The Mother-Writer:
Navigating Motherhood through Creative Work

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Transfiguration

I dreamt myself into a mother,

but when I became her, I had to

dream her back into a woman

back into a woman

back into a woman

again.

By Kate Baer (2020)

Kate Baer, poet and mother to four children, is featured in her children's bedroom in the photo on the title page. The image was posted on the author's Instagram page and is being used for this thesis with permission by the author.

Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Signature

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13461.

Synopsis

The relationship between motherhood and creative work has received increased scholarly attention in recent years. However, in contrast to most existing research that examines the negative impact motherhood has on creative work, there is an emerging, less studied trend of middle-class women engaging in creative work when they become mothers – most often from home and as micro-entrepreneurs/self-employers. So far, it remains unclear how this group of creatives experiences and navigates creativity and motherhood, what the appeal of creative work is for mothers and what function it serves in their lives. To examine these issues, this thesis brings together two currently disconnected literatures, those of cultural work and maternal studies. Conceptual frameworks such as passionate work and intensive mothering provide insights into the expectations that middle-class women face with respect to (creative) work and motherhood, however, these frameworks alone are insufficient for explaining the emergence of the 'mother-creative phenomenon'.

This thesis draws on a qualitative study of the lived experiences of thirteen writers and mothers based in Australia almost all of whom took up their creative practice after they had children, indicating that for some women motherhood can actually be a pathway into creative work. Challenging the assumption that motherhood and creative work are incompatible, the thesis argues that the uptake of creative work can be an opportunistic response to changed circumstances rather than an expression of passion often central to explanations of gender and creativity. Furthermore, the engagement in creative work by mothers is not primarily motivated by aspirations of future success but provides tangible benefits in their everyday navigation of motherhood. Writing also served as a substitute for a professional identity and thus enabled a continuation of the pre-maternal self. By prioritising their own needs and self-actualisation,

mother-writers challenge dominant intensive mothering ideals, whilst their creative practice simultaneously enables them to engage in those demanding childrearing practices.

The overall argument of this thesis is that creative work is particularly appealing to some women when they become mothers because it enables them to navigate both contemporary mothering and work expectations. While engaging in meaningful, fulfilling work with social legitimacy they are simultaneously able to adhere to dominant norms of mothering and invest in their own self-actualisation. By examining the negotiation work that study participants performed in relation to their transition to motherhood, their everyday lives and their identity, this thesis also highlights the importance of considering creative work within the particular life context of practitioners. My insights into the lived experiences of a less 'fashionable' creative cohort – mother-writers – foreground the different functions that creative work fulfils, which can only be understood in relationship to their context as mothers as well as the discourses and expectations that they have to navigate.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my mother, who to this day is my rock and unconditional supporter. To my sisters, Sarah and Tilla, and my father: I love you. All my dear friends, both near and far, I am always receiving love and support from you. Theresa, Meli, Ege, Xari, Kristina, Anja, Natalia, Christina, Dominica, Lisa and Bea. I love you all and admire each and every one of you!

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Last – but in no way least – to my participants who are at the heart of this thesis. Thank you for sharing your time and experiences so generously and openly with me. Your stories have accompanied me over such a long period of time that each of you feel very close to me. I wish all of you the very best on your journey of figuring out how to balance motherhood and self-actualisation.

Table of Contents

The photograph on the title page shows Kate Baer, an American poet, writer and mother of four sitting in her children's bedroom with her laptop placed on a child's desk. Her posture and facial expression reflect exhaustion (the photo was taken during a COVID lockdown). However, to me it represents that, despite her exhaustion, she is claiming her place as a writer within her children's world. I have chosen this image as it encapsulates the mother-writer phenomenon. Mother-writers are women who, amongst the often messy and strenuous daily life of motherhood, create spaces for themselves and their writing. They are women who want to be both a mother as well as a person in their own right. Kate Baer's life[1] is representative of not an uncommon middle-class biography – she obtained a university degree, got married, and was working in a professional job from which she was let go when seven months pregnant. Confronted with high childcare costs, she, as the secondary earner, stayed home with her children and consequently moved from the outside world of an independent female adult life to the inside world of the home and family. Feeling completely absorbed by the intensity of childrearing, Kate longed for something outside of motherhood, primarily mental stimulation, which is when she started to write. Writing was not an arbitrary or unlikely choice, given that she studied English at university[2] and always had an interest in literature. She began by writing emails to friends about motherhood, which she then published on a blog, the popularity of which secured her a book contract. While initially planning to write a novel, she ended up writing short poetry that was based on her experiences of motherhood, marriage and family life (Baer 2020). Her work resonated with many readers – women in particular – and quickly made it onto the *New York Times* bestseller list. While Kate's is a unique story of success that reads like a script for a movie, it is emblematic of a wider trend: middle-class women who engage in creative work from home whilst raising children. For many, motherhood can actually provide a pathway into creative work.

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[1] Information about Kate Baer has been retrieved from two newspaper articles about her. One is an interview with the author (Moshakis 2021) and the other one is a profile piece (Bennet 2021).
[2] Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Negotiating Motherhood and Creative Work at Home

Exploring the experiences of women who engage in creative work from home whilst mothering, this thesis argues that creative work can enable them to effectively negotiate expectations in relation to both contemporary mothering and work. It allows women with caring responsibilities to engage in meaningful, fulfilling work with high social status and, simultaneously, to adhere to cultural norms of mothering. It also fosters their own project of self-actualisation. Offering both flexibility and fulfilment, for most of the participants in my study, motherhood was also an entry point into creative work. Having children provided them with the socially licensed time and status to engage in creative work. By showing that creative work can be experienced as a counterbalance to the intensity and tedium of mothering, these findings challenge the assumption that motherhood and creative work are incompatible.

For most study participants, motherhood was a pathway into creative work and an opportunistic response to changed circumstances – mainly work/care tensions. The appeal of creative work was related to the fact that (1) it presents the opportunity and need to find work that is more aligned with family-life, (2) it is an antidote to maternal and domestic labour and makes it possible for women to engage in activities that increase wellbeing, and (3) it provides a space for self-actualisation and fulfilment, allowing women to be 'more than mothers'. This study thus questions explanatory frameworks in the creative work literature such as 'passionate work' (McRobbie 2016) and 'aspirational labour' (Duffy 2016), because rather than finding the engagement into creative work was motivated by passion or hope for future success,

participants emphasised tangible everyday benefits. For the women in my study, creative work was associated with enhancing wellbeing, maintaining the status of a productive worker and fostering a professional identity/self-actualisation alongside maternal responsibilities. Those findings led me to conclude that participants related to their creative work as *vital work* that was integral to their ability to negotiate motherhood. Furthermore, they emphasised that it was not work *per se* that was desired, but creative work in particular – an activity that provided satisfaction and potential for self-actualisation.

The way the participants primarily related to their creative work as vital and motherhood as strenuous, made me question the utility of using intensive mothering (Hays 1996) as an explanatory framework mainly applied in this area of research so far. I found that it fails to explain the drive of some mothers to engage in creative work beyond the fact that it allows them to work flexibly from home and around their children's needs. In contrast, my study shows that a central motivation for participants to engage in creative work whilst caring for their children at home was their desire for self-actualisation and being 'more than a mother'. They created care-free spaces and times that allowed them to work creatively, escape the demands of mothering and domestic labour as well as cultivate their selves outside of motherhood. I interpret my participants' serious engagement in creative activities as a repair attempt to an identity disruption caused by work/care tensions, offering a substitute for the lost professional identity that made up an integral part of their pre-mother selves.

While my participants mobilised the intensive mothering discourse and spoke of prioritising their family commitments over their career, they did so alongside, and not to the detriment of, their own self-actualisation. Although challenging the dominance of intensive mothering among contemporary tertiary educated, middle-class mothers, rather than dismissing it as an

explanatory framework, my data indicates that women's engagement in creative work at home can simultaneously be contesting and enabling – and thus reproducing – intensive mothering. Because creative work provided them with fulfilment, a sense of wellbeing and time off from everyday mothering, participants experienced an enhanced desire, as well as capacity, to engage more intensively with their children. Consequently, my research suggests that certain kinds of creative work can decrease the competing expectations that women experience between work and care; though rather than finding that creative work and motherhood are more compatible when both performed at home, they are merely more manageable as a result of women's temporal and spatial flexibility.

My own interest in the topic of creative work and motherhood results from my previous Master of Philosophy research where I investigated the appeal of diverse neighbourhoods and creative cities to urban residents, as well as from my own experience of becoming a mother during this time. The literature that I consulted often left me wondering how families, and women with children in particular, fitted into the image of the 'creative class' (Florida 2002) that is widely celebrated in public and policy discourses. The focus here is routinely on young, mobile and independent creatives who can afford high rents in gentrified urban areas. Invisible in this discourse are creatives who do not fit this ideal type and have been identified as 'unfashionable cultural workers' by cultural sociologist Deborah Stevenson (2020). I thus became interested in exploring the relationship between motherhood and creative work and the experiences of a less 'fashionable' and visible cohort of creatives.

An initial search on this topic revealed a broad public discussion of the impact of motherhood on women's creative careers. There are numerous articles, blog posts and documentaries that either support or challenge the compatibility of having children and the ability to produce

creative work (see, for instance, Sokolowski & Trumbull-LaValle 2018; Judah 2020; Campbell 2021). Often invoked in this discourse is the 'pram in the hall' metaphor which is based on a quote from writer Cyril Connolly (1938, 116) who, as a father of seven children, claimed almost a century ago that "there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall". Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic once declared in an interview that having children would have been "a disaster for her work" and that motherhood is the main reason why female artists are less successful than male artists (Neuendorf 2016). In addition to the question of whether to have children, also publicly discussed are the ideal number of children and their impact on a creative career. Writer Lauren Sandler (2013), for instance, claimed that the "secret to being both a successful writer and mother" is to only have one child, referring to established writers such as Joan Didion, Susan Sontag and Margaret Atwood to support her argument. This claim sparked vehement disagreement from writers with more than one child, such as Zadie Smith, Jane Smiley and Aimee Phan, who all argued that rather than the number of children being the issue, it is the availability of a public and private support network (or the lack thereof) that impact the time and energy women are able to put into their creative work.

The relationship between motherhood and creative work has also received increased scholarly attention in recent years, primarily within creative and cultural industries studies (Wreyford 2013, 2018; Gill 2014; O'Brien 2014; Summers & Clarke 2015; Dent 2017, 2020; Verhoeven et al. 2018; Pedersen & Haynes 2019; Percival 2020; Liddy & O'Brien 2021a; 2021b; 2021c). This body of literature is dominated by explorations of issues relating to gender inequality and the additional disadvantage that mothers experience in the creative sector. Research shows that women in the creative industries earn less, are dramatically underrepresented in key creative roles, more likely to lose their jobs in times of crisis and are disadvantaged by informal and homophilic hiring practices, essentially reproducing an industry that is predominately male,

white and middle-class (Banks & Milestone 2011; Gill 2014; Wing-Fai, Gill & Randle 2015; Conor et al. 2015). An additional layer of disadvantage affects women with caring responsibilities due to the difficulties they face accommodating unpredictable and long working hours and finding affordable, flexible and accessible childcare (Wreyford 2013, 2015; Wells 2016; Verhoeven et al. 2018). A UK study has found that childbearing is the main factor leading to gender imbalance in the cultural and creative industries and explains the low representation of women over 35 years of age in the sector (Skillset 2010). This research is primarily concerned with women working in organisations (large and small) and outlining the difficulties that they face in relation to creative work and motherhood in this context. However, little research has been done on women engaging in creative work at home; raising the question of how motherhood affects their ability to pursue a creative career. The fact that women engage in creative work from home whilst they mother is not new; however, the scale and extent at which this phenomenon is occurring are growing (Luckman 2015b; Russum 2019). To date, very few studies have explored the trend of 'mother-creatives'. Cultural studies scholar Susan Luckman (2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2018) was the first to identify that mothers – primarily middle-class, tertiary educated women – are particularly likely to start a creative craft business because it allows them to combine care and paid work at home. A few other studies have since explored the enabling relationship between motherhood and home-based creative work, with a primary focus on crafting (Pöllänen & Voutilainen 2018; Russum 2019; Ikonen 2020). These studies ascribe the 'mother-creative phenomenon' to low barriers of entry into the crafting economy, the fact that this creative work can be performed at home as well as its flexibility that allows middle-class women to navigate work whilst engaging in the culturally dominant model of mothering – intensive motherhood (Hays 1996).

1.2 Research Questions, Scope and Significance

The engagement with this literature generated further queries about motherhood and creative, home-based work from a sociological perspective because what remained unclear was how this group of creatives experiences and negotiates creativity and motherhood at home. This concern became the main question I set out to explore in this thesis. Studying this subject is important, because it provides insights into how women navigate blurred boundaries between home, mothering and work, and the particular role that creative practice plays in this context. Working from home in a self-employed capacity whilst mothering – creatively as well as non-creatively – is a growing trend among middle-class women with childcare responsibilities (Baxter 2013; Foley 2015). If we do not understand how they navigate those dual roles, what implications it has and what challenges and benefits this home-based work/care regime contains, this group of women – often in a financially vulnerable position – cannot be appropriately considered within cultural policy and planning efforts. Stevenson (2020, 78) argues that rather than producing generic cultural strategies targeted at young, male, mobile creatives, it is critical for governing bodies to tailor their cultural plans to the actual demographic profiles of the cultural workforce and to understand "their aspirations and the conditions of their practice". From my own experience of negotiating research and early motherhood at home, I know that this can often be a messy, unpredictable and ambivalent process. This complexity and tension was what I did not read about in the literature, but what I expected would impact the everyday lived experiences of this cohort of creatives. I was thus interested in exploring what the appeal of creative work is for mother-creatives and what role it plays in their lives. Women with childcare responsibilities engage in creative work under specific and unique circumstances that differ significantly from those experienced by unencumbered creatives. There is, thus, a lack of knowledge about a growing cohort of creatives which, consequently, is invisible from much of research and policy in times where neoliberal governments actively encourage female

entreneurism to reduce un- and underemployment (see, for example, Commonwealth of Australia 2017). This thesis addresses this gap by studying the lived experiences of mother-creatives in navigating creative work and motherhood at home.

Considering motherhood, work and creativity as social constructs and discourses with disciplinary power (Hall 1996), I wanted to explore how they shape the lives of creative women when they have children. There is a social imperative for women to be both a 'good' mother and worker – as an external expectation as well as an internalised desire. The 'good' mother today is an intensive mother, who invests an unprecedented amount of time, energy and money into childrearing (Craig et al. 2014; Huisman & Joy 2014; Dotti Sani & Treas 2016). Simultaneously, female labour market participation has been normalised – and for many it is also an economic imperative – including for women with caring responsibilities (Luckman 2015b; Wolfinger 2020). Work and motherhood (Bailey 2001) have thus both been found to be a central "organising or regulative principle" (Grey 1994, 481) of the 'project of the self' (Giddens 1991). Understanding how women navigate those two aspects – mothering and creative work – within their project of the self is important, because it highlights how those discourses on the structural level manifest in the individual. I was particularly interested in finding out whether the expectations associated with contemporary, intensive mothering shaped the way in which participants undertake creative work, and if it did, in what way. The overall aim of this thesis thus is to explore the complexities and distinctiveness that characterises contemporary mother's negotiations and experiences of creative work at home. I found that this negotiation took place in participant's lives in three key contexts – in relation to transition to motherhood, their everyday lives, and their identity – which my thesis is organised to explore.

