, extending the Me Time Protocol and piloting it with the same, and other, populations of parents is required. To extend this protocol, consideration for the gaps and the future impacts of the research are required. We suggest extending the qualitative component of the protocol with questions that ask parents what does me time do for their physical health, mental health, and overall affect, what do they perceive the positive impacts of me time to be, what do they perceive the barriers to me time to be, what would make it easier for them to engage in me time, and so on.

Further, larger and diverse parent populations are needed for the momentum to continue. First larger populations are needed, as in our study we were unable to find significant quantitative differences for mothers and fathers, for parents of varying socioeconomic statuses, and for parents of different ethnicities. Second, balanced gender sample sizes are needed to explore gender differences within me time. As of the time of writing, this thesis was one of the only research papers that investigated the differences between mothers and fathers on the me time variables of frequency and satisfaction. Further, research from father's perspectives is lacking in general in this space. Third, SES-diverse voices are needed to unpack the economic and cultural factors that reduce and inhibit me time participation. Lastly, specific ethnic differences cannot be explored if the research methodology and protocols are not inclusive and meet the needs of the people they are assessed against at the beginning of the research project. Especially in a New Zealand research context, a re-evaluation of the methods and assessment tools that are used with Māori and Pasifika populations are required prior to investigating me time outcomes for these groups. Additionally, as discussed above, research should weave Māori models of health with

me time assessment to increase engagement and retention for Māori in research, as well as creating a database of me time knowledge that diversifies the research in that space overall.

Lastly, the functional impacts (or outcomes) of me time have not been researched in depth. This is due to the lack of assessment tools for independent leisure and me time. Following an extension of the Me Time Protocol, or new protocols created, and deeper analysis into me time outcomes may be plausible. The findings of our study provide a starting point for further research to pick up and extend the investigations into the health outcomes (e.g., parental burnout, physiological recovery, etc.) and wellbeing outcomes (e.g., increased parental mental health, positive parenting practices, positive family functioning, etc.) of me time. Possible meta-analyses or systematic reviews are needed to collate the research on what outcomes are currently understood, and what the gaps are here.

## **6.2 Limitations**

Despite the strengths of our study and important contributions to previous literature, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Twenty-seven out of seventy-nine parents provided vague or ambiguous responses to what me time means to them. More specifically these parents could not describe the qualitative characteristics of this phenomena with depth. Parents may have difficulty producing answers to complex questions about me time, and given that the definition of me time is ambiguous and unknown in literature and society, this would be plausible. It could also be that the question was not explicit enough to elicit appropriate answers. Further, a lack of follow-up opportunities to revisit the questions and ask for further perspectives about their responses, was also a limitation we did not anticipate prior to data collection. Although we had an open-ended question to elicit descriptive answers of me time, it may be more appropriate to follow-up with related

questions, for example “what do you think me time does for you physically/mentally, etc.?” or “how would someone else close to you describe me time?”. In doing so, the opportunities to confirm parent’s thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about me time may be increased, as well as opportunities to clarify meanings of words and why certain language and connotations were used when answering.

Additionally, our Me Time Protocol, being the first of its kind, is simplified and short which is a positive in most research. Shorter and easy to understand protocols can assist with accuracy of responses and retention rates. Given the Me Time Protocol was amongst a larger set of interview questions, which took up to 1.5 hours to complete with parents, this may have negatively impacted the parents’ ability to answer thoughtfully and carefully on the me time questions.

Finally, a lack of New Zealand (NZ) perspectives on leisure in general is an ongoing constraint to diverse and generalisable findings. Cultural considerations are lacking within the research process as whole – from methodology, to including Māori and Pasifika perspectives in literature reviews, to having balanced ethnic sample sizes. Perspectives on leisure from differing ethnic perspectives is lacking over the entirety of the leisure literature space (Hodge et al., 2017), and in NZ, there are less considerations for Māori in leisure in general (see Harvey, 2002). We attempted to resolve the lack of ethnic perspective by assessing NZ Māori and Pasifika peoples separately, as a common practice is to combine them for ease of analysis, and in doing so were not able to make generalisations due to small population sizes. Our limitation was not for lack of effort, but for lack of sample size for each ethnic group. Future research should continue to include culturally diverse parent voices; ethnicity-specific sampling criteria could be useful to diversify the leisure space, and methodology and assessments that are created or diversified with Māori and Pasifika needs in mind could increase these voices within leisure, and me time, research.



### **6.3 Conclusion**

Me time is an aspect of parental leisure that is often overlooked in the literature, with most studies opting to research me time combined with other leisure forms. This thesis aimed to explore me time as its own phenomenon in an attempt to work towards a definition of me time from the perspectives of parents of preschool-age children. To date, there are no known studies exploring the characteristics, presentations, and functional outcomes of me time. Future research should focus on creating operational definitions of me time by advancing me time protocols, especially focusing on how parents perceive me time effect different areas of their lives (e.g., mental health, physical recovery, parenting practices, etc.). Further, our study had a disproportionate amount of mothers and people of NZ European descent. Because of this, we were unable to find significant differences across the varying demographic groups. Future research should ensure even sampling groups as to further the known presentations and effects of me time for parents of preschoolers. Extending the knowledge of the me time phenomenon may guide future societal decisions about accessible and available leisure facilities, and increase access to education for parents about the importance of me time.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### Literature Search Table

**Table A**

*Literature Search Table of Article Characteristics*

| Article Information   | Country(s)          | Phenomena                               | Aim  | Sample size; Age; Sex | Methodology, measures           | Leisure type   | Key findings   |
|---|---------------------|---|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Blanchard & Heeren (2020). Why we should move from reductionism and embrace a network approach to parental burnout. | Belgium             | PB                                      | To see the goodness of fit of a network model to approach the numerous PB variables and potential TxS. | N/A                   | Opinion, literature exploration | "Leisure time" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible synthesis of appropriate variables related to PB and connect those interactions.</li> <li>• Possible connectivity with other theoretical frameworks (e.g., family systems theory).</li> <li>• Possible prioritisation of dynamic research questions.</li> <li>• Possible opportunities for developing targeted "symptom" interventions and personalised TxS for families.</li> </ul> |
| Blažević Simić & Đurašin (2020). Excuse me, whose leisure time?! Perceptions of family leisure amongst              | Republic of Croatia | Family Stress Proximal Processes (FSPP) | To research FLT participation and the associations with child developmental disabilities.              | 9; 32-49 yrs; Female  | Qualitative interviews          | FLT, ILT       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The greatest importance to mothers is the interaction they get from the FLT.</li> <li>• Benefits of FLT – bonding, relaxation, fun for the child.</li> <li>• Challenges to FLT – stress, fatigue, difficulties finding suitable activities.</li> <li>• FLT and ILT may not be exclusive leisure forms</li> </ul>  |

families with children with developmental disabilities.

for families with children with developmental disabilities.

Brown et al. (2001). Perceived constraints and social support for active leisure among mothers with young children.