To narrow the scope of my thesis and acknowledging the diversity and variety of creative work, I chose to focus on one creative practice – writing. This decision was informed by Rachel Power's (2015) book *Motherhood and Creativity: The Divided Heart*, which provided me with insights into a variety of experiences of Australian female creatives, such as writers, actors, musicians and filmmakers. The fact that most writers in Power's book were navigating their creative practice at home made this a suitable cohort for my thesis given my research question. I thus decided to focus my research on female writers with children and, in particular, on those with young, under-school aged children – a phase I refer to as early motherhood[3] – because once children attend school, childcaring and creative work are easier to navigate (Luckman 2015b). The participant group that my research is based on was comprised of 13 women living in Australia[4] who self-identified as writers and were caring for at least one child under the age of six who was not yet attending school. All participants (except for one) were interviewed on two separate occasions over a period of three to six months in 2019-2020 and interview transcripts were analysed following the principles of Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014). While most of the data collection coincided with different degrees of COVID-19 restrictions, my research does not specifically focus on the pandemic and its unequal impact on women with caring responsibilities (Wood et al. 2021). However, the relevance of my study has certainly increased because of this global crisis as it provides insights into how women navigate work and care in the home space and the issues that arise from the lack of spatial separation.

To provide some context for the cohort of creatives at the centre of my study, looking at the writer population in Australia is useful. A most detailed profile of Australian artist, including

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[3]A term in the scholarly literature that is also often used in reference to adolescent mothers.
[4] Participants were recruited from NSW and Victoria and the majority lived in Sydney and Melbourne at the time of the interviews.

writers, has been created by cultural economists David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya in their study *Making Art Work* (2017). The authors estimate that Australia's population of "practicing professional artists" consists of around 48,000 people (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017, 24). In total, they identified 120 individual artistic practices which they grouped into the following eight principal artistic occupations (PAO): musicians and singers (15,400), visual artists (8,600), writers (7,900), actors and directors (7,900), craft practitioners (3,000), dancers and choreographers (2,300), composers, songwriters and arrangers (1,700) and community cultural development artists (1,200). For their study, 823 artists across those eight PAO – 160 of them writers – participated in computer assisted telephone interviews. The most represented types of writer were: novelist (53), short-story writer (52), non-fiction writer (50), children's/young adult writer (36), poets (18), writer (new/digital media) (17) and screenwriter (14) – a similar distribution to my participant cohort. The demographic make-up of the Australian writer population shows that writing is a female dominated profession with two-thirds of writers being women. The female proportion of writers has grown significantly over the past thirty years – from 45% in 1988 to 65% in 2016 – indicating a feminisation of this creative field[5]. However, women writers earn significantly less than their male counterparts and are often reliant on other forms of financial support (including from non-creative jobs or from their partners) (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017). With regards to education levels, writers are the highest educated artist group in Australia, positioning writing as a middle-class practice – assuming that education is a strong indicator of class status (Reeves et al. 2018)[6]. Writers are also the group with the highest rate of freelancers and self-employment, which highlights the precarious nature of a writing career. The precarity and the gender issues permeating the writing and publishing sector

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[5] The feminisation of an occupation is generally associated with a social and economic devaluation of a profession (Irvine 2013; Duffy & Schwartz 2018).

[6] Level of education has also been found to be the strongest predictor for participation in creative activities, with middle-class people being most likely to take part in arts practices as amateurs or professionals (Reeves 2014).

are of relevance to my research, as they indicate that women are more likely to practice writing but also that it is often not an economically viable career.

My thesis provides insights into the lived experiences of one sub-group of writers in Australia, female writers with young children – a group of 'unfashionable', under-researched creatives – and highlights how motherhood does not have to be the end of a creative career but can actually be the beginning. Whilst there is a growing body of literature concerned with women who combine creative and care work at home, how women negotiate those two forms of labour is unclear and under-researched. To better understand this navigation from the point of view of women's lived experience is important as it highlights the challenges negotiated and benefits accrued by mothers who engage in creative work from home. I thus perceive this thesis as a feminist inquiry, motivated by the assumption that women's lives – and motherhood and care work in particular (Harding 1992) – provide important insights into social order (Brooks 2007). Whilst the focus of this study is quite specific – women who write and care for under-school aged children at home – it has implications beyond this cohort because it indicates how women navigate contemporary expectations associated with motherhood and work in the context of neoliberalism and precarity. I contend that the mother-creative phenomenon is emblematic of a wider trend among women, who, as a response to work/care tensions, create their own work opportunities, often under precarious conditions. Thus, understanding the particular context in which they engage in creative work is central as they do so under specific circumstances that are distinct from other groups of creatives.

By researching the navigation of motherhood and creative work within the home, this thesis makes an original contribution to two scholarly fields: creative work and maternal studies. With regards to the creative work literature – an interdisciplinary field of study with a focus on

creative/cultural production and policy – there is scant in-depth research specifically analysing how motherhood facilitates some women's engagement with/entry into home-based creative work. My study contributes to addressing this gap and demonstrates how existing concepts such as passionate work and aspirational labour fall short in explaining the complexity of the mother-creative phenomenon and some women's relationship to creative work. Challenging these ideas, my data suggests that the uptake of creative work by women with caring responsibilities can be opportunistic and pragmatic. Furthermore, my study demonstrates that the role and meaning of creative work has to be understood in relation to the practitioner's life stage, in this case early motherhood. For instance, the primary function of writing in the everyday lives of my study participants, was its ability to be an antidote to the intensive demands of motherhood and domesticity – a function that is very specific to this particular phase of maternity in women's lives. Last, by centring on writing as a creative practice, this thesis adds another creative discipline to the 'mother-creative' literature, which so far has predominately focused on crafting as a micro-entrepreneurial activity that home-based mothers of young children engage in.

My research also contributes new insights to maternal studies, a growing field of interdisciplinary research (O'Reilly 2007, 2010; O'Brien Hallstein, O'Reilly & Vandebald Giles 2021), which has primarily been concerned with three strands of inquiry: "motherhood as institution, motherhood as experience, and motherhood as identity or subjectivity" (Green 2010, 831). My research is mostly focused on the last two – motherhood as experience as well as identity/subjectivity. In particular, my research contributes to the maternal studies literature that examines how women navigate and experience modern motherhood and work. The thesis specifically highlights that creative work can be a corrective as well as an enabler to intensive mothering. It also challenges the subjugation of the mother's needs to that of their children,

indicating that an updated framework for intensive motherhood is required. Moreover, one of the central issues of motherhood for this contemporary generation of tertiary-educated, middle-class women my respondents were drawn from, is how to cultivate their individuated 'old' selves alongside their maternal 'new' selves. My thesis provides insights into how women navigate those two modes of self within the private sphere of the home and finds that this perceived split of the self is strongly related to the significance of work and professional identity within the lives of contemporary women. When they become mothers, work needs to be rearranged around caring responsibilities, which is a prompt for some women to create their own work opportunities at home.

My understanding of *motherhood* (the institution), *mothering* (the performance of maternal work) and *mothers* (the subject position) is informed by a poststructuralist approach, as I perceive these concepts to be discursive constructs that refer to a specific historic, cultural and social context (Hall 1996). A woman's ideas of mothering are informed by their social location (i.e. gender, race, class), attitudes (i.e. political beliefs), experiences (i.e. upbringing) and individual circumstance (Hays 1996) and thus are in some way unique. However, the way maternal work is performed is shaped by culture-specific discourses – "cluster[s] of ideas, images and practices" (Hall 1997, 4) – and transcends the individual, referring to collectivised ways of childrearing. As a cultural practice, motherhood is also a social institution (Rich 1986), operating on a political and ideological level and regulating human actions "according to the needs of a community, not individuals" (Coulter 2010, 571). Adopting this social-constructivist perspective, I do not perceive mothering or motherhood as an essential quality of women. While I use heteronormative notions such as 'mother' and 'women' throughout the thesis, neither refers to an essentialist understanding of these terms. I support the idea that mothering work (primary caregiving) can be performed by a range of persons including biological and non-

biological carers, non-binary people, grandparents, and fathers, to name but five –
acknowledging that there is a growing number of non-traditional family models. However,
despite this development, it is important to stress that the nature of care work is highly gendered
around the world and that statistically the majority of mothering work is still being performed
by women (Vandenbeld Giles 2014).

The other key terms used in this thesis that require definition and context are *creative work* and
the cohort of creatives this thesis is concerned with. Whilst Chapter 2 examines discussions
about creativity and creative work in more detail, a common understanding is that creative work
involves innovation and originality and is primarily of symbolic and aesthetic rather than of
functional value (Banks & Hesmondhalgh 2009; Banks et al. 2013). Creative work is also said
to be experienced as inherently more fulfilling and pleasurable than non-creative labour, and
creatives have a deep attachment to their work as well as opportunities for self-expression and
self-actualisation (Gill & Pratt 2008; McRobbie 2016). Whilst there is a debate as to whether
to term this work as 'creative' or 'cultural', I use the term creative work throughout the thesis,
as it is a reference to the high status ascribed to creativity in contemporary society (Reckwitz
2017). I also focus on *creative work* rather than *creative activity* in this thesis, because the
participants emphasised that, for them, writing was more than a hobby and they were all
attempting to link their creative practice to the labour market regardless of their ability to
generate an income. Throsby and Petetskaya's (2017, 6) definition of a practising professional
artist is useful in this context, which they describe as follows:

> The seriousness is judged in terms of a self-assessed commitment to artistic work as a
> major aspect of the artist's working life, even if creative work is not the main source of
> income. The practising aspect means that we confine our attention to artists currently

working or seeking to work in their chosen occupation. The term professional is intended to indicate a degree of training, experience or talent and a manner of working that qualify artists to have their work judged against the professional standards of the relevant occupation.

From this perspective, claiming a creative identity is primarily a self-categorisation and not linked to income or external parameters. Last, I use the term *mother-creatives* in this thesis to refer to women who organise their engagement in creative work around their caring responsibilities. I view mother-creatives as a reference to a subject position that is shaped by a number of contemporary discourses on (creative) work and motherhood. In respect to my participants, I refer to them more specifically as *mother-writers.* These are women who navigate mothering and writing at home and care for at least one under-school aged child.

1.3 Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 has provided insights into the tensions and expectations that contemporary mothers face when they engage in creative work, often leading to the conclusion that childrearing and creative work are incompatible. The aim of this thesis is to explore how those expectations are negotiated by women who conduct creative work from home. To gain insight into this question, I am drawing on two bodies of literature: creative work and maternal studies. It is to those interdisciplinary fields that my thesis contributes new knowledge. Chapter 2 maps current work trends and the status of creative work to better understand the expectations contemporary mothers navigate in constructing their project of the 'mother-creative'. This connection between work and the self is important to consider in a culture where it is assumed that *what you do* is *who you are*. Looking more closely at the broader economic context in which creative

work operates highlights inequality relating to gender and motherhood. It is within this organisational context that the incompatibility of childrearing and creative work is found. In contrast, recent research has pointed out an enabling relationship between motherhood and creative work that can be performed at home, primarily through crafting. Chapter 3 charts the discourses of modern motherhood as they provide insights into the tensions and expectations contemporary mothers have to negotiate – primarily their mother and professional roles. To balance work/care expectations, having children is thus often a time in a woman's life where they change career paths and perhaps exhibit a preference for home-based, less profit-oriented, corporate and more 'feminised' professions; characteristics that several creative disciplines, including writing and crafting, match.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework of my qualitative study, positioning it as a feminist, women-centred inquiry. I explored how women navigate creative work and motherhood at home using a Constructivist Grounded Theory approach involving a two-staged interview process with participants. The empirical chapters are organised around the three key themes that emerged as important from the research: the transition to motherhood, the everyday and identity. Chapter 5 focuses on how the participants negotiated the transition to motherhood, including work/care tensions as well as temporal and spatial changes and how they perceived this passage as an opportunity to reinvent themselves. The fact that almost all study participants took up writing *after* they had children is an indication that motherhood can be a pathway into creative work as it enables women to navigate the expectations of contemporary mothering. Chapter 6 shows how creative work was managed in the everyday lives of participants. A key theme was the role that writing played as a self-care practice and coping mechanism for women seeking to navigate demanding expectations associated with motherhood and domesticity. Temporal and spatial considerations of their everyday navigations suggests that creative work

is not necessarily more compatible with motherhood when performed at home – participants compartmentalised both forms of work – but can be managed in a more flexible way. Chapter 7 is concerned with how participants negotiated the two roles of mother and writer within their project of the self, with the majority ascribing equal importance to both identities. Participants associated their engagement in creative work with a desire to be 'more than a mother' and explicitly to invest into the project of their individuated, non-maternal selves – the continuance of the person they were before they had children. I outline the different purposes this non-maternal, individuated self serves, including, for instance, as a counterbalance to motherhood, as a quest for fulfilment/self-actualisation, and as an enabler of the 'good mother'. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by highlighting and synthesising the themes and arguments of the thesis. It outlines the original contribution the thesis makes to knowledge and flags areas for further research.

Over the following six chapters, this thesis will first look at explanatory frameworks and research that considers contemporary, middle-class women's relationship to creative work and motherhood and then apply this knowledge to the empirical data. While this literature provides a good understanding of why mother-creatives are a growing cohort among the creative workforce, my empirical data challenges some of the current concepts and assumptions. By highlighting the negotiation work that study participants perform in relation to their transition to motherhood, their everyday lives and their identity, my thesis emphasises the importance of considering creative work within the particular life context of practitioners. Through this exploration, the study at the centre of this thesis provides novel insights into this work/life stage relationship of one under-researched group of creative workers: mother-writers.

Chapter 2

Creativity, Passion and Gender:
The Attractions of Creative Work

2.1 Introduction

To provide context for the mother-creative phenomenon, this chapter explores the roles of work (paid employment) and creativity in late-modern capitalist society through reviewing a range of different, mainly sociological, concepts and studies on post-industrial work culture, creative work as well as the creative and cultural industries (CCI). This literature provides insights into the appeal of creative work, the relationship between motherhood and creative work and the contemporary work trends that produce the mother-creative. But first, it is important to understand the broader context in which mothers engage in creative work. For instance, the changed relationship between individuals and society postulated with the individualisation thesis, highlights that individuals are now required to construct their own biographies as these are no longer predetermined by social groups and institutions. Central aspects of this "project of the self" (Giddens 1991) are the decisions individuals make about work and career, which are increasingly driven by notions of vocation, passion and self-actualisation. This trend points to the central role of work, especially for the middle class. Simultaneously, the prominence of creativity and creative work is increasing, which is seen as a time-specific historical and geographic phenomenon (Banks et al. 2013). The rise of the 'ethos of creativity' has been associated with increased risk and insecurity in people's lives, especially within the employment sector (Sennett 2006; McGuigan 2010). That is why an account of creativity in contemporary society cannot be told without referring to other social, political and economic developments, such as individualisation, neoliberalism and precarity.

The objective of this chapter is to provide a broader framework for this thesis to understand how current trends related to work and creativity inform women's career decisions and encourage the mother-creative phenomenon. To this end, I first outline broader societal trends and discourses that shape relationships to work – individualisation, neoliberalism and passion. I then review the literature on creativity, creative work and affect in order to highlight the appeal of creative work in contemporary society. Third, I examine the literature on the creative and cultural industries with a focus on gender inequality. Lastly, I discuss creative work literature that has examined motherhood, highlighting how having children can both serve as a barrier to, as well as a pathway into, creative work.

2.2 Contemporary Work Trends: Passion and Precarity

Three social developments are repeatedly referred to as having significantly affected contemporary conceptions of work in late-modern capitalist societies, namely: individualisation, neoliberalisation and precarity. The individualisation thesis developed as part of a modern social theory was proposed in different ways by sociologists Ulrich Beck (1992, 1998, 1999, 2002) Zygmunt Bauman (1998, 2000, 2001, 2004) and Anthony Giddens (1991). It aims to account for changes in the social, economic and political spheres that occurred in modern Western societies, especially, in the second half of the 20th century, which were instigated by counterculture movements protesting for civil rights and women's liberation. The main thesis of individualisation is that social structures are giving way to agency, which means that the individual – as opposed to social class and groups – has become the central entity of social life. This structural change demands that the "individual must now become the agent of his or her own identity making and livelihood" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 203). In that

sense, the socially prescribed default biography prevalent in traditional society is substituted by a reflexive or do-it-yourself biography, which is always also a risk-biography (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 3), highlighting the fact that precarity is a defining aspect of the late modern risk society (Beck 1992).

Taking a more optimistic perspective on what he calls 'high modernity', Anthony Giddens (1991) speaks of the reflexive 'project of the self' which he defines as "the process whereby self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives" (Giddens 1991, 244). Giddens views the self as a continuous project and writes: "we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (Giddens 1991, 75). Underlying this project of the self are the imperatives of constant self-actualisation and self-innovation. Giddens (1991, 78) defines self-actualisation as a "balance between opportunity and risk". To self-actualise and, thus, to change and expand the self, is a risky endeavour, enabled by opportunity/choice but constrained by social factors, such as inequality. Self-actualisation is thus a need/value primarily associated with people from middle- and upper-class backgrounds who have more opportunities to take risks.

Rather than being a stable entity of an individual, Zygmunt Bauman (2004) argues that identity is a life-long experiment. He contends that identity as a concept has gained importance in late modern society due to the increased availability of choices individuals faced (Bauman 1997). The necessity to construct one's own biography applies to every individual in society, women and other marginalised groups included. Every individual has to make a number of choices, as Beck (1992, 135) writes:

Decisions on education, profession, job, place of residence, spouse, number of children and so forth, with all the secondary decisions implied, no longer can be, they must be made. Even where the word 'decisions' is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present, the individual will have to 'pay for' the consequences of decisions not taken.

Individualisation is not something that can be chosen but is obligatory and thus an "institutionalized condition" (McGuigan 2010, 332). The fact that individuals are made responsible for their 'choices', highlights the pressure that is associated with a reflexive biography. The aim of the project of the self is to present a coherent narrative about oneself and to accommodate changing circumstances into this narrative in order to establish a seemingly stable identity (Giddens 1991). Work and motherhood are both integral aspects of the project of the self (Grey 1994; Bailey 1999), indicating that individuals make specific choices in relation to career and family that are central to their sense of self. With regards to employment, critical organisational studies scholar Christopher Grey (1994, 482) argues that "in societies where work, and especially hierarchically organised work, is important, career can offer one of the most obvious sites for realising the project of the self". Consequently, the kind of work people perform provides insights into the persons they want to be.

Looking at how reflexive modernity has affected particular groups of people, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) examine how increasing individualisation has changed women's biographies, especially with regards to their role in the family. Overall, they see a shift in women's life trajectories "away from 'living for others' towards 'a bit of a life of [their] own'" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 55). They further elaborate on how individualisation has affected women's relations to different social institutions, such as the family, education,

legislation, public life and work. With regards to the latter, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim argue that women's increased engagement in the labour market and thus work outside the home, offers them more autonomy as it provides access to money of their own, time to themselves and away from home as well as spatial mobility. These structural changes all require women to develop a "behaviour of [their] own" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 64) and to construct and acquire new roles in the work/public sphere. As a consequence, women now have access to and demand the freedom associated with 'a life of their own' in respect to "career development, leisure, autonomy, mobility, income or self-actualisation" (Bueskens 2018, 12). Furthermore, the normalisation of divorce means that women are aware that they might have to provide for themselves (and potentially their children) at some point in their life, elevating the importance of employment for financial independence (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 8; Proctor 2010). Based on these developments it could be assumed that individualisation has resulted in the liberation of women from oppressing structures, offering them similar life opportunities to those of men. However, feminist writers critique the narrative of 'free choice' pointing out the structural inequalities that limit women's agency (Bueskens 2018). This is especially the case for women with children who, in Australia (as in all industrialised countries), bear responsibility for the majority of childcare and housework (Wilkins et al. 2021). Whilst more insight into the recent evolution of women's lives will be provided in Chapter 3, the literature discussed so far highlights how individualisation has changed women's role in society including requiring them to make decisions regarding, and take responsibility for, their educational and professional development. Individual accountability for life choices links individualisation to neoliberal ideals which warrants further exploration because it highlights in part why some middle-class women keep working after they have children and create their own work opportunities.

Neoliberal discourse asserts that "each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being" (Harvey 2005, 65), emphasising the accountability that individuals have with regards to the construction of their own biography. Neo-Marxist geographer David Harvey (2005, 2) offers the following definition of neoliberalism:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

However, more than just being a political approach, neoliberalism has been framed as an ideology that "subordinates all values to an economic rationality" (Whyte 2019, 19) and positions competition at the centre of human relations (Brown 2019). Neoliberal ideology produces specific subjectivities that are encouraged to act as self-enterprises and increasingly commodify their everyday life (Summerton 2017). Furthermore, neoliberalism has been associated with a disregard for structural forces given that "individual success or failure is interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings […] rather than being attributed to any systemic property" (Harvey 2005, 65-66). Whilst it has been argued that the generalised use of neoliberalism in academia diminishes its analytical power (Birch 2017), two developments associated with neoliberalist ideology are relevant for the context of this study. First, a trend to address social issues on an individual and not on a structural level implies that the individual is responsible and accountable for their (as well as their dependents') own life circumstances and opportunities. The discourse of personal responsibility has a significant impact on women's lives because it privatises work and family matters – a discourse that has been broadly internalised (Collins 2019). Second, and related to the first point, a trend of the

active promotion of entrepreneurism under neoliberalism implies that all the risks associated with entrepreneurism and self-employment, such as the lack of social security benefits as well as annual, sick or parental leave, are put on the individual (Luckman 2015b). This trend relieves governments and employers from any obligations, which are now to be shouldered by the individual and often women. Because "women, like men, are viewed and valued, primarily as worker-citizens" (Anderson & Moore 2014, 97) a growing enterprise culture among mothers has been observed in an attempt to privately navigate work and care (Taylor 2015; Luckman 2015b). It has thus been argued that "the fallout of neoliberalism has rested disproportionally upon mothers" (Craven 2014, ix) as "neoliberal policies have offloaded the costs and responsibilities of social reproduction onto families, women and especially mothers" (Anderson & Moore 2014, 96).

The increased responsibilities that individuals have to navigate in terms of decision-making and constructing their project of the self, coincide with a wider economic instability and insecurity, including the "de-standardization of employment, de-unionization of labor, dis-aggregation of production [and the] de-industrialization of economies" (De Peuter 2011, 421). The global changes that work in post-industrial, capitalist societies has undergone since the 1970s have been conceptualised via the terms Post-Fordism and precarity. Precarity describes the fact that "increasing numbers of workers (including well-paid and high-status workers) in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labour" (Gill & Pratt 2008, 2). With regards to the work force, post-Fordism stands for the normalisation of precarity, marking the end of lifelong job security and the family wage. The latter leads to the increasing participation of women in the labour market, including those with childcare responsibilities (Conor et al. 2015, 6). However, whilst conditions associated with post-Fordism might seem like a novelty, Neilson and Rossiter (2008, 54) argue that "if we look at capitalism in a wider historical and

geographical scope, it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization". The rise in creative entrepreneurship – such as online craft businesses – has been linked to the economic recessions associated with precarity, highlighting the uptake of creative work as a response to unemployment (Jakob 2013; Luckman 2015b). In lieu of job security, post-Fordist work conditions thus require new career narratives (Luckman 2015b) and sources of attachments, for instance, through discourses such as passion and self-actualisation.

Some social theorists have predicted that as a result of the fragmentation and increasing insecurity of work, its significance in people's lives is going to decline (Bauman 1998; Sennett 1998, 2006). Writing in 1998, Bauman, for instance, argued that work was being replaced by consumption as the main source of fulfilment. However, exploring the meaning attributed to work in the context of Bauman's concept of liquid modernity, sociologist Sara James (2017) refutes Bauman's claim. In a study on a broad range of workers in Melbourne, James (2017, 8) found that work continues to play a central role in people's lives and that it is a "key component of self-identity" and fulfilment. This finding points to the fact that in times of lower commitment between employer and employee, the content of the work itself becomes the primary element of satisfaction – indicating one argument for the growing status and popularity of creative work. This relationship between work and worker is created with the help of specific discourses. In James' study, the "myth of vocation" and a "passion narrative" were the most central discourses, which associate work with an expression of the authentic self, fulfilment and self-actualisation. The study participants linked passion to natural talent and a sense of vocation/destiny, highlighting a unique and complex relationship between the individual and work. Interestingly, participants who experienced interruptions and career changes still engaged in the passion narrative. James (2017, 54) found that "even jobs that are unfulfilling and feel inauthentic can be made meaningful if they are incorporated into the story and viewed as

necessary steps in the pursuit of one's true "passion"". This finding highlights how the passion narrative can function as a strategy to reconstruct or "repair" a sense of self and attribute meaning to a variety of activities. The common use of the passion narrative also indicates that passion is not an individual incidence but reflects a wider discourse that produces certain narratives to frame and experience work. Sociologist Erin Cech (2021) claims that this discourse, which she calls the "passion principle", is particularly prevalent among college-educated middle-class people. From her US study involving career aspirants and workers as well as career counsellors, Cech views passion as a dominant framework for career related choices. The participants prioritised personal investment, fulfilment and self-expression over stable, well-paid, but often unrewarding, work. However, Cech notes that the ability to choose passion over job and financial security is an indicator of privilege and intersects with economic status, gender and race. The function of the passion narrative is further explored in relation to creative work in the next section, highlighting that associating creativity with passion and self-actualisation is particularly potent.

2.3 Creativity, Creative Work and Passion

Creativity is one of the buzzwords of the 21st century and has been associated with grand promises such as the revival of cities and economies (Florida 2002; Morgan & Nelligan 2018; Stevenson 2020). However, it has been critically noted that creativity is a "term so over-used it is in danger of becoming meaningless" (Knell & Oakley 2007, 14). Creativity has thus been described as an elusive concept that lacks definitional clarity and consensus (Godart, Seong & Phillips 2020). Whilst the sociological interest in creativity has increased over the past decades, it is a subject that had already received attention by classical sociologists such as Karl Marx (1987 [1844]), Emile Durkheim (1982 [1895], 1995 [19912]), Max Weber (1978 [1921]),

Adorno and Horkheimer (1997 [1947]) and, more recently, Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1993, 1996). However, no collectively agreed upon the definition of creativity exists. Therefore, Godart, Seong and Phillips (2020) reviewed work on creativity in classical sociology and social theory with the aim of developing an encompassing definition and based on this review, they define creativity as an "intentional configuration of cultural and material elements that is unexpected for a given audience" (Godart et al. 2020, 489). This concept of creativity is built on three premises: (1) creativity is a combination of ideas, symbols and objects created through work practices in art and everyday life; (2) creativity is an intentional and not an arbitrary result of labour; (3) creativity comprises an element of unexpectedness, something novel, that captures an audience and thus is an intersection of production and consumption. This definition highlights that creativity is not just associated with high art but can be detected in daily activities as well (Joas 1996).

Whilst creativity itself is evidently not a new phenomenon its social significance has changed. According to sociologist and cultural theorist Andreas Reckwitz (2017, 12), creativity until the 1970s was restricted to "cultural and social niches" but has since become "a crucial organizing principle of Western societies", structuring the social and the self. The latter is of relevance for this study, as it allows for an understanding of creativity and creative work as an enhancement of the project of the self. Reckwitz argues that a 'creative ethos' is now permeating the work sphere, institutions – political and scientific institutions in particular – and organisations as well as popular and everyday culture, evident in people's quest for individualisation and uniqueness. He contends:

In late modern times, creativity embraces a duality of the *wish* to be creative and the *imperative* to be creative, subjective desire and social expectations. We *want* to be creative and we *ought* to be creative. (Reckwitz 2017, 11, emphasis in original)

Reckwitz here flags the extrinsic and intrinsic power that is emanated by creativity as an 'inner' urge and desire as well as an 'outer' imperative and obligation. This imperative of being creative, Reckwitz argues, is not targeted at an elitist audience but at everyone – though research shows that it is especially appealing to the middle class (Brook et al. 2018; 2020). Because it is so all-encompassing, Reckwitz, following Foucault, views creativity as a *dispositif*, which exceeds the capacity and scope of a discourse. According to Foucault (1977b), a *dispositif* consists of discourses as well as complex constellations such as "institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault 1977b, p. 194). As a *dispositif*, creativity operates across multiple areas such as economy, education and urban planning, transcending boundaries between those fields and homogenising their practices and discourses by centring them on creativity. Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie (2015, 2016) also uses the term creative *dispositif*[7], symbolised by the mandate in her book titled *Be Creative* (McRobbie 2016). Departing from Foucault, McRobbie (2015) argues that the creativity *dispositif* is powerful because it is tied to pleasure and self-reward. Tracing the roots of the creative *dispositif*, Reckwitz (2017, 35) distinguishes four historical phases: preparation (18th-19th century); formation (1900-1960); crisis and concentration (1960-1980); and domination (since 1980). Reckwitz (2017, 36) argues that the *dispositif* is now fully formed and "well on its way to cultural dominance". Creativity thus possesses high status in

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[7] I could not find any cross-references between McRobbie and Reckwitz, although Reckwitz' work was originally published in German in 2012 and thus predates McRobbie's use as far as I am aware.

contemporary society, which encourages people to engage in creative work as a way to enhance their project of the self.

Linked to the omnipresence of creativity is the rise of creative work – the labour that results from, and involves, creativity – as well as the increase in work that is classified as creative. It has been argued that all work has the potential for creativity (Florida 2002), moving from an elitist understanding of creativity to an unspecific one (McGuigan 2010). Nevertheless, within different work sectors, creative work is most strongly associated with the creative and cultural industries (CCI). The degree of creativity required within these industries is especially high as "competitive advantage and profitability are dependent not so much upon the routinisation of work but on harnessing individual and collective creativity" (Smith & McKinlay 2009, 29). Regarding the type of work that is labelled as creative, Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009, 416) offer the following definition:

> Creative labour is […] geared to the production of original or distinctive commodities that are primarily aesthetic and/or symbolic-expressive, rather than utilitarian and functional.