Australia

Barriers to maternal PLT

To explore the factors that constrain mothers of young children from being more physically active.

543;  $\mu = 33$ ;  
Female

Quantitative survey packages

PLT

- Barriers to PLT – structural (lack of time, money, energy) and ideological (commitment to others) factors.
- Facilitators of PLT – higher social support.
- There are differences in time for PLT depending on SES; lower SES indicative of lower PLT.

Buswell et al. (2012). The relationship between father involvement in family leisure and family functioning: The importance of daily family leisure.

USA

FLT, family functioning, paternal involvement

To investigate the effects of paternal involvement on FLT and family functioning.

647 families;  
Father age not specified,  
adolescent 11-15 yrs;  
Mixed

Quantitative online survey

FLT

- Paternal involvement predicted family cohesion, family adaptability and overall positive family functioning.
- A combination of paternal involvement and regularly (consistent, predictable) occurring home-based activities predicted better family functioning.

Chen et al. (2019). Family leisure and subjective well-being: Do patterns and timing matter?

Taiwan

FLT, well-being

To explore the type and timing of family leisure activities and their impacts on well-being and family functioning.

711; 11-15 yrs; Mixed

Quantitative questionnaires

FLT

- Higher subjective well-being associated with higher levels of engagement in FLT.
- Results implied that these well-being statistics correlated with the patterns and timing of FLT (i.e., planned, consistent, predictable activities).

|  |  |  |   |  |  |   |   |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Craig & Mullan (2012). Shared parent-child leisure time in four countries.                                   | Australia, Denmark, France, USA        | Social norms, cross-cultural comparisons               | To investigate shared leisure experiences across cultures.                              | 3180; NR, “parents with children 0-9 yrs”; Mixed | Cross-sectional, large cross-cultural data exploration | FLT   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FLT varies substantially across countries. In countries where more mothers were employed in paid work, FLT was lower.</li> <li>• Shared FLT outside of the family home did not differ significantly across countries in time or activity type.</li> </ul>  |
| Craig, L & Mullan (2013). Parental leisure time: A gender comparison in five countries.                      | Australia, USA, France, Italy, Denmark | Social norms, gender roles, cross-cultural comparisons | To investigate similarities and differences between maternal and paternal leisure time. | 5230; NR; Mixed                                  | Cross-sectional, large cross-cultural data exploration | FLT, child-free leisure, leisure within daily childcare | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure quantity and quality favour fathers (i.e., fathers experience more leisure time, as well as rating their leisure time as satisfactory, compared to mothers).</li> <li>• Denmark had the highest rates of leisure time participation for mothers and fathers.</li> <li>• Australia and Denmark had high rates of leisure within daily childcare.</li> <li>• Mothers’ average child-free leisure time was 0.4 - 1.1 hours per day.</li> <li>• Fathers had higher rates of the leisure activity “television with children” compared to mothers.</li> </ul>  |
| Delle Fave & Massimini (2004). Parenthood and the quality of experience in daily life: A longitudinal study. | Italy                                  | Bio-cultural perspective, developmental implications   | To investigate the leisure, work, parenting and media use experiences of new parents.   | 10; 23-31 yrs; Mixed                             | Short-term longitudinal, interviews, observations      | “Leisure” ND, possibly ILT                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant leisure differences before and after birth for both mothers and fathers.</li> <li>• Leisure elevated moods and intrinsic motivation – significantly high intrinsic motivation with media use.</li> <li>• Across all investigated experiences (leisure, work, parenting, media use) leisure time was observed the least.</li> <li>• Leisure activities for fathers were structured (e.g., sports), whereas leisure activities for mothers were less structured (e.g., walking, idling, being at home).</li> <li>• Leisure and media use were perceived as a pleasant activity in daily life, compared to the other activities of daily life (work, parenting), most likely because of the high level of attentional effort required to complete work and parenting tasks.</li> </ul> |

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| Denault & Poulin (2008). Associations between interpersonal relationships in organized leisure activities and youth adjustment.             | Canada | Interpersonal adjustment  | To investigate the associations between parental, gender, and prior adjustment factors with interpersonal adjustment and activity participation among youths. | 115; $\mu = 13.9$ yrs; Mixed                                | Longitudinal, teacher, child, parent self-report        | "Activity participation"  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive relationship was found between parental involvement in activities and youth's persistence over time. Mother's involvement produced a main effect, whereas father involvement was moderated by gender.</li> <li>• Perceived support and positive appraisals from a mentor were positively associated with interpersonal adjustment and activity participation, especially for boys and less adjusted youths, compared to girls and better adjusted youths.</li> </ul>   |
| Dyck & Daly (2006). Rising to the challenge: Fathers' role in the negotiation of couple time.   | Canada | Social norms, Systems theory, paternal involvement                  | To investigate how fathers of young children negotiate couple time with their partners.   | 14 couples with young children (3-12 yrs); 31-50 yrs; Mixed | Mixed methods, semi-structured interviews, observations | Couple leisure            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barriers to couple time – uncertain social support, stressful demands of daily living, unclear couple time preferences, ambivalence and confusion regarding their desire for traditional courtship in the context of egalitarian parenting.</li> <li>• Fathers played important role in initiating couple time, whereas mothers played a significant role in the implementation of couple leisure activities; the authors attribute this to “power dynamics” within romantic relationships.</li> </ul>                        |
| Evans & Allen-Collinson (2016). From ‘just a swimmer’ to a ‘swimming mother’: women’s embodied experiences of recreational aquatic activity | UK     | Gendering of leisure, pastimes, and body image, Foucault, Sociology | To investigate how mothers experience aquatic leisure.  | 22; 25-36 yrs; Female                                       | Mixed methods, group interviews                         | PLT, parent-child leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key social construct contouring perceptions in a swimming pool environment is the centrality of the gendered, lived body; self-perceived physical deficiencies (e.g., weight, shape) reduced likelihood of participation.</li> <li>• The presence of children reduced self-perceptions and shifted the focus to a maternal/caregiving focus. More specifically, a focus on perceived risks in, and rules of, the environment that could affect children.</li> <li>• The time of day of parent-toddler swimming</li> </ul> |