In other words, creative work prioritises aesthetics and symbolism over functionality. However, not all creative work is equal and has been conceptualised and distinguished in different ways and under different names, adding to the definitional problem within creative industries studies (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt 2005; Smith & McKinlay 2009). In general, a discursive shift has been identified from art to culture and more recently to creativity (Smith & McKinlay 2009; Stevenson 2020) – whereby the usefulness of the latter two notions is highly debated. Some authors, for instance, prefer the term cultural work (see, for instance, McGuigan 2004; 2010;

Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh 2012; Cohen 2012), which in popular and academic discourse is often used interchangeably with creative work. McGuigan (2010) argues that whilst all work can have creative elements, not all creative work can be classified as cultural. It has also been claimed that the term 'creative' is unspecific in that it does not distinguish between technical and artistic creativity (Pratt 2005). Cultural work, however, is specifically concerned with the production of meaning (McGuire 2004), and thus culture, and has been broadly defined as "symbolic, aesthetic or creative labour in the arts, media and other creative and cultural industries" (Banks et al. 2013, 5). More specifically, McGuigan (2010, 326) argues that cultural work is "first and foremost about communicating meaning and very often also about identification and pleasure".

In contrast to other forms of work that can be creative but are often more instrumental than meaning-producing – for instance work related to "nourishment, clothing and shelter" (McGuigan 2010, 326) – cultural work is predominately non-alienated[8] and thus often experienced as inherently more fulfilling (McRobbie 2016). Opposed to the proponents of the term 'cultural', Smith and McKinlay (2009) argue that this notion is broader and more eclectic than creative work as the term culture refers to complex phenomena such as "tradition, identity, values and social belonging" (Smith & McKinlay 2009, 29). They prefer the term creative work as an inclusive term of "those working within old and new sectors that share certain features of innovation, risk, uncertainty, performativity and differentiation from repeat or mass production sectors" (Smith & McKinlay 2009, 30). The preference of either the term 'creative' or 'cultural' is thus dependent on the definition of creativity and culture that underlies the research. A practice such as writing, for instance, can be classified as both cultural and creative work according to the above definitions. I will use the term creative work throughout the thesis to

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[8] A reference to Marx's (2000) theory of alienation, which refers to the estrangement of workers from the products of their labour.

emphasise its relationship to the creative imperative and *dispositif* that seems to be omnipresent in late modern society.

To better understand the attractiveness of creative work, I am particularly interested in the affective dimension attributed to it. Research shows that creative work is experienced and promoted as "profoundly satisfying and intensely pleasurable [promising the worker a] deep attachment, affective bindings, and […] the idea of self-expression and self-actualization through work" (Gill & Pratt 2008, 15). These attributes are closely aligned with imperatives of the project of the self, which requires continuous self-innovation and self-realisation (Giddens 1991). With its ability to generate positive emotions and fulfilment, creative work blurs the boundary between work and leisure, portraying similar characteristics to recreational activities, which individuals engage in voluntarily (Rojek 2010; Pöllänen & Voutilainen 2018). Promises of 'doing what you love' are seen as a main component of the attraction of creative work and provide an entry point for many aspirants into a creative career (Taylor & Luckman 2020).

Assuming that this promise serves certain purposes, feminist scholars have critically explored the affective attachment to creative labour and especially the relationship between affect and power (Gill & Pratt 2008; McRobbie 2016). Following a Foucauldian school of thought, they argue that affects are not outside the social and are subject to power relations. Discourses of affective labour have normative power, meaning that affect and pleasure have to be seen as a "disciplinary technology" (Gill & Pratt 2008, 17). McRobbie (2016), for instance, sees what she calls passionate work as an ideology, luring especially women into precarious working conditions. She argues that because people are emotionally invested in their work and take pleasure from it, they are more easily exploitable and less likely to form labour organisations. McRobbie views the promotion of the creative economy as disguised labour reform, away from

secure and unionised working conditions towards precarious employment and entrepreneurship. She argues that transferring all risks to the individual serves the interests of governments and employers; she further warns, however, that this strategy is driven by short-term thinking that has no long-term plan behind it (McRobbie 2016, 71). McRobbie furthermore claims that the force of passionate work lies in its subject-forming power which normalises the "cheerful, upbeat, passionate, entrepreneurial person who is constantly vigilant in regard to opportunities for projects or contracts" (McRobbie 2016, 74) and disciplining all who deviate from that norm. Adding a gender lens to the amalgamation of work and pleasure, she contends that the ethos of passionate work is the female version of Apple founder Steve Jobs' 'love your work' culture. With the normalisation of female labour market participation, this ideology promises young – often working-class – women an exciting life and access to the middle class, despite predominately holding low-power, low-paid positions in the creative sector. Thus, McRobbie views the ethos of passionate work as the romanticisation of labour where passion is a normative requirement. Using provocative notions such as 'working girl' or 'career girls', McRobbie (2016, 110) claims that the contemporary young woman is "marrying her work, having devoted so much romantic energy into finding the right job, rather than the right man". What McRobbie's analysis describes is the changed relationship between women and work in Western capitalist societies, highlighting that the imperatives of creative and passionate work are particularly compelling among women.

In addition to the appeal of passion, the sentiment of hope has also been found to attract and tie women to creative work. Elaborating on the relationship between female creatives and their practice, digital labour scholar Brooke Erin Duffy (2016, 2017) critically evaluates the probability that young women are actually able to sustain a living by monetising their creative interests. She argues that the popular discourse promotes creative work as a lifestyle where

economic activities do not seem or feel like work. The slogan 'do what you love' promises a fusion of pleasure, autonomy and income as well as leisure and work and has been claimed to be the "unofficial work mantra of our time" (Tokumitsu 2014, np.). However, Duffy and other authors point out that the realisation of this lifestyle is often a dream rather than a lived reality. Duffy (2016, 445) thus describes creative work as "aspirational labour", which she defines as a "forward-looking, carefully orchestrated, and entrepreneurial form of creative cultural production". By referring to the potential of creative work to translate into social and economic capital at some point in the future, the focus shifts away from the present of precarity to a future of prosperity. Others have termed this focus on future opportunities and success 'hope labour' (Kuehn & Corrigan 2013) and 'venture labour' (Neff 2012). However, in reality this promise of 'making a living with your passion' only eventuates for a small proportion of creative labourers and often along lines of gendered and intersectional privilege. Duffy, thus, argues that there is a parallel between creative work and the under-valued work that women traditionally perform in fields such as media and fashion. Thus, both McRobbie and Duffy reflect on the ideology of aspirational and passionate work as an elusive promise that allures people – often young, tertiary educated and female – into a precarious situation.

To make sense of women's engagement in affective work despite its often-grinding reality, Lauren Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism' has been found useful by creative studies scholars (see, for instance, Luckman 2015b; Alacovska 2020). According to Berlant (2011, 1):

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. […] These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently

cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.

The dream or fantasy of a life motivated and funded by 'doing what you love' can be described as a form of cruel optimism as for many women – and men for that matter – the experience of precarity rather than success dominates their creative work. For instance, in an economic study of professional artists in Australia, Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) found that 60% earned less than $10,000 per year from their creative activity and had to engage in other kinds of work – often non-creative – to sustain a living. It is thus questionable whether following the dream of 'doing what you love' contributes to the flourishing of the individual, especially when looking at it from a statistical or collective perspective. However, viewing creative work as cruel optimism also raises the question of whether creative workers are passive victims of neoliberal/capitalist interests. Berlant (2011, 14) cautions against simply mistaking cruel optimism as a hoax or fantasy and argues that:

> Even when it turns out to involve a cruel relation, it would be wrong to see optimism's negativity as a symptom of an error, a perversion, damage, or a dark truth: optimism is, instead, a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently.

Cruel optimism and feminist affect theory are an analytical framework that assists in making sense of why individuals – and especially women – subscribe to the creative imperative, despite the precarity that comes with pursuing a creative career. It is also a critical tool that can acknowledge the pleasure and reward that individuals experience from engaging in creative work – 'making life bearable'.

Ideas and concepts including the creative *dispositif*, creative work as well as passionate work and cruel optimism – are useful to understanding why ever more people desire to engage in creative work. The affective dimensions associated with creative work indicate the appeal of creative activities for individuals mainly by promising fulfilment and blurring the line between work and life. What remains unclear is the relationship between creative work and precarity which provides insights into the conditions women working from home have to navigate.

2.4 Creative and Cultural Industries: Precarity and Inequality

In an effort to maximise the economic value of creative and cultural work as well as a strategy for economic recovery, a whole sector centring around creativity has been identified – the creative and cultural industries (CCI). Whilst the cultural industries have an established history in policy since the 1960s (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011), the creative industries have only emerged in the late 1990s and primarily as a policy discourse (Hesmondhalgh 2008; Flew & Cunningham 2010). Their origin is generally associated with the establishment of the Creative Industries Task Force (CITF) in 1998 by the newly elected Labour government in the UK under Prime Minister Tony Blair (Hesmondhalgh 2008). Although cultural economist Justin O'Connor (2013) points out that much of the work and language used by the CITF was inspired by Australia's first cultural policy *Creative Nation* developed by the government of Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1994. The CITF was integrated into the UK's new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which highlights the economic potential seen in the cultural and creative sector by making it an integral part of the economies seeking to move away from a reliance on heavy industries such as steel making. The DCMS defined the creative industries as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which

have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (DCMS 2001, 5). Thus, the creative industries are not about the intrinsic value of creativity but about its commodification, focusing on the economic potential of creativity and culture.

As in the UK, creative industries elements were integrated in the cultural policies of other countries – on a national, regional and local level – such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, China, the EU, Australia and New Zealand, although some countries preferred the notion of cultural industries over creative industries (Flew & Cunningham 2010). The appeal for governments to establish and invest in creative and cultural industries is a result of its idealistic status as a panacea to all sorts of socio-economic issues, namely "to stimulate national economies, to regenerate depressed urban areas, to aid in attempts to build social inclusion and cohesion, to challenge unemployment, and even to improve nations' health" (Conor et al. 2015, 2). Compared to other policy interventions, CCI policies can also be implemented relatively cheaply (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011, 5). Another factor explaining the popularity of the CCI is the fact that they were supported across the political landscape and transcend party differences (Stevenson 2014).

There is a disagreement on what work activities count as creative, and thus which sub-sectors make up the CCI (Morgan & Nelligan 2018). However, according to media scholars Flew and Cunningham (2010, 115), most policies include the following nine sub-sectors: publishing and literature; performing arts; music, film, video, and photography; broadcasting (television and radio); visual arts and crafts; advertising; design (including fashion); museums, galleries and libraries; and interactive media (web, games, mobile, etc.). Further sub-sectors often included are: architecture; software; product and reception hardware (e.g. musical instruments, electronic

goods); festivals; intangible cultural heritage; and leisure activities, including sport. The inclusion of some sub-sectors, such as electronic publishing, software and gaming, have been viewed critically, as they are seen as inflating the economic significance of the creative industries (Hesmondhalgh 2008; Flew & Cunningham 2010). This broad range of sectors that are classified as cultural and creative highlights the deflation and non-specificity of creativity discussed above, which is no longer exclusively associated with high culture. Applying the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, Trembath and Fielding (2020), in collaboration with the independent think tank, A New Approach, assign the following twelve sectors to the creative and cultural industries in Australia: broadcasting; electronic or digital media and film; design; environmental heritage; fashion; library and archives; literature and print media; museums; music composition and publishing; other cultural goods and manufacturing and sales; performing arts; supporting activities; visual arts and crafts. Based on this classification, 645,303 people (6% of the total workforce) were employed in this sector in 2016 (Trembath & Fielding 2020). The economic return of those twelve sub-sectors in 2016-17 was $91 billion (~5% of GDP), whereby the largest proportion of this sum was derived from design (49.8%), fashion (16.6%) and broadcasting (11.3%). Those numbers indicate that creatives make up a significant number of the workforce in Australia and that substantial profit is being generated from creative work.

Work modes and the work culture in the creative industries differ from traditional work sectors. Much of creative work in the CCI is characterised by casualised, project-based, informal and individualised employment as well as flexibility with regards to working hours and days – a trend that also permeates other sectors such as academia and is commonly referred to as the gig economy (Morgan & Nelligan 2018; Woodstock & Graham 2020). Compared to established career paths, no blueprint exists for a career in the CCI and pathways into the sector include

vocational training, higher education and autodidacticism (Taylor & Luckman 2020). The non-traditional work structures prevalent within the CCI require a certain type of worker, whereby the ideal creative worker is driven by passion, is independent, flexible, adaptable, entrepreneurial, self-motivated and most importantly willing to work long hours for little or no pay (Wreyford 2013; Conor et al. 2015). To attract creative people, creative organisations have cultivated a business culture that is "cool, creative and egalitarian" (Gill 2002, 70) as well as "'hip' and informal" (Conor et al. 2015, 10), with networking events often taking place in bars or night clubs (McRobbie 2009). This network culture highlights the importance of reputation and self-presentation within the CCI, where workers are expected to be well-networked, constantly present and self-promoting, for instance on social media (Conor et al. 2015).

The idealised image of creative work that is often found in policy documents and public discourse, is missing the perspective of how work is *experienced* by the individual worker (Banks 2010; McRobbie 2016). Here, critical accounts paint a rather bleak picture, highlighting precariousness and job insecurity within the CCI (Conor et al. 2015; Morgan & Nelligan 2018). Furthermore, "bulimic" (Pratt 2002) or "feast and famine" (Gill 2014) work patterns – a constant and unpredictable change between periods with a high volume of work and no work at all – take a toll on the mental health of creative workers, and can contribute to health issues such as burnout, anxiety or depression (Gill 2011; McRobbie 2011). Due to the unreliable and insecure nature of creative work, many creatives are unable to rely solely on work in the CCI and have to take up additional, more stable jobs (Stevenson 2020), often in teaching or in hospitality (Conor et al. 2015). Furthermore, studies have shown that the demographic make-up of the creative workforce does not necessarily reflect the stereotypical image depicted in policy discourse. Deborah Stevenson (2020), for instance, found in a study on cultural work in an Australian metropolitan area that the majority of artists were female, over 46 years of age

and less mobile than assumed by policymakers. These creatives represent a group that is "largely invisible but also seemingly unfashionable within the discourses and practices of cultural policy and planning" (Stevenson 2020, 9). Women with children engaging in creative work can similarly be classified as "unfashionable", given that, due to their family responsibilities, they are rarely flexible, mobile or independent.

Another trend associated with the precariousness of work in the CCI and the lack of paid employment options, is an increase in self-employment, which means that individuals have to create their own work opportunities and are responsible for the conditions of their work (including superannuation and sick/annual leave). Research shows that creatives in the CCI increasingly work in an entrepreneurial or freelance capacity (Conor et al. 2015; Morgan & Nelligan 2018) – often unpaid and with significant periods of time without work each year (Wing-Fai et al. 2015). Looking at designer-makers in Australia, Luckman, Andrew and Crisp (2018) link this trend to wider socio-economic global changes. They write:

> At a time of growing employment uncertainty, shrinking arts funding, and a governmental policy emphasis on encouraging small business, self-employment and the development of a craft or designer maker micro-enterprise can seem like an attractive and logical option for makers. Certainly, what emerges in our research, as elsewhere (in other creative employment sectors and national contexts), is that self-employment is becoming ever more regularised as a response to wider socio-economic global forces. (Luckman et al. 2018, 59)

Encouraging people to become entrepreneurs is a strategy to reduce un- and underemployment, especially among women (see, for instance, Commonwealth of Australia 2017). This trend

towards entrepreneurship is supported by government initiatives in Australia such as the Boosting Female Founders Initiative (Commonwealth of Australia 2019) and is also reflected in the integration of entrepreneurial skills in the syllabus of higher education and vocational training institutions (Carey & Naudin 2006). As outlined above, a push towards self-employment has been associated with the political and economic climate produced under neoliberalism where responsibility for success and wellbeing is put onto the individual rather than society. This general tendency towards having to create your own career path and work opportunities is relevant for my study as most women writers in Australia do so in a freelance or entrepreneurial capacity.

In addition to the precarious nature of creative work, another main social issue facing the creative industries is a lack of diversity and the underrepresentation of marginalised people. Many authors have noted that the 'creative class' (Florida 2002) consists predominately of white middle-class people and is not representative of the composition of the respective population. In Australia, for instance, only about 10% of artists have a non-English speaking background, compared to 18% in the Australian labour force (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017). This is problematic as it may mean that creative work is less accessible for people from non-Anglo cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which often intersect with socio-economic disadvantage (Morgan & Nelligan 2018). Regarding the latter, research shows that the CCI are less inclusive of people coming from a working-class background. In an analysis of the UK creative workforce, Brook, O'Brien and Taylor (2018, 2020) found an overrepresentation of people with an upper middle-class background and an underrepresentation of people with working-class origins, which is most pronounced in the publishing sector. One of the main issues resulting from a lack of diversity in cultural production is that it reproduces stories and products that perpetuate inequality and thus fails to represent and appeal to a significant

proportion of the population (Stein 2020). The underrepresentation of marginalised communities shows that it is important to consider the intersectionality of disadvantages along different demographic markers (race, income, education, age, gender, etc.) when doing research in the creative industries. In relation to the study at the centre of this thesis, inequalities related to gender and motherhood are of particular interest as they illustrate the layers of disadvantage women face within the creative sector.

Many have condemned the celebration of creative work within the CCI as an open, egalitarian and meritocratic sphere in which everyone with talent can thrive and argue that public and policy discourse are oblivious to existing and growing inequalities within the sector (Banks & Milestone 2011; Gill 2014; Conor et al. 2015; O'Brien 2019). While officially aiming to pluralise culture and be more inclusive of marginalised people, most creative subsectors are characterised by a substantial gender imbalance and inequality – horizontally and vertically – especially in key creative and decision-making roles (Adkins 1999; Gill 2014; Wreyford 2015; 2018). Statistical data also shows that women earn less than men (Skillset 2010) despite being better qualified (Allen 2013; Wing-Fai, Gill & Randle 2015). In Australia, 83% of female artists have a university degree compared to 70% of male artists yet earnt 32% less in 2015 (Throsby & Petetskaya 2018). This also applies to self-employed women, who earn on average 40% less than men (Luckman 2015b). Despite the whole cultural and creative work force being subjected to precarious work, women are even more exposed to uncertainty as they are more disposable in times of economic crisis and job-insecurity (Conor et al. 2015; Wing-Fai et al. 2015). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's work and careers has exacerbated this gender gap, with research showing that women in Australia "were more likely to lose their jobs, more likely to do a lot more unpaid work, and less likely to get government support" (Wood et al. 2021, 3; see also Flore et al. 2021 for work on gender, creative work and Covid-19).

Scrutinising the way access to work opportunities are managed within the sector, studies have found that informality is a main mechanism reproducing gender inequality (O'Brien 2014; Wreyford 2015), due to a lack of equity policies, hiring transparency and accountability (Conor et al. 2015; Wing-Fai et al. 2015; Banks & Milestone 2011). In addition, men are perceived to be more competent in self-promotion, thus disadvantaging women in a competitive environment (Wing-Fai et al. 2015; Cannizzo & Strong 2020). To better understand how informal and network-based hiring practices perpetuate gender inequality, cultural studies scholar Natalie Wreyford (2015) examined recruitment processes in the UK film industry. She argues that the often-insecure nature of projects in the film industry and the fact that funding must be secured before the outcome of a project is known, makes producers and investors seek to minimise those risks in their control. As a result, people tend to recruit creatives they have worked with previously or based on personal recommendation and/or a substantial track-record. This practice disadvantages women in a number of ways. First, people tend to recruit other people whose socio-demographic makeup is similar to their own – a process known as homophily – which presents a barrier to diversity and women entering male dominated roles (Wing-Fai et al. 2015; Wreyford 2015). Second, because women are underrepresented in key roles and face recruitment disadvantages, they "have less experience and credits when the next opportunity comes along" (Wreyford 2015, 89). Third, the importance of being well-connected disadvantages women with caring responsibilities, as "motherhood has been shown to have a detrimental effect on networking" (Wreyford 2015, 85; see also Banks & Milestone 2011) – which, however, is not the case for men with children. Wreyford, who interviewed 23 female and 17 male screenwriters for her study concluded that:

The prevalence of women employing women in my sample suggests that those who are working are finding a large percentage of opportunities through other women and perhaps are not so trusted by men. (Wreyford 2015, 93)

This finding implies that homophily works both ways and that the more women work in key creative roles, the more women they will employ. Consequently, more female creatives receive work opportunities which increase their chances of getting further work, ultimately enabling them to build up portfolios like those of men (Wing-Fai et al. 2015).

To reduce gender inequalities through recruitment practices, empirical data suggests that women benefit from more formal and transparent hiring processes (Conor et al. 2015). However, due to the casualisation of work in the creative industries there often are no institutionalised policies, HR departments or tribunals to appeal to (Wreyford 2013) and trade unions are very unlikely to be established among non-permanent employers (Conor et al. 2015). In addition, there exists "an entrepreneurial ethic and an antipathy to 'whinging'" (Wing-Fai et al. 2015, 50), which implies that addressing inequalities bears the risk of being labelled as difficult, which, in turn, negatively affects future job prospects (Gill 2014; O'Brien 2015). Scholars have also pointed out that there is a lack of awareness of sexist practices and gender-based discrimination among female creatives as well as a lack of language to address inequalities (Gill 2014; cf. Cannizzo & Strong 2020). Further exploring this issue, sociologist Kim Allen (2013, 233) argues that contemporary women are "caught within neoliberal and post-feminist discourses and individualistic approaches to equal opportunities that constrain their capacity to challenge existing gender hierarchies". All these findings point to the institutionalised nature of gender inequality within the CCI and the complex issue of addressing them in an environment in which reputation is a key factor for securing jobs. How deeply

ingrained gender bias, discrimination and sexual harassment are in the creative industries (Hennekam & Bennett 2017) has come to light in recent years through movements such as #MeToo, which have exposed predatory employment practices, particularly in the film industries (Verhoeven et al. 2019; Liinamaa & Rogers 2020; Sanchez Lozoya 2021). In addition to those gender-based barriers, women who care for children face a further layer of disadvantage in the creative and cultural industries.

2.5 Creative Work and Motherhood

Childbearing is seen as the main factor that produces gender imbalance in the CCI in the UK, with a stark under-representation of women over 35 years of age in the sector (Skillset 2010; Percival & Hesmondhalgh 2014; Creative Scotland 2016; Percival 2020). The notable absence of women in that age group contradicts policy assumptions that, due to its flexibility and project-based nature, creative work is a panacea for balancing work and motherhood (Wreyford 2013). Media scholar Anne O'Brien (2014, see also Liddy & O'Brien 2021b) notes that rather than there being a singular reason for mothers leaving the CCI, there are a number of push and pull factors that make it difficult for women with caring responsibilities to stay in the sector. As mentioned above, the ideal creative worker is flexible, independent, self-reliant, fully devoted to the job and able to work long hours. These expectations are at odds with the schedule and routine of mothers with younger children and indicate that flexible creative work is generally tailored to fit a male lifecycle (Wreyford 2013; Beedles 2021). Natalie Wreyford (2013, 2) argues that "flexible working can often be more difficult to reconcile with motherhood and provides additional barriers for mothers hoping to juggle work and families". Wreyford (2013; 2018) claims that the reason that men are able to work in jobs requiring flexibility if they have children is because women continue to bear the main responsibility for care and domestic

work (see also Adkins 1999; McGuigan 2010). Consequently, Luckman (2015b) concludes that women are carrying the burden of flexible work with irregular and often long hours. It is thus not surprising that statistical data shows that representation in the media industry of women above the age of 35 is highest in those creative sub-sectors that have more stable and permanent employment models – such as terrestrial television, broadcast radio, cinema exhibition and book publishing (Skillset 2010, 5) – and are more compatible with childcare services.

The lack of flexible, accessible and affordable childcare has been identified in a UK study as a major barrier to working in the creative industries after having children (Wells 2016, see also Liddy & O'Brien 2021b). The problem with current childcare models is that they often only operate during business hours, require advanced booking, do not offer flexibility in case of a change in schedule and are generally unaffordable for the creative workforce. Recent statistics show that over 80% of the average weekly income of a creative industry worker in London is needed to pay childcare fees (Wells 2016). Creatives in Australia face similar difficulties. The median weekly cost of full-time childcare in Australia was $480 in 2018 (Productivity Commission 2018), which averages to around $20,000 per year. In comparison, the average income of professional artists in Australia was only $15,500 (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017), which is not even enough to cover full-time childcare costs for one child. For low income earning families, there are subsidies available covering up to 50% of the childcare costs, but even this adds up to 75% of the average income of a professional artist. As a result of the difficulties that creatives face in combining work and childcare, women might decide to delay (Wells 2016) or forgo having children in order to succeed in their profession (Stuart 2011; Wreyford 2013).

To better understand the impact that parenthood, and especially motherhood, has on creative workers, several studies have been conducted. Laura Wells (2016), for instance, surveyed 545 CCI workers in the UK – a majority of whom were women and mothers. Over 90% of the participants reported that their career had been markedly affected by parenthood. Furthermore, 51% of the respondents had a partner who also worked in the CCI, showing that working modes, stresses and insecurity related to creative work often affect both parents. In an Australian study, Verhoeven et al. (2018) surveyed 618 workers in the screen industry to better understand the needs and experiences of parents and carers. They found that 74% of the participants experienced a negative impact on their role within the industry, often causing high levels of stress. The five major challenges identified from all respondents were: (1) long hours/weeks; (2) financial uncertainty; (3) evening networking/screening events; (4) lack of confidence/prejudice from funders/employers; and (5) lack of access to childcare services. These findings highlight that the temporal flexibility of creative work, especially within larger organisations and productions, is a major barrier for carers. A further relevant subject that emerged in the study of Verhoeven et al. (2018) was self-employment/freelancing. The authors found that 60% of carers were freelancers or self-employed, which matches the average within the industry. However, they note that "the precarious nature of freelance work in the Australian screen industry was a dominant challenge and highly unsustainable and undesirable" (Verhoeven et al. 2018, 23). Another important finding from this study is that in contrast to female carers, male carers "do not appear to be negatively affected financially by their caring responsibilities. In fact, their income is higher than that of male non-carers and indicated that they have benefited from a 'fatherhood bonus'" (Verhoeven et al. 2018, 8; see also Dent 2017, 2020). This gender difference indicates that the disadvantage female creative carers face is not a result of caring *per se*, but that there is a gendered dimension to it. Wing-Fay et al. (2015, 59)

thus stresses the importance of remaining "attentive to the question of why parenting does not negatively impact on men's careers in film and television in the way it does on women's".

Looking at written testimonials of women and men with caring responsibilities in the UK screen industry[9], media scholar Susan Berridge (2019) found that while women identify and address the barriers that they experience, they do not actively request structural change, mobilise feminist discourse or talk about gender inequality, which has been detected in numerous other studies (Gill 2014; Jones & Pringle 2015; Liddy 2016). A noteworthy difference that emerged in the testimonials was how women and men referred to their work. While the female participants expressed love for their work and mobilised the passionate work discourse, the male participants did not. Berridge (2021; 7) thus suggests that "a specific tension between work and motherhood" exists, which supports Angela McRobbie's (2016) claim that passionate work is particularly potent among women. Further investigating how women with caring responsibilities narrate their experience of working within the Scottish film industry, Berridge (2021) writes that the participants experienced feelings of alienation due to the lack of other mothers at their workplace but still perceived their personal situation as a result of their own choices rather than structural barriers.

Women navigate motherhood and work in the CCI in different ways. Media scholar Tamsyn Dent (2021) found in her UK study on female media workers with children that there are currently three stigmatised identity 'options' for women to manage creative work and care tensions. First, women who 'manage [motherhood] like a man', by outsourcing care and domestic labour to keep on working senior-level creative positions. Women operating in this model are often labelled has 'hardcore' as they prioritise their work over their maternal role.

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[9] The testimonials were collected as part of a larger research project on care work within the UK screen industries (Raising Films 2016).

Second, women who experience 'the occupational downgrade' and find themselves managing less demanding and desirable work that, however, is more compatible with their caring responsibilities. This group is stigmatised for settling for less valued creative positions, that are usually associated with lower pay and status. And third, 'disappearing/absent mothers' who leave the industry entirely to engage in dominant intensive mothering practices and are stigmatised for this 'decision'. The power of those stigmatised identity models, Dent argues, is that they divert attention from the lack of structural support for caregiving within the CCI onto how the individual manages this creative work/care conflict. This research provides insights into the fact that working creatively from home is a particular way in which some women navigate the work/care tensions they encounter.

So far, the literature on motherhood and creative work highlights how childcaring for female creatives is incompatible with their careers, which often results in their withdrawal from the industry. What is apparent, however, is that those studies focus on creative work that is embedded in larger organisations/productions, mainly the screen industry. Projects and timelines in these environments are complex and often involve teams of people and external deadlines and thus cannot be tailored to the specific needs of the individual worker. In contrast, there are a number of creative practices that operate on a small scale and often can be done from home and as sole traders – such as crafting or writing. In those creative fields, freelancing is seen as an opportunity, offering temporal and local flexibility, especially among women with caring responsibilities. Susan Luckman (2015a), for instance, explored homeworking entrepreneurs in the crafting industry and argues that there are two life stages when women are particularly likely to start a creative enterprise: motherhood and retirement. Luckman (2015b, 151) claims that women with caring responsibilities and with the necessary means – usually middle-class and white – see "working from home as a kind of magical solution" for meeting

the complex socio-economic expectations upon them. Following sociologist Lisa Adkins (2012), Luckman perceives this trend as a folding of the economy into the society, where the home increasingly becomes a space of production. In a further study on Australian designer-makers and their micro-enterprises, Luckman et al. (2018, 59) argue that an incentive to work creatively from home is the ability to make "sales and money doing what you love, on your own schedule, being your own boss, and importantly having the flexibility to organise one's working day around the needs of significant others". Implicitly, Luckman thus assumes that the passionate work discourse draws mothers into creative work, as promising them fulfilment, autonomy and flexibility – characteristics that reflect the modern work ideals discussed above. Further supporting the popularity of this discourse, gender and media studies scholar Shani Orgad (2019) found in her UK study on highly educated middle-class women who left their jobs to stay home with their children that they often desired to start a creative enterprise. However, her interviews showed that in most cases this aspiration lacked a specific plan and reflected unrealistic expectations, illustrating how women buy into the idealised image of the creative micro-entrepreneur, which is "motivated by the hope of self-development, self-realization, satisfaction, pride, and freedom" (Orgad 2019, 145).