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| with pre-school children.   |             |  |   |                               |   |  | sessions could account for the reduction in paternal participation.   |
| Gardner et al. (2003). The role of mother-child joint play in the early development of children's conduct problems: A longitudinal observational study. | UK          | Attachment theory, child psychopathology   | To examine the relationship between conduct problems in preschoolers and parent-child play interactions.  | 60; 3 yrs; Mixed              | Short-term longitudinal, observations, parent self-report | NA   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The more time that was spent in parent-child joint play at age 3 predicted lower conduct problems at age 4.</li> <li>• The more the child was unoccupied and the less maternal attention they received, was predictive of conduct problems.</li> <li>• Parent-child conversations and child solo-play did not predict conduct problem outcomes.</li> <li>• Positive and proactive parenting practices may reduce the instances of conduct problems over time in preschoolers.</li> </ul> |
| Gracia (2015). Parent-child leisure activities and cultural capital in the United Kingdom: The gendered effects of education and social class.          | Netherlands | Social and gender constructs, social norms | To analyse how social position influences parents' leisure activities with children.  | 610 couples; 25-59 yrs; Mixed | Data exploration, exploratory analysis                    | FLT, parent-child leisure                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social position (i.e., class, SES) has significant positive effects on leisure with children, and negative effects on watching TV (for mothers and moderate effects for fathers).</li> <li>• The spouse's social position strongly influences father-child leisure.</li> <li>• There are complex differences within parental education and social class which affect parent-child leisure participation.</li> </ul>  |
| Håkansson et al. (2016). Insufficient time for leisure and perceived health and stress in working parents with small children.                          | Sweden      | Resource replenishment, exhaustion         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore the gender differences of self-reported poor health and higher stress and insufficient leisure time.</li> </ul> | 1562; 19-62 yrs; Mixed        | Quantitative, self-report                                 | PLT, FLT, hobbies, relaxation, socialisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less reported time for relaxation increased risk for perceived stress.</li> <li>• Less time spent with children increased likelihood of subjective health complaints.</li> <li>• Claims of insufficient time for all leisure types across both men and women.</li> <li>• Higher risk for perceived stress in working parents and in women.</li> <li>• Insufficient time with friends effects women's stress more than men.</li> </ul>  |

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| Hatzmann et al. (2014). Consequences of caring for a child with a chronic disease: Employment and leisure time of parents.                    | Netherlands | Chronic illness, functional impairments | To assess the effect of having a chronically ill child and the role chronic illness plays on parental employment and leisure activity time. | 576 parents, 441 comparison; NR; Mixed   | Quantitative, self-report   | “Sports or leisure activities”, PLT                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a child with a chronic illness is negatively associated with employment, maternal paid work participation, and time for leisure activities.</li> <li>• Mothers of chronically ill children are “disadvantaged” in society, and find childcare, work and leisure challenging to juggle.</li> <li>• Leisure time was negatively associated with a low level of education and living outside of the Netherlands for parents of children with chronic illness.</li> <li>• In the comparison group, fathers reported more time for leisure than mothers, whereas in the chronic illness group there were no differences between parents.</li> </ul> |
| Hodge et al. (2017). The association between family leisure and family quality of life: A meta-analysis of data from parents and adolescents. | US          | Family functioning                      | To collate existing and unpublished research on FLT, and investigate the associations between FLT and family quality of life.               | 23 articles                              | Meta-analysis, database searches, asking prominent researchers in the field, contacting authors | FLT  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were small-to-moderate effect sizes in both models – family leisure participation with family quality of life, and family leisure satisfaction with family quality of life.</li> <li>• For the satisfaction-quality model, marital status and nationality (ethnicity) were moderating variables.</li> <li>• Ethnicity is a variable that is one of the least investigated within the leisure discipline.</li> </ul>   |
| Horna, J. L. (1989). The leisure component of the parental role.  | Canada      | Parental roles                          | To investigate leisure roles within parenting for married couples.  | T1 562 couples, T2 56 couples; NR; Mixed | Longitudinal, two time-points, interviews, surveys  | ILT, spouse only, parent-child only, friend/relative only, FLT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers were more likely to carry the greater share of shared-leisure and semi-leisure throughout their child's upbringings (infant to teenager), even with maternal employment as a factor.</li> <li>• Fathers viewed games and play as their leisure, whereas mothers viewed these as semi-leisure.</li> <li>• Men found the paternal role tasks less taxing, time-consuming, and confining compared to women's perceptions of their maternal roles.</li> <li>• Parental roles from patriarchal stances were still in play during this study despite the shifts of society at the time to more egalitarian ways of viewing parenthood.</li> </ul>   |



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| Hubert & Aujoulat (2018). Parental burnout: When exhausted mothers open up.  | Belgium     | PB  | •"To give voice to exhausted mothers, in order to get a better understanding of what it means to be exhausted in relation with one's parental role..." | 5; 30-42 yrs;<br>Female;                       | Interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative, interviews | NA directly                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recurrent themes from the interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overinvestment in the maternal role leads to exhaustion – increased feelings of perfectionism, self-pressure, and projection;</li> <li>• Tiredness leads to automatic behaviour which leads to emotional distancing – intense physical fatigue and emotional fatigue, there is only “surviving”, being on automatic pilot, feeling strains on the bond between mother and child, and losing control;</li> <li>• Maternal exhaustion seen as a form of major suffering;</li> <li>• Recurrent feelings of self-hate, fear, parental shame, loneliness, guilt.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Jenkins & Lyons (2006). Non-resident fathers' leisure with their children.   | Australia   | Social and gender constructs                  | To explore the qualitative aspects of how participation in father-child leisure is important for non-resident fathers.                                 | 46 articles/<br>information sources            | Article exploration, qualitative analysis                         | Parent-child leisure, father-child leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father-child leisure takes place within the context of custody arrangements – e.g., daytime-only contact, holiday-only contact, little or no contact – and are usually reinforced by the law in formal settings (i.e., supervised visits).</li> <li>• Less contact between father and child is usually associated with negative circumstances for the family (e.g., mother has less income, parental incarceration, conflict between parents).</li> <li>• Leisure is regarded as a primary mechanism for non-resident parent's connections with their children with more interactions positively impacting wellbeing.</li> </ul>                                  |
| Karsten et al. (2015). ‘Time-out ‘with the family: the shaping of family leisure in the new urban consumption spaces of cafes, | Netherlands | Societal barriers and facilitators to leisure | To explore how families, parents, and child-free families experiences public spaces.   | 10 spaces,<br>12 families,<br>21 staff members | Mixed methods, observations, interviews                           | FLT, ILT, socialisation                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement effects what family leisure time looks like – high parental involvement is associated with “leisured caring time”.</li> <li>• Parent's personal activities are seen as their own leisure time (i.e., ILT).</li> <li>• Maintaining social relationships beyond the family is seen as social leisure time.</li> <li>• Families that use social spaces for leisure usually live local and are middle-class.</li> </ul>  |

bars and restaurants.

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| Kimmel & Connelly (2007). Mothers' time choices caregiving, leisure, home production, and paid work.       | US        | SES                       | To study the role that SES plays on caregiving, leisure, home production, and paid work. | 4552; 18-65 yrs; Female       | Cross-sectional, self-report diaries                                  | ND, possibly ILT                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure time decreases when wages increase.</li> <li>• Hispanic mothers had fewer minutes of leisure time.</li> <li>• Married mothers spent less time on leisure and more time on house production.</li> <li>• Older children don't effect leisure time, but school-age children decrease the amount of leisure time.</li> </ul>  |
| Lloyd et al. (2016). Mothers with young children: Caring for the self through the physical activity space. | Australia | Foucault's ethics of self | To explore how young mothers perceive and engage in PLT.                                 | 18 mothers; 26-41 yrs; Female | Qualitative, interpretive design, focus groups, individual interviews | PLT   | <p>Two themes were discovered: • “Resisting the ethic of care for self-care” – self-care within leisure is learning what they need to do for the self to feel healthy versus doing what is recommended for their health;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Embodiment of LTPA through transformational experiences” – increased self-reflection on the meaning behind why they persist with LTPA and how it affects their emotional states.</li> <li>• Freedom of choice (in type of activity, when, where, and how often) increased feelings of agency, confidence and pleasure, and increased their levels of self-efficacy.</li> <li>• Pursuing leisure for fun and to feel good increased persistence and commitment to physical activity compared to pursuing leisure to achieve fitness outcomes and/or complying with recommended health guidelines.</li> </ul> |
| Martín Quintana et al. (2018). Analysis of family shared leisure time in                                   | Spain     | Parental competency       | To discover the leisure activities of young children and                                 | 438; $\mu=38.9$ ; Mixed       | Quantitative - questionnaires   | FLT, “shared family leisure”, child leisure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared leisure was categorised with the following activities: recreational, digital, physical – sporting activities, spending free time with family and friends.</li> </ul>   |

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| early childhood and their relation with parental competencies.   |                 |   | the types of shared leisure, and how these effect parental competency.   |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers engage in more shared leisure compared to fathers.</li> <li>• Fathers are more likely to engage in video games and sports.</li> <li>• An increase in the quantity of shared leisure time increased feelings of parental competency.</li> </ul>   |
| Meeussen & Van Laar (2018). Feeling pressure to be a perfect mother relates to parental burnout and career ambitions.                  | UK, US          | PB, happiness                             | To investigate how mothers regulate pressure and that effect on PB and paid work outcomes.                       | 169; 19-58 yrs; Female                   | Quantitative, questionnaires                     | NA   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling pressure to be a perfect mother and partner was positively related to PB, and was mediated by stress, cognitive focus to avoid mistakes, and maternal gatekeeping.</li> <li>• An increase in pressure meant a decrease in a work-family-life balance, and decreased mother's career ambitions.</li> </ul>  |
| Mikolajczak & Roskam (2018). A theoretical and clinical framework for parental burnout: The balance between risks and resources (BR2). | Belgium, Europe | Theory of PB, risk and resource framework | To propose a theory of why PB exists and to provide direction for intervention. To develop a tool to measure PB. | 923; $f\mu=39.93$ , $m\mu=43.07$ ; Mixed | Two-wave longitudinal, quantitative, self-report | "Time for leisure" stated as a protective resource (but never discussed) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong linear relationship between the BR2 score and PB.</li> <li>• A chronic imbalance of risks over resources leads to PB.</li> <li>• BR2 predicts PB better than job burnout.</li> <li>• Risks and resources that are non-specific to parenting predict PB and job burnout equally; risks and resources specific to parenting uniquely predict PB.</li> </ul>                     |
| Mikolajczak & Roskam (2020). Parental burnout: Moving the focus from children to parents.  | Belgium         | PB  | To open a discussion about the concepts, phenomenology, etiology, and consequences of PB.                        | N/A                                      | Review article                                   | "Quality time with children"   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lockdown was a "blessing" for some parents as they felt they had more time to spend with their children; they regarded this quality time as substantive.</li> <li>• Contrastingly, there were parents who felt additional stress because they had to work from home, home school and/or continue their household duties while caring for, and entertaining, children.</li> </ul> |

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| Mikolajczak et al. (2019). Parental burnout: What is it, and why does it matter?   | Belgium         | PB                                       | To investigate the impacts of PB on escape ideation, parental neglect, and parental violence. | 918, 822; 22-69 yrs; Mixed | Analysis/ investigation of two cross-lagged longitudinal studies | NA   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PB strongly increases escape ideation (i.e., wanting to get away from one's parenting role, dissociation from one's parenting role, disrupted, disengaged or absent emotional affection towards children), as well as neglectful and violent behaviours towards one's children.</li> </ul>   |
| Mikolajczak et al. (2018). Exhausted parents: socio demographic, child-related, parent-related, parenting and family-functioning correlates of parental burnout. | Belgium, Europe | PB, family functioning                   | To further identify antecedents/risk factors for PB.  | 1723; 22-75 yrs; Mixed     | Quantitative, online surveys                                     | "Leisure time" items were deleted                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PB is a multi-determined syndrome mainly predicted by three sets of factors: parent's stable traits, parenting, and family functioning.</li> </ul>   |
| Offer (2016). Free time and emotional well-being: Do dual-earner mothers and fathers differ?   | US              | Parental roles and societal expectations | To investigate the emotional effects of free time from the perception of parents.             | 693 parents; NR; Mixed     | Experience Sampling Method (ESM), surveys                        | Pure free time, adult free time, free time with child(ren) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers and fathers spend the same amount of time on average on leisure activities.</li> <li>• Mothers have less pure free time, spend more leisure time with children, and combine unpaid work time with leisure time more often than fathers.</li> <li>• Pure free time is associated with increased positive affect and engagement, and decreased negative affect and stress.</li> <li>• Adult free time and free time with children were beneficial for parental well-being.</li> <li>• Fathers experienced more positive affect when engaging in free time with their children, compared to mothers.</li> </ul> |

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| Öztürk & Koca (2019). Generational analysis of leisure time physical activity participation of women in Turkey. | Turkey | Socio-ecological model (SEM), Feminism | To analyse the adolescent-period LTPA experiences across three generations of the same families. | 48, 48, 48; 9-17 yrs, 33-53 yrs, 55-84 yrs; Female | Qualitative, semi-structured interviews | LTPA, PLT   | <p>Four themes were discovered: • “Changing the meaning of sports, LTPA and being active” – 1<sup>st</sup> gen considered home-based work PLT, whereas 3<sup>rd</sup> gen considered sports and physical education classes PLT.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Social resources for participating in LTPA: from authoritarian to supportive parenting” – 1<sup>st</sup> gen experienced more authoritarian parenting (from fathers mostly) and were pressured to conform to traditional family valued and beliefs (e.g., girls did not “play” sports), 2<sup>nd</sup> gen revealed they had more permissive parents but sports they were “allowed” to play were still somewhat dictated for them by their parents, and 3<sup>rd</sup> gen experience freedom with PLT engagement whereas others are still restricted by their parent's perceptions of gender and PLT activities.</li> <li>• “Doorsteps, streets and the four walls” – 1<sup>st</sup> gen experiences PLT on the doorstep and in the family home, 2<sup>nd</sup> gen on the streets, and 3<sup>rd</sup> gen are limited to indoor activities because of risk and safety concerns (i.e., the four walls).</li> <li>• “Changing educational policy” – this looked at the cultural systems of which determined whether these women were engaging in LTPA by looking at their education level. It also showed that SES, poverty, opportunities for sports engagement within communities, gender stereotypes, and living in rural areas were all factors influencing PLT participation.</li> </ul> |
| Passias et al. (2017). Who experiences leisure deficits? Mothers' marital status and leisure time.              | US     | Gender roles/norms, expectations       | To explore how the framework and societal conditions of marriage impact on a mother's            | 492; 18-54 yrs; Female                             | Quantitative                            | Passive, social, PLT, socially isolated leisure (ILT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never-married mothers have more total leisure, but less high quality leisure – these activities are considered passive and socially isolated, offering less social and health benefits.</li> <li>• Black, single mothers have the highest rates of socially isolated leisure, particular “watching TV” leisure.</li> </ul>   |