Those studies indicate that motherhood is not necessarily incompatible with creative work but can also be the entry point for women into a creative career. Susan Luckman (2015b) was the first researcher to observe motherhood as a potential pathway into creative work. For her study on homeworking micro-entrepreneurial craft producers, she analysed Etsy profiles which showed that a significant number of founding stories originate in motherhood. In these narratives, becoming a mother is highlighted as a life stage where women revaluate their life-work relationship and desire for more flexible, home-based options. The discourses that were mobilised in their profiles were those of choice, satisfaction, achievement, and control,

disguising that for many "self-employment is simply a license for low or no income" (Luckman 2015b, 154). Luckman views homeworking in that context as problematic, as it does not challenge either the structural forces that make this kind of work necessary nor the unequal gender roles within the industry in general. Since Luckman's work, a limited number of other researchers have explored the enabling relationship between motherhood and creative work – with a focus mainly on the craft economy. For instance, English and media scholar Jennifer Russum (2019) examines the role of sewing in the professional lives of middle-class mothers in the US. While micro-entrepreneurial sewing among mothers is not a historically new phenomenon, it has grown drastically as a result of increased digitalisation and online network opportunities, which allow the launch of small-scale businesses with less financial risks. Russum found that the internet enables women to reach a bigger audience from home and also maintain a close relationship with their customers through social media, blurring the private and public dichotomy. In a Finish study, sociologist Hanna-Mari Ikonen (2020) highlighted that the 'mother-creative phenomenon' also exists in countries with higher levels of social security and childcare benefits and a less prominent stay-at-home mother culture than in the neoliberal Anglosphere. The 13 participants in her study included graphic designers, freelance journalists, professional bloggers, and theatre producers. While motherhood was identified as a pathway into creative work, it is noteworthy that the participants themselves did not perceive their creative enterprise as related to motherhood. However, echoing Luckman's (2015b) findings, motherhood inspired them to revaluate their life and life choices. The participant's creative pursuit often started out as a leisure activity that was then turned into a part-time business. All participants spoke passionately about their work and considered it as an integral part of their self. Ikonen (2020) also found that creative work served as a way for participants to differentiate themselves from stay-at-home mothers, indicating a lack of social approval for full-time mothering.

A further Finnish study was conducted by education scholars Sinikka Pöllänen and Laura Voutilainen (2018) on the relationship between stay-at-home mothers, crafting and their wellbeing and the function that creativity fulfils within the everyday lives of mothers. Whilst this research looked at crafting as a hobby rather than a source of income[10], it still provides valuable insights into the role that creativity plays for women with caring responsibilities and how it is experienced – an aspect that has not been considered in the literature above. For their study, the authors recruited 34 participants from a crafting Facebook group, who mostly engaged in knitting and sewing. The participants were middle-class, mostly university educated and between 23-40 years old. The analysis consisted of written narratives in which the participants reflected on the impact of their craft activity on their mental wellbeing. The authors found that crafting was experienced as a mental resource, offering recreation and respite from their daily responsibilities around the family and house as well as opportunities for self-expression and self-development. While crafting is potentially an activity that could be done with or alongside children, the participants preferred doing it alone but valued the home-centeredness of this hobby. The authors further found that crafting was an extension of the participants' mothering practice, perceiving it as a "concrete, tangible form of love and care and a demonstration of the ethics of mothering" (Pöllänen & Voutilainen 2018, 28).

This literature highlights that motherhood as a pathway into creative work is a trend that is observable in different Western countries – Australia (Luckman 2015b; Luckman et al. 2018), the US (Russum 2019), the UK (Orgad 2019) and Finland (Pöllänen & Voutilainen 2018; Ikonen 2020). All studies found the mother-creative phenomenon to be prevalent among middle-class, tertiary educated women, suggesting that creative work at home in this context is

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[10] In contrast to creative work, creative leisure activities are located between play and employment and are characterised by people's voluntary engagement and not the goal to monetise products/services from this activity (Gelber 1999).

a privileged practice. The attraction of creative work is mainly attributed to its promises of fulfilment, passion and self-actualisation as well as the imperative/desire among women with caring responsibilities to engage in intensive mothering practices. What warrants exploration is why the transition to motherhood results in women's uptake of creative work – a topic that requires explanatory frameworks beyond intensive mothering.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how work, work culture and the individual's relationship to work has changed in the past decades, away from traditional, secure employment towards more creative, self-created and precarious but, simultaneously, passionate work. The increasing individualisation that requires reflexive decision-making with regards to all aspects of life, makes choices associated with work and its content/nature central to the project of the self. For the middle class, work preferences in post-industrial, neoliberal society are primarily shaped by discourses of passion, fulfilment and self-actualisation. This conflation of work and identity – you are what you do – together with the passion imperative – do what you love – provide insights into the appeal of creativity and creative work, representing a work culture around which a whole economic sector has been formed. However, this chapter has also highlighted how opportunities within the creative and cultural industries are not distributed equally, with the disadvantages women with caring responsibilities face within the sector being of importance. Even though there is a cohort of women who enter the industry after they become mothers, indicating a positive relationship between motherhood and some forms of creative work, they join a sector in which women earn less and work generally under precarious circumstances, especially if they do so in a self-employed capacity.

Aiming to understand expectations and tensions facing contemporary mothers as they navigate the processes of engaging in creative work, this chapter has provided insights into the central role of work within the project of the self and the particular attraction associated with creative work. It thus enables a better understanding of why women continue to work once they have children (as it constitutes a central aspect of their self) and why this work is of a creative nature (it provides potential for self-actualisation, has a high social status, and has low access barriers, i.e. as a result of digitalisation). However, what the literature on mother-creatives falls short in explaining is *why* and *how* motherhood impacts/instigates women's relationship to creative work. Women with caring responsibilities are required to navigate creative work under unique circumstances. By exploring the expectations contemporary women have to negotiate in relation to motherhood, research from the maternal studies field can contribute a different perspective on this topic and can account for the role motherhood as an institution and experience plays among creatives in a more nuanced way. Therefore, the next chapter will examine relevant theory and research within maternal studies that offer explanatory frameworks for understanding modern motherhood and women's dual expectations to simultaneously be 'good' mothers and workers.

Chapter 3

Modern Motherhood:
Cultural Contradictions and Dual Identities

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to understand modern motherhood and the ways in which it shapes middle-class women's biographies. While the previous chapter highlighted the centrality of work and the appeal/status of creativity in contemporary Western society, this chapter examines the role expectations in relation to motherhood play in generating female subject positions, such as the mother-creative. Of particular interest are current culturally-dominant mothering models as well as the relationship between mothers, work and the home, and thus to the public and private spheres. While the public/private dichotomy has been contested (Goodman 1992; Wischermann & Mueller 2004), I refer to it simply as the separation of home and employment (Scott 2014).

To provide more context for the mother-creative phenomenon, this chapter maps out key aspects of modern middle-class motherhood. First, I outline the historical developments of gender and middle-class family relations in Western societies from traditional to post-modern times, including an overview of developments in Australia in recent decades to show how these have shaped modern motherhood. Next, I discuss the most prevalent maternal discourse among middle-class women – intensive mothering – which indicates that expectations associated with maternal work have intensified in recent years and often is the main rationale used by researchers for explaining the growing trend of home-based working among mothers (Duberley & Carrigan 2013; Foley 2015). Simultaneously, however, the importance of work to women's

sense of self has increased (Pascoe Leahy 2019), resulting in a duality between a maternal and an individuated self (Bueskens 2018). This split sense of self is examined in detail because it offers a framework for grappling with women's quest for self-actualisation and fulfilment outside of motherhood. Lastly, I will review literature examining how the transition to motherhood prompts a myriad of changes in women's lives, including a revaluation of life choices and a preference for meaningful and fulfilling work.

3.2 Recent History of the Middle-Class Family and Mother

Recent modernisation processes highlight the intricate relationship of gender, family life and motherhood with the labour market and work culture. Maternal studies scholar Andrea O'Reilly (2016, 44) argues that "normative motherhood discourses are rewritten in response to, and as a result of, significant cultural and economic change". To better understand women's relationship to work and the family – the public and private spheres – I will delineate the main cultural and economic trends that have shaped modern motherhood. The focus will be on middle-class motherhood because, as discussed in Chapter 2, creative work is most strongly associated with the educated middle class. Since I am interested in the relationship of creative women to mothering, historical developments related to middle-class mothers are most relevant in the context of this thesis.

In traditional, pre-industrial society, women were integral to household production and so childbearing and rearing was performed alongside other tasks (Anderson 1995). The care for children was shared with other household and community members, including the father, grandparents, siblings and extended family that lived nearby. Women possessed very limited personal freedom and were legally, economically, politically and socially subjugated to men

(Shorter 1977). Marriage at that time was an economic arrangement with the aim being to maintain or enhance social status. The main mode of production was aimed at self-sufficiency which meant generating enough to sustain the household members but also to make sure that the family size did not exceed food production. Around 1600 the traditional family organisation underwent a transformation when more families started to produce goods that exceeded self-sufficiency and subsequently were sold for external capital (Goody 1983). The opportunity to earn independent wages also increased the birth rate, as more family members could be supported with an additional income. For women, this development meant that more time and energy had to be dedicated to raising, birthing and nursing children (Bueskens 2018).

Increasing industrialisation – which occurred at a different pace and form in various Western nations and regions roughly between 1750-1900 – generally marked the end of the household- and resource-based economy and its replacement by waged labour and mass production, predominantly in urban factories. It also brought an end to self-sufficiency for the majority of people, requiring their engagement in paid labour as well as the sourcing of essential goods and services outside the home. This division of labour resulted in the separation of the private and public spheres, whereas the home became a non-productive and private space (Oakley 1974; O'Reilly 2016). Thus, for middle-class women, this structural shift meant the loss of their productive role within the household and their economic dependence on marriage and their husbands (Bueskens 2018). The new middle-class family constellation that emerged was that of a mostly absent wage-earning husband and father and the sequestered mother and wife, whose role it was to care for the house, children and husband. Furthermore, the end of self-sufficiency increased economic independence as well as the mass migration into cities and smaller living spaces, which resulted in the dissolution of the multi-generational, extended family households and the formation of the nuclear family (Parsons 1951). Everyone left the

home except for the married (middle-class) women, for whom "motherhood and the conjugal relationship became ends in themselves" (Bueskens 2018, 112). This sequestration process was reinforced by the emergence of a domestic ideology of moral motherhood and domesticity. Narratives were produced during this time that highlighted the important role of maternal love and the home for the reproduction of a flourishing society – most notably Rousseau's (2003) work *Émile* published in 1762, which impacted the public discourse in the 18th and 19th century (Bloch 1995). On a structural level, the separation of public and private spheres, in turn, generated a gendered division of labour as well as the exclusion of women from economic, political and civic participation in public life. Sociologist Petra Bueskens (2018, 115) thus argues that "it is only because women were structurally forced to sacrifice their own ends as 'individuals' that male citizens were able to operate as if they were free". In addition, the privatisation of the home has also been associated with "an increase in powerlessness, [and] a desperate loneliness" (Rich 1986, 53) for many mothers, who were now required to perform care work alone at home.

The default position of the stay-at-home woman established by industrialisation was disrupted by the Second World War[11], where women had to engage in paid labour to replace the wages of their husbands and to sustain the household during their absence as well as to support the war efforts in countries such as Britain and the US. However, once the war ended and men returned home, women were expected to revert to their pre-war roles as full-time mothers and housewives (Riley 1983). Sociologist and maternal studies scholar Andrea O'Reilly (2016, 45) claims that this return to the home was "orchestrated and facilitated by an ideological redesign of what constitutes good motherhood". O'Reilly here refers to the emergence and popularity of a psychological theory of the mother-child relationship, such as attachment theory, that

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[11] As well as early feminist counter-discourses that propagated the idea of an independent 'New Woman' in the late 19th century (Jordan 1999).

promoted the importance of the mother-child bond and cautioned about the long-term negative mental health impact on children associated with maternal deprivation (Thurer 1994) – a mothering practice that could only be engaged in under conditions of post war affluence. O'Reilly (2016) terms this model of good motherhood 'custodian motherhood' which views mothers as naturally designed to nurture and raise children full-time as primary caregivers. This trend was supported by gendered divisions of labour and high-income earning men/husbands, whose salary could sustain the living wage of a whole family (Pascoe Leahy 2019). However, the discursive attempt to reassign women into the home was challenged by the women's liberation movement as well as social and political changes from the 1960s onwards – particularly second-wave feminism.

Second-wave feminism marks the moment when women themselves began to enter the public sphere and higher education, writing and researching about motherhood (Smith 1974). Thus, rather than external factors (economic changes or war) dictating the lives of families, change was now driven collectively by women. Second-wave feminist appraisals of motherhood aimed at revealing and criticising patriarchal structures and to foster "equality and greater personal autonomy for women" (Everingham 1994). One influential, though since then widely criticised, book within feminist circles, was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which gave a voice to white middle-class women, who wanted to be more than housewives and mothers and saw motherhood as a form of patriarchal control[12]. In line with other feminists, Friedan identified education and employment as spheres of liberation for women from their domestic realm. As explored in Chapter 2, women's inclusion in the public sphere of work and education, provided them with time, space and money to develop new identities and roles within society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

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[12] Other books on this issue were written by female sociologists at this time, such as *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (Gavron 1966) or *Housewife* (Oakley 1974).

It is useful specifically to examine second-wave feminism in relation to motherhood in Anglo-Australia during this time[13], as women's liberation movements had different foci across countries. Historian Carla Pascoe Leahy (2019) argues that feminism in Australia focused particularly on women's rights to work and thus job growth and access to childcare. Some of the demands were realised when the Labor party, with Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister, was elected in 1972 with their campaign titled 'It's Time'. Pascoe Leahy (2019, 115) writes about the changes prompted by this political momentum:

> Whitlam instigated a sweeping program of legislative reforms including phasing in equal pay for women workers; introducing financial support for single mothers; removing fees for tertiary education (leading to a proliferation of women studying at universities); introducing no-fault divorce; making birth control and abortion more accessible; and improving the availability of childcare.

A further landmark legislation for the integration of mothers into the labour market was the 1984 Sex Discrimination Act, which listed as one of its objectives "to eliminate, so far as possible, discrimination on the ground of family responsibilities in the area of work" (Parliament of Australia 1984). This was followed by the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act in 1986, which required large organisations to report on their efforts to increase female employment (Grimshaw 2019). As a result of these legal frameworks, the workforce participation of women grew significantly from 16% in 1961 to 44% in 2001 (Grimshaw 2019; ABS 2021). However, it is important to note, that the work women performed was often part-time as well as causal and thus precarious (Pocock 2005).

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[13] I want to emphasise here that this historical overview is specific to Anglo-Australians and acknowledge that the history for Aboriginal mothers under colonial settlement was distinctively different at this time (Pascoe Leahy 2019).