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|   |         |                                      | ability to have leisure time.   |  |   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context and type of leisure have salient differences for people with differing marital status.</li> </ul>  |
| Pöllänen & Voutilainen. (2018). Crafting well-being: Meanings and intentions of stay-at-home mothers' craft-based leisure activity. | Finland | Mental health, mental wellbeing      | To explore the meanings of, and intentions behind, craft-based leisure activities among stay-at-home mothers. | 34; 23-40 yrs; Female                                    | Phenomenog-raphical approach                                  | Craft-based, artistic leisure             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The meanings: home centredness, items as personalised keepsakes/fingerprints, mental resources, personal growth and identity, and social relationships.</li> <li>• The intentions - help escape daily worries, pursue craft as a form of enjoying their family-centric life, and to enhance self-realisation without the added stress of having to do so while negotiating their family's needs.</li> </ul>  |
| Pomfret & Varley (2019). Families at leisure outdoors: well-being through adventure.  | UK      | Family functioning, mental wellbeing | To investigate how participating in outdoor adventure holidays as a family benefits wellbeing.                | 15 families, 62 participants, child ages 5-17 yrs; Mixed | Qualitative whole family approach, semi-structured interviews | Outdoor adventure-related activities, PLT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a connection between active family lifestyles and engaging in outdoor adventure holidays.</li> <li>• Families repeatedly mentioned the health and well-being benefits (positive affect, family cohesion, happiness) gained from these leisure experiences.</li> <li>• These holidays facilitated unmediated time together for families.</li> <li>• Parents believe positive personal development is richer through these experiences for their children.</li> <li>• From parent testimonials: family bonding relies on making memories and looking back on those experiences post-trip.</li> </ul> |
| Roggman et al. (1994). Family leisure and social support: Relations with parenting stress and psychological well-being in           | US      | Parenting stress                     | To investigate how family leisure and social support effect parental functioning.                             | 103; NR, Mixed   | Quantitative, questionnaires                                  | Shared leisure (6 options), ILT           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive parental functioning were associated with increases in overall leisure time and leisure time spent with spouse for both mothers and fathers, leisure time with extended family for mothers, and leisure time with children for fathers.</li> <li>• An increase in social support, particularly in formal social support, was related to positive parenting functioning for fathers.</li> <li>• Opportunities for leisure and socialisation indicate</li> </ul>  |

Head Start  
parents.

higher levels of positive parenting and  
psychological well-being.

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| Roskam et al. (2021). Parental burnout around the globe: A 42-country study.  | 42 countries  | PB | To investigate if there are any differences in PB rates across cultures.   | 17,409 parents; NR; Mixed | Quantitative, various assessments  | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PB is linearly related to individualism, even when sociodemographic variables, parental workload, economic inequalities across countries, and the other cultural values were controlled for.</li> <li>• Parenting norms in Euro-American countries have become increasingly demanding and may be contributing to the higher prevalence of PB in individualistic cultures.</li> <li>• Further research into the mechanisms linking PB and individualism is warranted.</li> </ul>  |
| Roskam et al. (2018). A step forward in the conceptualization and measurement of parental burnout: The Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA). | 10+ countries | PB | To measure and conceptualise PB from self-reported burnt out parent testimonials<br>To validate the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) measure. | 901; 20-59 yrs; Mixed     | Quantitative, self-report measures | NA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are four dimensions of PB – exhaustion in one's parenting role, contrast with precious parental self, feelings of being fed up with one's parental role, emotional distancing from one's children.</li> <li>• The PBA has good validity – factor loadings range 0.69 - 0.88 (high), fitness with other measures 0.94/0.93, convergent validity 94.7% cases with predicted outcome.</li> <li>• Psychological traits of parents, parenting factors, family functioning account for more variance in PB than sociodemographic factors.</li> </ul> |

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| Roskam et al. (2017). Exhausted parents: Development and preliminary validation of the parental burnout inventory. | 10+ countries | PB, SEM  | To examine the construct validity of the concept of PB.   | Study1 379, study2 1723; study1 $\mu=39.92$ , study2 $\mu=39.50$ ; Mixed; | Quantitative, self-report measures   | "Lack of leisure time"                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 53.96%-55.76% of variance in both studies was explained by exhaustion, inefficiency and emotional distancing.</li> <li>• The reliability range was 0.89 - 0.94</li> <li>• There was strong convergent validity - 0.95 (CFI), 0.06 (RMSEA).</li> <li>• There were low to moderate correlates between PB and professional burnout, parental stress and depression; this suggests that PB is not just burnout, stress or depression.</li> <li>• 2 - 12% of parents suffer from burnout and voted it as an appropriate term for their collective emotions and experiences.</li> </ul> |
| Sanik. (1993). The effects of time allocation on parental stress.  | US            | Parental stress  | To find out if time allocation variables contribute to stress for mothers and fathers.                                    | 117 couples; $f\mu=27.0$ yrs, $m\mu=28.5$ yrs; Mixed                      | Exploratory, mixed methods   | Personal care   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average personal care hours: mother <math>\mu = 9.2</math> hrs / father <math>\mu = 8.59</math> hrs</li> <li>• Having older infants and girls were predictive of lower parental stress levels.</li> <li>• The allocation of time elements by both parents failed to predict stress scores.</li> </ul>   |
| Saxbe et al. (2011). Time spent in housework and leisure: Links with parents' physiological recovery from work.    | US            | Marital, gender roles, expectations within the family home | To examine whether and how husbands and wives, who are dual-earners, differ in their engagement in housework and leisure. | 30 couples; 28-51 yrs; Mixed  | Mixed methods, observations, cortisol tests, surveys, daily checklists/diaries | • 13 activity categories coded in observations, "Leisure" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For women, from the highest to lowest frequency of activity type, was housework, communication, then leisure.</li> <li>• For men, from the highest to lowest frequency of activity type, was leisure, communication, then housework.</li> <li>• Both wives and husbands who devoted more time to housework had higher cortisol levels in the evenings and weaker afternoon-to-evening recovery.</li> </ul>  |
| Séjourné et al. (2018). Maternal burnout: an exploratory study.  | France        | Maternal burnout (MB)                                      | To assess MB rates, and identify factors associated with MB/the   | 263; 20 - 49 yrs; Female  | Exploratory, mixed methods   | NA  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 20% of mothers were effected by MB.</li> <li>• The main factors associated with MB were having a child perceived as difficult, a history of post-natal depression, anxiety, satisfaction of balance between professional and personal lives, and parental stress.</li> </ul>  |



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|--|----------|---|---|---|---|--------------------|---|
|  |          |   | state of exhaustion.  |   |   |                    |   |
| Soubhi et al. (2004). Family process and parent's leisure time physical activity.                                  | Canada   | SEM, systems theory, the social environment                     | To examine how a system of LTPA specific variables facilitate or hinder the relationship between parent leisure and the family environment. | 1136; $f\mu=38.83$ yrs, $m\mu=41.63$ yrs; Mixed   | Quantitative, various questionnaires      | • LTPA, PLT        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social conditions in which families live (e.g., family rules, routines, support, levels of activity) facilitate and/or hinder parent's LTPA; these social conditions make up the family environment system.</li> <li>• The family environment is personalised and there is likely to be differing mechanisms across families (e.g., living location (i.e., urban, rural), interpersonal communication, values and beliefs, cultural differences etc.) which impact the likelihood of increased PLT for any one individual within that family system.</li> </ul>  |
| Swinton et al. (2008). Nonresident Fathers' Family Leisure Patterns during Parenting Time with Their Children.     | US       | Social, gender norms and constructs                             | To investigate the facilitators to, and constraints on, non-resident fathers' parenting time and leisure with their child(ren).             | 129; 23-64 yrs; Male  | Quantitative, questionnaires              | Father-child, FLT  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constraints that were salient for fathers were interpersonal constraints (e.g., divorce and conflict) and structural constraints (e.g., low income, ethnicity, and time).</li> <li>• Leisure constraints significantly predicted non-resident fathers' satisfaction with their involvement in family leisure time and their family leisure patterns; leisure facilitators did not.</li> </ul>  |
| Torres et al. (2014). Domains of father involvement, social competence and problem behavior in preschool children. | Portugal | Paternal parenting, attachment, problem behaviours in childhood | To investigate the mechanisms of father involvement and its associations with preschooler's social and behavioural outcomes.                | 295 children, 343 fathers, 428 mothers; Child age 36-71 months, father age 24-70 yrs, mother age 22-47 yrs; Mixed | Quantitative, parent, teacher self-report | "Leisure outdoors" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fathers were involved in play, teaching/discipline, and outdoor leisure as much as mothers.</li> <li>• Fathers were less involved in direct and indirect care compared to mothers.</li> <li>• Father involvement was higher if the mother was employed or the father was unemployed.</li> <li>• Father involvement was significantly higher in families with higher levels of parental education.</li> <li>• Father involvement was negatively correlated with parental stress.</li> <li>• Fathers were more involved when the activity was outdoor leisure. This interaction was predictive of</li> </ul> |

|   |            |   |   |                       |   |   |
|---|------------|---|---|-----------------------|---|---|
|   |            |   |   |                       |   | lower levels of problem behaviours and higher child social competence, especially for boys.   |
| Trussell (2017). Parents' Leisure, LGB Young People and "When We Were Coming Out".        | Canada, US | Constructivism, LGBTQIA+ sexual identity              | To examine parental leisure experiences in relation to their child's coming out process – social and relational aspects of their leisure were assessed. | 13; NR; Mixed         | Qualitative, retrospective, in-depth interviews                             | <p>"Leisure experiences", FLT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure contexts can be altered (with prolonged parental effort) in relation to their child's coming out experience and their developing sexual identity.</li> <li>• Parents discussed removing themselves and their family life away from hetero-typical activities and homophobic ideals/people/groups they once were embedded within.</li> <li>• Parents noted a sense of loss and grief for the community they were once a part of – the traditions, gatherings, people, ideals, rules – these were salient when trying to navigate new experiences and forward (future) thinking and planning of special events, holidays, and other family activities.</li> </ul>                              |
| Valtchanov et al. (2016). 'A Whole New World': Mothers' Technologically Mediated Leisure. | Canada     | Motherhood ideologies, cyber-feminism, constructivism | To explore mothers' experiences of online connections and technologically mediated leisure through their use of IT media.                               | 22; 26-40 yrs; Female | Constructivist grounded theory approach, interviews, coding and comparisons | <p>Media, technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The limiting ideologies of motherhood restrict and reinforce mothers in the social world, and the thinking that there needs to be separation for them of their public and private spheres; mothers' experiences are seen as less visible and less socially relevant, and should be confined to private spheres because of the limiting ideologies (cultural and societal expectations/norms) placed upon them.</li> <li>• The public and private spheres became blurred through technologically mediated leisure, and the ideologies were both reinforced and resisted.</li> <li>• Media/technology leisure could be used to combat mother's isolation and anxiety-inducing cultural restrictions.</li> </ul> |

|   |             |   |  |                        |   |     |  |
|---|-------------|---|--|------------------------|---|-----|--|
| Windlin & Kuntsche (2012).<br>Differences in the impact of the frequency and enjoyment of joint family activities on adolescent substance use and violence. | Switzerland | Adolescent problem behaviours, family functioning | To investigate how the frequency and enjoyment of FLT effects the likelihood of adolescent substance use and violence. | 3751; 13-16 yrs; Mixed | Quantitative data exploration, adolescent self-report | FLT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The perceived enjoyment from FLT engagement was predictive of lower adolescent drug use and violent behaviours, compared to FLT frequency.</li> <li>• FLT may diminish problem behaviours amongst adolescents overall due to the adolescents having less time for engagement in problem behaviours, and increased chances to learn and model prosociality (e.g., trust, respect, self-confidence).</li> </ul> |
|---|-------------|---|--|------------------------|---|-----|--|

*Note:* Articles are listed in alphabetical order; PB = Parental Burnout; Tx(s) = Treatment(s); NA = leisure type not assessed; FLT = family leisure time; yrs = years; ILT = independent leisure time; PLT = physical leisure time; SES = socioeconomic status; NR = leisure types not reported; ND = leisure types not differentiated; LTPA – leisure time physical activity; N/A = not applicable.

## Appendix B

### The THRIVE Project's Information and Consent Sheets for Parents/Primary Caregivers

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ERHEC Ref: 2020/04/ERHEC

1 March 2021



#### Children's Social Behaviour and Teacher and Parent Health and Wellness Information Sheet for Parents/Primary Caregivers

You are invited to participate in a study exploring children's (2- to 5-years old) social and emotional behaviours and how these may influence teachers' and parents' (or primary caregivers') health and wellness over a school year. The purpose of the study is to 1) to explore the prevalence and nature of children's use of social and non-social behaviours, as reported by teachers and parents/caregiver; 2) to explore the prevalence and nature of teachers' and parents' health and wellness, through self-reports; and 3) to examine children's perceptions of friendship, kindness, and princesses and superheroes that are portrayed in common television series and movies. Children will also be invited to play some simple activities on an iPad to assess their attention and memory.

This study is being conducted by Dr Cara Swit (principal investigator), Senior Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences, Dr Porsha London, Researcher at Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, Dr Seth Harty, Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychology, Speech and Hearing, Dr Valerie Sotardi, Senior Lecturer in School of Educational Studies and Leadership, University of Canterbury, Dr Anne McMaugh, Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, Macquarie University.