The increase in female employment also coincided with a weakening economy and the necessity of two incomes to sustain a family household, highlighting the diversity of reasons for women to work (Pascoe Leahy 2019). Furthermore, divorce rates reached over 50%, within a few years, further increasing the significance of an income for women.

However, whilst the inclusion of women in the labour market was widely encouraged, workforce participation of women with children was met with more resistance (Grimshaw 2019). Even though the employment rates among women with children increased steadily from 46% in 1980 to 60% in 1993 among married mothers (Cass 1994), they were lower among women with young children and single mothers (Warren et al. 2020). Sociologist Betsy Wearing (1984) found in her study at that time that the majority of mothers felt conflicted about workforce participation, especially when they had pre-school aged children. The lower employment rates among this cohort were reflective of public discourses that stress the importance of a close mother-child bond during the first 'formative' years. This sentiment is still prevalent in Australia today, were half of the participants in a 2015 study agreed that a pre-school child is likely to suffer if their mother works full-time (Warren et al. 2020). This ambivalence to work during early motherhood is important contextual information, as it helps to explain why some women seek to create their own, flexible work opportunities from home to accommodate their young children's needs.

The 'decision' for women to stay home and care for their children until they go to school, is often also a result of the lack of quality, affordable and accessible childcare (Grimshaw 2019). Historian Patricia Grimshaw (2019, 360) argues that the absence of "systemic support structures" in a neoliberal Australia – in contrast to many European countries – made it the individual's responsibility to balance work and family demands. In a comparative study

including the US, Australia, Denmark, Italy and France looking at paid and unpaid work performed by non-parents and parents of young children, sociologists Lyn Craig and Killian Mullan (2011, 1359) found that:

> parenthood was associated with more total work and a deeper gender division of labor in all the countries studied, but the effects were most pronounced in the Anglo countries, where children are regarded as private responsibility, family care is valorized, and there is gender neutral opportunity in the public sphere but little public institutional support to balance work and family.

Craig and Mullan's study highlights the intensive workload that falls on parents – and often mothers – in countries that offer minimal support to families. It is thus up to individual families to navigate the conflict between paid work and motherhood and to compensate the lack of institutional support, indicating why creating their own work opportunities at home to better navigate work and care is a growing trend among mothers in neoliberal countries such as Australia (Baxter 2013).

Researching work and employment in Australia across decades, economist Barbara Pocock (2003, 2005) points out that the 'choices' women make regarding work and care arrangements are not made autonomously but are constrained by surrounding conditions. Pocock calls those conditions 'work/care regimes', which are context specific and involve social, cultural and institutional factors that structure how parents divide paid employment and childcare. This work/care regime in the early 2000s in Australia was based on a full-time earning male worker and a part-time female worker, who is the primary carer (Pocock 2003, 2005). However, despite the preference to balance childcare and work, Pascoe Leahy (2019) argues that since the

women's liberation movement and second-wave feminism there has been a discursive shift away from motherhood to paid employment as the primary source of fulfilment (Pascoe Leahy 2021). This trend is in accordance with the elevated status of work in society and in people's project of the self, outlined in Chapter 2. The growing importance of work in women's lives, however, is in conflict with the dominant model of mothering – intensive motherhood. Since women have been liberated into the public sphere of work, mothering expectations have intensified, which tie middle-class mothers, as primary caregivers, back to the home and private sphere. Examining this ideology is important in relation to mother-creatives as it highlights the expectations in relation to motherhood that they need to negotiate when engaging in creative work.

3.3 Intensive Motherhood

There is consensus within maternal studies that motherhood and mothering practices are neither an inherent trait nor entirely a result of autonomous choices but shaped by specific cultural discourses and ideologies (Goodwin & Huppatz 2010). Paradoxically, the movement of women into the public sphere was met in recent decades with an increase in the demands that women with childrearing responsibility face beyond attending to the basic needs of "feeding, clothing and sheltering" (Faircloth 2014, 181). Sociologist Sharon Hays has termed this development 'intensive mothering'*,* which she views as the dominant ideology of socially appropriate childrearing in Western societies that are dominated by a patriarchal ideology of motherhood (Green 2010). She defines intensive mothering as "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" (Hays 1996, 8). Whilst from her study of American mothers, Hays detected class-based and intersectional differences in mothering approaches and acknowledged that mothering practices are shaped by women's individual

socialisation and context, she argues that all mothers – though middle-class mothers in particular – are subjected to the ideology of intensive mothering, even if they reject it. The origin of intensive mothering practices, Hays (1996) argues, can be found in custodian motherhood and the influence of attachment theory. However, Canadian sociologist and maternal studies scholar Andrea O'Reilly (2016) views custodian and intensive mothering as two distinct discourses and practices, with the latter one emerging in the 1980s and 1990s. She argues that whilst the dominant discourse on custodian mothering demanded mothers to be at home full-time with their children, it did not require the same intensity of mothering as today where the mother is expected to be "continuously attuned to the psychological, emotional, or cognitive needs of their children" (O'Reilly 2016, 47). This intense mother-child relationship has also resulted in the intertwining of their identities where mothers view "their children's success as a reflection of their own" (Ennis 2014, 6). It is thus helpful to specify the characteristics of this dominant mothering ideology to better understand how it has intensified care work for mothers and, in turn, shaped the work and career choices of middle-class women.

Following Hays, psychologist Linda Ennis (2014) argues that the ideology of intensive mothering is based on four core beliefs: (1) that mothers are the central care givers; (2) that mothers rely on experts for advice on appropriate child rearing; (3) that mothering is perceived as more valuable than paid employment and; (4) that mothering requires spending an unprecedented amount of time, energy and material resources on the child. Whilst the first three core beliefs could also be applied in various degrees to post Second World War mothering ideologies, it is the fourth – temporal, emotional and financial investment – that sets intensive mothering apart. Elaborating more on the intensive nature of contemporary mothering, Hays (1996, 128) describes the following aspects of child rearing as characteristic of this ideology:

The willingness to nurture the child, to listen to the child, to decipher the child's needs, to respond to the child's desires, to respect the child, to consult the experts for suggestions on what the child may require, to search long and hard for appropriate alternative caregivers to watch the child should the parent be unavailable.

All of these activities are time- and energy-consuming and increase the load of care work that is performed by mothers, in particular, with studies showing that contemporary middle-class women spend more time, energy and money on their children than ever before (Stone 2011; 2020; Craig et al. 2014; Huisman & Joy 2014; Dotti Sani & Treas 2016). This trend towards more intensive mothering practices, however, is somewhat counterintuitive, given that more mothers today work in paid employment than ever before. In Australia, 63% of partnered women with children under the age of four were employed in 2019, up 30% since 1984 (Warren et al. 2020). Identifying this contradiction 20 years earlier, Hays (1996, 3) remarked:

When well over half of all mothers are in the paid labour force, when the image of a career woman is that of a competitive go-getter, and when the image of the family is one of disintegrating values and relationships, one would expect a de-emphasis on the ideology of child rearing as labour intensive, emotionally absorbing work.

To understand why child rearing methods have intensified even though most women participate in the labour market and aspire to have careers, it is necessary to look at the purposes this dominant discourse serves. In the maternal studies literature, the intensification of motherhood has been linked to a number of social, cultural, economic, political and technological factors.

On a socio-cultural level, the emergence and persistence of intensive mothering has been related by scholars to (1) the perpetuation of patriarchy; (2) counteracting social erosion, and; (3) social class reproduction. O'Brien Hallstein and O'Reilly (2012, 8) view the idealisation of the intensive mother as a "post-second wave sophisticated backlash ideology" (see also Douglas & Michaels 2004), counteracting the advancements made by women in the previous decades. The authors thus interpret the ideology of intensive mothering as a way to regulate mothers to ensure that the main responsibility of child rearing, domestic labour and family life still falls on women despite their advancements in other areas. Hays (1996) herself acknowledges the feminist critique that sees men in positions of power – predominately middle/upper class and white – as beneficiaries and protectionists of this system as it upholds traditional gender hierarchies. However, she also cautions that this view is simplistic and omits the agency of mothers. In contrast, Hays (1996) argues that with the growing unreliability of social relationships (for instance with partners and/or the family), there is an increased demand for stable intimate relationships and that the mother-child bond provides one of those opportunities for close social connection that is otherwise absent or declining. Looking at the social role of intensive mothering on a macro level, sociologist Bonnie Fox (2006) claims that intensive mothering, and especially staying at home whilst mothering intensively, is a marker of middle-class status. The activities that intensive mothers engage in as part of their parenting system, such as early childhood education, assure that their children will be "better prepared for success later in life" (Fox 2006, 256) and hence maintain their middle-class position (O'Reilly 2016). Sociologists Melissa Milkie and Catherine Warner (2014, 68) view 'status safeguarding' as an extensive labour performed by mothers with the aim of:

creating a thriving child who is distinguished as unique and, more fundamentally, over the many long years to adulthood, set to achieve a similar or better place in the social hierarchy compared with his parents.

Paradoxically, engaging in this intensive work prevents the women themselves from advancing their careers and thus their social status and reflects the extent to which mothers feel responsible for managing their children's future.

Increased expectations placed on parents – and especially mothers as primary caregivers – can also be observed in policy discourse. Drawing on popular findings from neuroscience[14], policy documents in the US and UK indirectly started promoting intensive mothering in the mid-1990s by paying special attention to the critical periods of infant brain development (Nadesan 2002; Wall 2004, 2010; Macvarish 2014; Lee & Lowe 2014; Jensen 2018). Early childhood policies developed at this time highlighted the importance of the first three years of a child's life (starting from conception) and how the intellectual, behavioural, social and emotional developments made in early life determine a child's success and accomplishments in later life. Since then, a vast number of resources have been made available that advise parents – and, thus, almost by default mothers – to be more attuned to their children's emotional, physical, psychological, and cognitive needs, all of which contribute to an increase in the childrearing work that parents and mothers in particular are expected to perform (Wall 2011; Budds et al. 2017). Looking at the political investment in family issues, sociologist Jan Macvarish (2014) argues that whilst there was an agreement up until the 1990s that family matters are private matters, policy documents and discourses in Western societies have increasingly made family life a public concern. Child wellbeing is thereby at the centre of those policies, as children are seen as an investment in the

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[14] See Bruer (1999) for a critique of the lack of evidence-base in neuroscience that support populist claims about critical brain development in a child's first three years. Bruer argues that scientific evidence shows that brains are wired for life-long learning.

future of the nation. Whilst in the past the focus was on reacting to problems, the attention has shifted to preventing problems before they arise, especially with respect to educational achievements, unemployment and crime (Macvarish 2014). Parenting courses are now offered to most parents in Western societies, and it is assumed that what constitutes 'good parenting' can, and has, been established by science. The dominant parenting approach currently advocated is positive parenting "which relies on the use of 'positive reinforcement' in place of punishment" (Macvarish 2014, 81). This approach has been developed by the University of Queensland and was ranked by the United Nations as the world's most effective evidence-based parenting program (UNODC 2009). Today, it provides the basis for policies targeting parenting around the world. The Positive Parenting Program offers "support strategies designed to prevent behavioural, emotional and developmental problems in children" (UNODC 2009, 5), indicating the increased expectations placed on parents – and thus especially mothers – for the performance of their children. Social issues, which formerly might have been perceived to be structural in nature, such as disadvantages resulting from poverty or social marginalisation, are now viewed as individual failures (Macvarish 2014; Reynolds 2020) reflecting a neoliberal rationale (Vandebald Giles 2014).

The intensification of maternal labour is also related to socio-economic changes in capitalist societies. O'Reilly (2016, 52) claims that intensive mothering most commonly is a practice that middle-class women in their thirties engage in after they have established a career and view it as a "continuation of their busy lives as professional women". She argues that:

> these professional, highly educated women, who are unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable with the everyday, devalued, invisible work of mothering and

domesticity, fill up their days with public activities that can be documented as productive and visible work. (2016, 52)

Similarly, sociologist Pamela Stone (2007), in her study of career women choosing to opt out of their job once they have children talks about the professionalisation of motherhood and domesticity as a way for these 'successful' women to construct a meaningful identity as a mother. In those cases where women return to work, O'Reilly (2016) argues that engaging in intensive mothering practices is a way to reduce feelings of guilt. Furthermore, women's access to paid employment also correlates with the growing amount of money invested in children, as mothers are the main consumers of child-related products and services (Clarke 2004; Pocock 2006). Advertising, together with popular culture and social media, plays an important role in creating consumer desires amongst mothers evoking emotions such as insecurity and aspiration (Brown 2014). Various mother and child related products promise to make life more manageable as well as increase positive outcomes. It is a billion-dollar industry that has a strong interest in upholding the financial investment that is associated with the intensive childrearing practices today (Brown 2014). In fact, gender studies scholar Tatjana Takševa (2014) argues that in contemporary Western society mothering has been commercialised and that the separation that Hays (1996) described in her book between the nurturing logic of intensive mothering and the capitalist logic of the market is eroding. Takševa (2014, 215) contends that:

while some mothers might be critical of capitalism and may seek ways of resisting some of its aspects, it is impossible to systematically opt out of a cultural and economic system in which we work, live and raise children, or stay immune to its dominant or even implicit ideology.

The ideology of intensive mothering is part of a market-oriented society, in which goods and ideas are produced and consumed to enable and promote intensive mothering practices.

Lastly, it has also been argued that the technological developments of the past three decades, most notably the internet and social media (Rothbaum et al. 2008), have increased the pressure on mothers and are effective promoters of the intensive mothering ideology (Douglas & Michaels 2004; Chae 2015; Arnold & Martin 2016). During pregnancy and childrearing, women now have access to an unprecedented amount of information provided by experts, government and peer-groups (such as forums and so-called mummy blogs), which both promote as well as challenge intensive mothering ideals (Huisman & Joy 2014; Orton-Johnson 2016; Valtchanov et al. 2016). The internet is established as the primary source for parenting information (Rothbaum et al. 2008; Johnson 2015). There are a variety of online and community groups available on various childrearing related topics (such as pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, sleep, diet, health, parenting style) that parents can engage in, and source information from. In addition, social media in general, and 'celebrity moms' in particular (O'Brien Hallstein 2011; Chae 2015), contribute to the glorification of motherhood where women seemingly have it all, encouraging comparison and competition among mothers. Engaging in, and observing, online parenting content and discussions is also a form of intensive mothering and adds to the workload of mothers. In other words, the media's representation of motherhood, which is often idealised and unrealistic (Johnston & Swanson 2003), is an effective tool for reproducing the discourses of intensive mothering.

Looking at the different social spheres and institutions that promote the ideology of intensive mothering shows the complexity associated with the production, reproduction and normalisation of this discourse. As this overview has shown, the upholding of this time-,

energy- and money-consuming mothering ideology cannot be attributed to a single interest group but serves various 'beneficiaries' simultaneously – including mothers/primary caregivers (providing them with intimate relationships and a meaningful maternal identity), fathers/secondary caregivers (sparing them from unpaid childcare and domestic work by preserving traditional gender roles), corporations (profiting from the commercialisation of motherhood) and government (offsetting social responsibility to the family/mothers). Fulfilling all these different functions concurrently explains why the ideology of intensive mothering dominates maternal practices in the private sphere despite women's increased participation in the public sphere.