You have been approached to take part in this study because KidsFirst Professional Leaders are interested in gathering data on ways in which we can improve the social and emotional development of young children and the health and wellness of teachers and parents. We will be collecting data from teachers, parents, and children over several years, until your child goes to school.

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete the following questionnaires (independently or as an interview with one of the researchers or research assistants) twice per year (Time 1: March/April; Time 2: October/December):

#### *Demographic Survey*

You will be asked questions about your age, gender, ethnicity, family structure, and the highest level of education you have obtained. You will also be asked to report any past exposure to natural disasters. If the child participating in this study has siblings, you will be asked to list their age and gender. You will be asked this information so that we can identify as many potential factors that might impact on your health and wellbeing.

#### *Children's Social and Emotional Behaviours*

You will be asked questions about the social and emotional behaviour of your child participating in the study. This questionnaire asks you to identify how often your child engages in social and non-social behaviours and their temperament.

### *Parent-Child and Parent-Teacher Relationships*

You will be asked about your relationship and daily interactions with your child and their teachers in the early childhood setting.

### *Parenting Practices and Health and Wellness*

You will be asked about your everyday parenting practices, technology use, parenting stress, and your general happiness.

Completion of these questionnaires is expected to take approximately 60 minutes and they will be completed in a quiet room at the Kindergarten.

We are also interested in understanding more about what happens in your daily life and how you feel. So, once a day for one week in June and August we would like you to answer questions about the activities you completed during the day and how they made you feel. The research team will provide you details with how to download the app and complete the questions.

### **What will be expected of your child and their teachers involved in the study?**

Teachers will complete the same questionnaires as parents, however, the questions will be adapted for teachers and the early childhood education social context.

### *Child Interviews*

Your child will participate in short, interactive interviews that explore their friendships, understanding of kindness, and their favourite princesses and superheroes. The friendship interview will involve your child and other children participating in this study to identify children they like to play with and don't like to play with. This information will help the researchers understand the reciprocal friendships that your child has with other children. I will also use Duplo toy figurines (i.e., Lego), pictures, and short animations to tell children three scenarios about different social situations. The children will then be asked some questions about what they think about the behaviour and how they'd respond to the situation. An example of a scenario may be: a child is shown two Duplo children and told that the girl snatched the ball from the other girl. The child is then asked about whether it was okay to snatch and what might happen next. Children will also be invited to play some simple activities on an iPad to assess their attention and memory. It is expected that these activities will take approximately 30 minutes to complete with each child. These activities are designed to be fun and interactive, however, children will be given breaks or from the activities whenever they wish.

The interviews with the children will take place at a time when other children, teachers and parents are outside. This will ensure that the participating child's responses aren't influenced by the presence of others and that their responses are confidential.

With your permission and permission from the children and their teachers, the child interviews will be video and audio recorded. These recordings will only be used to analyse the information collected. If you, the child's teacher or the children do not wish to be recorded, they do not have to. During each of the activities, the researcher will also take notes to ensure they have recorded the child's responses accurately.

### **What will happen if your child doesn't want to do the activities or appears upset?**

I will do all I can to ensure that this is a fun experience for your child. If you consent to your child participating, I will talk to them about the study and the type of activities I would like them to do. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: your child is not obliged to participate even if you decide to participate. If your child chooses not to participate in this study, or requests to withdraw from the tasks, they will be free to return to their regular activities without having to give a reason and without consequence.

### **What do you need to do?**

It would be great for you to talk to your child about the research study. If you are happy for you and your child to participate please complete the consent form below. The questionnaires are included in this research pack. It would be very helpful if you could complete these and return these with the consent form. Please use the enclosed envelope to post them back to me or drop them in the locked box kept at the centre. Centre staff will not have access to your consent form and completed questionnaires. If you would prefer to complete the questionnaires face to face with a researcher (this could be via Skype or telephone or in person), we would be more than happy to do this with you. Please contact Cara Swit (see contact details below) to arrange a time that is most suitable for you to participate in completing the questionnaires. You are more than welcome to bring a support person with you.

### **What will you receive for your participation?**

Your participation is valuable to us, so we will offer you a \$30 grocery voucher for each time point you complete and return your questionnaires (a total of \$60 if you complete the questionnaires two times throughout the year) as a small koha of our appreciation.

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures, there are risks of emotional or psychological distress as you recall previous exposure to natural disasters. Some of the questionnaire items may also bring up memories of your own negative social interactions or victimization. At any time you experience discomfort or distress in disclosing this information, you are free to take a break and come back to the questionnaires at a later time, withdraw your participation or choose not to complete these questions. You are also welcome to contact the principal investigator, Cara Swit, to discuss your responses to these questions. There are confidential and anonymous external support and resources that can be offered to you. Any responses that indicate illegal activity where the life or health of any person may be at risk are required to be reported to the appropriate authority (e.g., Oranga Tamariki). In these cases, anonymity will be breached. It is also important for you to know that everyone in the Centre will know who is participating in the study.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your participation or your child's participation at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once the analysis of raw data starts on 1 April 2021, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

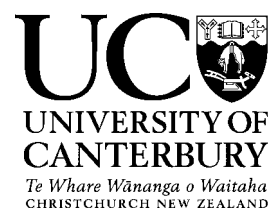
The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. The results of this project will be presented in the form of journal articles and/or at conferences. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. To ensure confidentiality, a participant code will be allocated to each participant. Only I, the research team (listed above), and University of Canterbury Master's Research students will have access to the data. All data will be transferred and securely stored on a password-protected external hard drive and will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office for a period of ten years.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of the results of the project. A copy of your individual results and your child's results will be made available to you, at your request.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and the questionnaires provided in this research pack, and place these in the envelope provided and deposit your responses safely in the locked box at the centre.

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## Children's Social Behaviour and Teacher and Parent Health and Wellness

### Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what is required of me and my child if I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and I or my child may withdraw at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- I understand that even though I have provided consent for my child to participate in this study, my child will be required to provide assent before the child interviews are conducted.
- I understand that any information or opinions I or my child provide will be kept confidential to the principal researcher, the research team, and a University of Canterbury Master's student and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their organization.
- I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password-protected electronic form and will be destroyed after ten years.
- I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- I understand the risks for my child in taking part and how they will be managed.
- I agree to the child interviews being video and audio recorded in a space within the early childhood setting.
- I understand that my child's permission will be sought for their interview to be video and audio recorded.
- I understand that I can contact the researcher Cara Swit, cara.swit@canterbury.ac.nz for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz))
- I would like a summary of the results of the project.
- I would like a copy of my individual results.
- I would like a copy of my child's results.
- By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return your consent form and completed the research pack to Cara Swit using the enclosed envelope. Your research pack can be placed in the locked box at the centre.*

## Appendix C

### Table of Constructs Assessed in the THRIVE Project

**Table C**

*Constructs Assessed in Consecutive Order in the THRIVE Project*

| Construct  | Author(s)   | Assessment Category          |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| Caregiver-Parent Partnership Scale   | Owen, Ware, & Barefoot (2000)   | Parent-Teacher Relationships |
| Authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting practices   | Robinson, Mandleco, B., Olsen, & Hart (1995)  | Parenting Practices          |
| Parental psychological control dimensions: Connections with Russian preschoolers' physical and relational aggression | Nelson, Yang, Coyne, Olsen, & Hart (2013)   | Parenting Practices          |
| Technology Device Interference Scale (adapted)   | McDaniel & Radesky (2018)   | Technoference                |
| Technology and Distraction (unpublished measure from Dr. McDaniel's 2016 Daily Family Life Project)                  | McDaniel, Everest, White (2018)   | Technology (Distraction)     |
| Frequency of Media Use   | Rideout, Foehr, Roberts (2010)  | Media Use (Frequency)        |
| Reasons for Media Use  | The Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure (CAFE) Consortium, Barr et al. (2020) | Media Use (Reason)           |



|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Parent Attitudes Towards Media Use               | The Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure (CAFE) Consortium, Barr et al. (2020)   | Media Use (Parental Attitudes)                     |
| Media Monitoring Plan                            | The Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure (CAFE) Consortium, Barr et al. (2020)   | Media Use (Monitoring)                             |
| Problematic Media Use                            | The Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure (CAFE) Consortium, Barr et al. (2020); Domoff, Harrison, Geranhardt, Gentile, Lemeng, & Miller (2019) | Problematic Media Use (Adult) and (Child) versions |
| Social Provisions Scale                          | Orpana, Lang, & Yurkowski (2019)  | Social Support Scale                               |
| Being a Mother Scale (BaM-13)                    | Matthey (2011)  | Experiences being a Parent                         |
| Parental Burnout Assessment                      | Roskam, Brianda, & Mikolajczak (2018)   | Parental Burnout                                   |
| <b>Me Time Protocol</b>                          | <b>Created for the purpose of this study</b>  | <b>Parent Experiences of Me Time</b>               |
| The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index               | Buysse, Reynolds, Monk, Berman, & Kupfer (1989)   | Adult Sleep Quality                                |
| The Children's Sleep Habits Questionnaire (CSHQ) | Owens, Spirito, & McGuinn (2000)  | Child Sleep Quality                                |
| Student–Teacher Relationship Scale–Short Form    | Pianta (2001)   | Relationships with the Child                       |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| The National Institute of Health (NIH)<br>Toolbox Emotion Battery General Life<br>Satisfaction Parent Report Ages 3-12 | NIH Blueprint for Neuroscience Research<br>(NIH Blueprint) (2013) | Child's general life satisfaction, sadness,<br>positive affect, empathic behaviour, peer<br>rejection, positive peer interactions, social<br>withdrawal, anger, emotion regulation |
| The Revised Preschool Anxiety Scale  | Edwards, Rapee, Kennedy, & Spence (2010)                          | Anxiety (Child)  |
| Sibling Relationships in Early Childhood   | Volling, & Elins (1998)   | Sibling Relationships in Early Childhood   |

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*Note.* Parents were asked about their demographic information prior to commencing answering the constructs, the Me Time Protocol is bolded to show its position within the THRIVE interview, interviews were approximately 1.5 hours in length.

## Appendix D

### Table of List of the Initial Subthemes and Associated Code(s) for the Qualitative Characteristics

**Table D**

*Thematic Analysis Phase Three - Searching for Themes*

| Subthemes for the Qualitative Characteristics of Me Time                | Associated Code(s)   | Parent Excerpt Examples  |
|---|--|--|
| Engaging in purposeful self-care  | A desire to engage in an enjoyed activity<br>Autonomy over what activities they engage in and when<br>Me time is inherently important<br>Physically resting<br>Putting the self first<br>Taking me time without guilt<br>Time to self-regulate | "...being able to do what I want to do."<br><br>"...lying down doing nothing..." |
| Using me time to replenish emotional, physical, and spiritual resources | Positive affect<br><br>Physically resting<br>Replenishing resources<br>Time to self-regulate   | "I enjoy it [me time], I come out energised..."                                  |
| Me time as a reward rather than a right                                 | Gain a reward/me time is something that is earned<br><br>Time as a commodity   |  |
| Me time as a solitary act   | Being alone  | " Alone time..."   |
| Me time as a way to reduce parenting and life demands                   | Me time can only happen when other things are settled/done   |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   | Reduction of demands                               |  |
| Me time as a way to escape the parenting role | Escapism   |  |
|   | Health risk behaviours                             |  |
| Me time as a part of parenting                | Me time is an aspect of parenting                  | "Sometimes it is sitting with the kids playing..."             |
|   | Me time is not as important as childcare/parenting |  |
| Parenting and life demands are forefront      | Little or no perceived time to engage in me time   |  |
|   | Me time is of little importance in general         |  |
|   | Me time is not as important as childcare/parenting | "...You would not have children if you just wanted me time..." |
| The concept of me time may be unclear         | Mismatch of question and answer                    |  |
|   | Unsure what me time is                             |  |
|   | Vague explanation                                  | "Relaxing."  |

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*Note:* Codes are listed in alphabetical order, in phase three, 26 out of the 35 initial codes were attributed to each subtheme, 9 initial codes were removed because they overlapped with other codes, some codes related to multiple subthemes in this phase.

## Appendix E

### Table of List of the Subthemes and Refined Codes for Phase Four for the Qualitative Characteristics

**Table E**

*Thematic Analysis Phase Four - Reviewing Themes*

| Subthemes for the Meanings of Me Time                                   | Refined Code(s)   |
|---|---|
| Engaging in purposeful self-care  | A desire to engage in an enjoyed activity<br>Autonomy over what activities they engage in and when<br>Me time is inherently important<br>Putting the self first<br>Taking me time without guilt |
| Using me time to replenish emotional, physical, and spiritual resources | Positive affect<br>Physically resting<br>Replenishing resources<br>Time to self-regulate  |
| Me time as a reward rather than a right                                 | Gain a reward/me time is something that is earned<br>Time as a commodity  |
| Me time as a solitary act   | Being alone   |
| Me time as a way to reduce parenting and life demands                   | Me time can only happen when other things are settled/done<br>Reduction of demands  |
| Me time as a way to escape the parenting role                           | Escapism<br>Health risk behaviours  |
| Me time as a part of parenting  | Me time is an aspect of parenting   |
| Parenting and life demands are forefront                                | Little or no perceived time to engage in me time<br>Me time is of little importance in general  |

The concept of me time may be unclear

Me time is not as important as childcare/parenting

Mismatch of question and answer

Unsure what me time is

Vague explanation

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*Note:* Codes are listed in alphabetical order, in phase four, each code was attributed to only one subtheme through a 'goodness of fit' approach when reviewing parent excerpts again to ensure each code completely represented only one subtheme.