To understand the influence that the intensive mothering ideology exerts on society and individuals through normalising and internalising certain practices and expectations, the Foucauldian (1977a) concept of 'disciplinary power' has been found useful (Stone 2020). Rather than explicitly prohibiting and punishing particular behaviours, control is executed more subtly by measuring mothers "against a set of ideal norms" (Stone 2020, 2). As shown above, judgment on the appropriate way to mother is exercised by social institutions, authorities, experts and individuals, and internalised by women themselves who are often their own and each other's harshest critics (Henderson et al. 2010). In addition, conflicts between parenting approaches are willingly exploited and reinforced by media discourses encouraging competition between mothers (Moore & Abetz 2016) that can lead to, what Darnton (1990) called, 'mommy wars'. In other words, disciplinary power to conform to dominant mothering ideals is exerted externally as well as internally. Additionally, intensive mothering practices are often perceived as 'enlightened mothering' (Douglas & Michael 2004) and 'choices' that women consciously make – such as the choice to stay home to care for one's child(ren) over having a career – appropriating feminist narratives of empowerment and agency (Douglas &

Michael 2004; O'Brien Hallstein 2011). However, critical feminist theorists view the concept of choice as a "neoliberal fiction that serves to disguise and justify social inequities, particularly those of gender" (O'Reilly 2016, 60), highlighting that the choices mothers, as structurally constrained beings, can make are limited.

Looking at the personal and financial costs of intensive mothering, it is worth asking whether there exists an alternative model of mothering. Feminist critiques from maternal studies scholars on intensive mothering practices do not question the general assumption at the basis of this mothering ideology, that children have distinctive needs that require more attention than previously acknowledged, but they challenge the belief that the biological mother is the only person that can fulfill these needs (O'Reilly 2016; Bueskens 2018). Black feminist scholars, for instance, argue that intensive mothering privileges white middle-class narratives and neglects practices of 'other mothering' (Hill Collins 1990) and 'community mothering', which have been pivotal in black communities (Reynolds 2020). Alternatives to intensive mothering do exist – out of necessity or resistance (O'Reilly 2004) – but have not yet been able to challenge the dominant ideal of the 'good' intensive mother. Furthermore, the heteronormative (and biologistic) nature of the intensive mothering discourse has been critiqued for overlooking all those parents who perform mothering work outside of the gender binary and traditional family model (Gibson 2014).

The disciplinary power of the intensive mothering ideology is exercised both on an external level (through discourses and institutions) as well as on an internal level in forms of internalised expectations and desires. However, the imperative/desire to mother intensively is not sufficient on its own to explain why some women who stay home with their children create their own work opportunities (which often only produce no, or low, incomes) when they become mothers

and why they seek to engage in fulfilling, meaningful creative work. This next section thus explores another facet of modern motherhood among middle-class women beyond the expectation to be a 'good' intensive mother, namely the quest to simultaneously be a self-actualised individual, which in neoliberal society is often seen to be achieved through work. This tension is what has been described in the maternal studies literature as split or dual identities. Furthermore, intensive mothering models do not address women's relationship to their maternal work and role. In recent years, public and academic discourses on motherhood have increasingly highlighted the ambivalent feelings women exhibit in relation to mothering, including regret (Baraitser 2008; Donath 2017; O'Reilly 2022). The dual identities framework allows for this affective component to be considered, as the ambivalence often originates from the desire of women 'to be more than mothers' (Bueskens 2018).

3.4 Cultural Contradictions and Dual Identities

Sharon Hays is most commonly referenced in relation to her analytical work on intensive motherhood, however, her influential book *The Cultural Contradiction of Motherhood* (1996) actually is concerned with the paradoxical cultural context in which contemporary mothers operate. Hays is particularly interested in the duality that exists between intensifying mothering practices and increased labour market participation. She argues that women with caring responsibilities have to constantly juggle "the contradictory logics of appropriate behaviour at home and appropriate behaviour in the outside world" (Hays 1996, 3). Hays further claims that it has become the responsibility of mothers to protect their 'innocent' children from the market logic in the home. Mothers who work are then required to adjust their behaviour when coming home from work or leaving the home for work "since the values that are applicable outside the home are destructive inside it" (Hays 1996, 65) and vice versa. The increasing expectations that

women are faced with at work as well as at home are impossible to meet without having to make 'concessions' either at home or at work. One push factor for women to uphold this duality, according to Hays, is that the status of a career is more valued by society than that of the mother, given that one is rewarded monetarily, and the other is not. Nevertheless, it has been found that many women themselves prioritise their children over work – at least in the early years of their child's development – which is in accordance with intensive mothering ideals (Hakim 2011; Bueskens 2018) and demonstrates the contradicting pressures that mothers have to navigate.

Whilst Sharon Hays was interested in the structural aspects – predominately the public/private divide – that shape modern motherhood, other maternal studies scholars have scrutinised the subject positions those structures produce. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein and Andrea O'Reilly (2012, 5), for instance, term the current generation of Western women the 'post-second wave beneficiaries', whose lives "have become more and more similar to those of men" as a result of the social changes brought about by second wave feminism. However, whilst this development might be experienced as liberating for women with no caring responsibilities, women who become mothers face a tension concerning their sense of self before and after they have children. O'Brien Hallstein and O'Reilly (2012) thus talk about a split subjectivity that contemporary women experience "between newfound gains as unencumbered women and old gendered expectations when women become mothers" (O'Reilly 2016, 8; see also Orenstein 2000; Wood 2007). Australian sociologist Petra Bueskens (2018) has dedicated a whole book to this subject. In her work *Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities*, Bueskens examines how the cultural contradictions that arise from the ideologies of the private and public sphere on a structural level manifest in two different, dialectical (rather than contradictory) modes of selves in mothers – the maternal self and the individuated or autonomous self. These two modes refer to the private, domestic self on the one hand and a public, individualised self

on the other. Interestingly, Bueskens does not offer a definition or a conceptual framework for identity in her book, however, she acknowledges that the focus on two modes of the self contradicts a psychological understanding of a singular identity and undercuts a sociological perspective of multiple (hyphenated) identities and roles that an individual inhabits or assumes (such as mother, wife, worker). She argues that the splitting of the self dominates women's self-perception after they become mothers and experience a loss of the autonomy that was taken for granted before they had children. She observes that "the idea that 'time out' or time at work facilitates another kind of self is standard parlance among mothers" (Bueskens 2018, 264). Whilst Bueskens specifically studied mothers who temporarily and physically leave the home for self-actualisation purposes – a cohort she calls 'revolving mothers' – she emphasises that the mother's 'departure' may not be literal and that it can consist "in leaving aside the demands of the domestic role to undertake paid work or other autonomously defined pursuits" (Bueskens 2018, 22), acknowledging that these activities increasingly take place inside the home. Her framework is thus useful in exploring the desire of mothers to engage in self-actualising activities, such as creative work, alongside their maternal responsibilities within the home.

Bueskens is interested in how this maternal/autonomous duality in mothers was shaped historically. She claims that women's liberation from the domestic sphere – which she perceives as defining for personal freedom – and the sequestration of mothers to the home are both products of the same Western modernisation processes. Bueskens (2019, 292) argues:

> The critical reason for the unique burden of modern motherhood is its sequestration to the private domestic sphere and the associated privatisation of the (nuclear) family, such that mothering is largely performed in isolation, separated out from (yet undergirding) the civil and economic spheres of life. On the other hand, […] it is this very

sequestration that has produced streamlined 'childfree' spaces to which women have (also) turned for their own education, labour, leisure and creativity.

According to Bueskens, the sequestration of mothers has led to the intensification and invisibility of mothering, since no-one else is there to witness or share the increased care work. Furthermore, as a consequence of their high care and domestic responsibilities – the infamous 'double shift' (Hochschild 1989) – mothers today strive but struggle to create childfree spaces. According to Bueskens, childfree spaces consist of free space and time that can be used for leisure activities and to maintain an individuated identity, for instance, by working, being creative or fostering self-development and thus seem particularly relevant in relation to home-based mothers who engage in creative work. The transition to motherhood for many women can be synonymous with a decline in freedom, autonomy and thus the individuated self, as the majority of care and domestic work is performed by women (Crompton et al. 2005; Wilkins & Lass 2018) – even if domestic labour was distributed equally before having children (Crittenden 2002). As a result, Bueskens argues that women in modern Western societies are free as individuals but constrained as mothers. If women actively seek to maintain their individuated selves alongside their domestic and caring responsibilities – in other words, if they want to 'have it all' – they are required to do it all. This outcome is what Bueskens terms the 'new sexual contract' departing from feminist political theorist Carole Pateman's (1988) concept of the 'sexual contract' that describes how gender inequality and patriarchy are perpetuated through contractual relations such as marriage. In that sense, Bueskens (2018, 14) describes a shift in the past seventy years in key issues concerning mothers "from the problem of domestic isolation and boredom [Friedan 1963] […] to the problem of contradiction, juggling and exhaustion". Bueskens argues that while men's full-time work commitments have been enabled by the sequestration, and thus the support, of their wives and the unpaid work they perform, no

equivalent has been made available to women who enter(ed) the labour force. However, this development does not mean that women do not aspire to have children; on the contrary, sociologist Catherine Hakim's (2011) preference theory shows that a majority of women in the UK and Spain, still desired and prioritised a family life. About this issue, Bueskens (2018, 292) writes:

> Most women today wish to be mothers; what they do not bargain for (literally) is the 'default position' that motherhood typically brings. Thus even when women 'choose' motherhood, the loss of freedom this choice entails, and the uneven burdens it produces, routinely shocks and distresses.

In addition to being a mother, most women also want to work, have leisure time and self-actualise (Hakim 2011); in short, they desire "what is structurally available to most men" (Bueskens 2018, 16). Whilst inhabiting the dual spaces of an intensive mother and an individual concurrently is a time restricted phenomenon, mostly concerning women who are between the ages of 30 and 45 and have children, it has socio-economic consequences that go beyond this time period, such as reduced income, career advancement and retirement provisions (Livermore et al. 2011; Keck & Saraceno 2013; Eunjung et al. 2019). There is thus social and economic pressure on women to cultivate their non-maternal self while caring for children (Blaxland 2010), a burden that women are left to deal with and often fail to navigate without adverse effects, such as compromised physical and mental wellbeing (Hubert & Aujoulat 2018).

Split identities have been described as a product of Western modernisation processes such as the separation of private and public sphere during industrialisation and the emancipation/individualisation of women in the 20th century. Post-colonial feminist writing,

however, exposed it as a form of white, middle-class privilege. In her essay titled *Revolutionary Parenting,* black American feminist theorist and social activist bell hooks (2000 [1984], 133), argues that perceiving motherhood as an "serious obstacle to women's liberation, a trap confining women to home, keeping them tied to cleaning, cooking and child care" is a white middle-class phenomenon. hooks (2000, 133) continues:

> Had black women voiced their own views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills, or education would have been top of the list, but not motherhood.

As this statement illustrates, hooks views the problematisation of motherhood as an indicator of white, middle-class privilege because unlike black and working-class women, middle-class white women do not experience work as a world of alienated labour. hooks thus highlights that the tension between maternal and individuated selves refers to a position of privilege, where the world beyond the home and family is considered desirable and work is perceived as fulfilling and satisfying. In contrast, hooks (2000, 134) writes that working-class mothers of colour view work outside the home as "stressful, degrading and dehumanizing" making them want "to have more time to share with family [and] to leave the world of alienated work". British sociologist Tracey Reynolds (2020, 3) also argues that for black mothers, the public/private distinction is more blurred and that "black mothering operates at the borders of public/private boundaries". Caring for children often occurs outside of the private realm – in the community, by other mothers, grandparents, neighbours, teachers etc – and is thus rather a collective than an individual pursuit and responsibility. Experiencing and relating to spaces, work and motherhood differently suggests that not all mothers desire an autonomous self and thus a split in their identity when transitioning from unencumbered woman to mother. hooks'

work in particular highlights how the work culture that idealises passion and self-actualisation outlined in Chapter 2, is not applicable to the lived experiences and opportunities of marginalised women. Whilst I have emphasised from the beginning that the mother-creative phenomenon is an outcome of class and privilege, research such as that of hooks and Reynolds, highlights how class- (and race-) specific experiences of work and motherhood are.

What this review of literature has shown so far is that middle-class women engage in intensive mothering and at the same time they seek to invest in and realise their individuated self – the continuance of the life and opportunities they had before having children – particularly through work. One way that women navigate those two contradictory roles is by working from home, which increasingly erodes or reconfigures the public/private dichotomy described by Hays (Morehead 2001; Bueskens 2018). For instance, a trend that has gained momentum in recent years and is enabled by new technologies, are mothers who work from home in a freelance/self-employed capacity, in order to better combine motherhood and paid work (Ekinsmyth 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Duberley & Carrigan 2013; Taylor 2015; Luckman 2015b; Foley 2015; Foley et al.2018). In Australia, women with children under the age of 12 and living in a partnered relationship, are much more likely to be self-employed (23%) compared to the rest of the female workforce (9%) (Baxter 2013; Foley 2015).

Women who configure their business around their caring responsibilities, have been termed 'mumpreneurs' (Ekinsmyth 2014), which refers to a specific sub-group of female entrepreneurs who seek to "achieve 'work–life harmony' through an identity orientation that blurs the boundary between the roles of 'mother' and 'businesswoman'" (Ekinsmyth 2011, 104) and who prioritise their family commitments over their business (Surangi & Ranwala 2018). While their enterprises often involve parenting and child-related products (Archer 2019), mumpreneurs

build businesses around all kinds of economically viable activities (Duberley & Carrigan 2013). Mumpreneurship enables women to adhere to the dominant intensive mothering ideology by being home and available for their children whilst also being economically productive (Duberley & Carrigan 2013). Despite this entrepreneurial trend among mothers often being celebrated as female empowerment and a conscious choice, Foley et al. (2018, 314) argue that mothers often do not view entrepreneurship as an opportunity "but as a functional necessity in managing the actual temporal and perceived moral obligations of motherhood" (see also Duberley & Carrigan 2013). This finding confirms that rather than challenging the corporate work culture that fails to accommodate mothers with their caring needs and aspirations, the responsibility is put on the individual to find a way to manage high care and work expectations. The mumpreneur contributes to asymmetrical and gendered parenting as well as working patterns, where women continue to be primary caregivers and engage in precarious part-time work. It is thus not surprising that the concept of a 'dadpreneur' is far less prominent[15], which highlights the gendered nature of this entrepreneurship sub-category. Due to the risks associated with self-employment, engaging in mumpreneurship generally requires a partner with a stable income (Vadnjal et al. 2009), placing women into a financially dependent position. The mumpreneur phenomenon is thus reflective of more general modern work trends towards self-employment as well as precarity. Overall, mumpreneurship highlights how women respond to the external and internal pressures to combine work and care by creating their own flexible work opportunities at home around their family's needs, indicating how this cohort may have found a way to manage the cultural contradictions that Hays (1996) wrote about. What this literature also indicates is that the transition to motherhood is an event were women reconfigure their sense of self and revaluate their work-family balance. I thus next look at research that has studied women's entry into the life stage of motherhood.

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[15] A Google search on the 30th of November 2021 for the term 'dadpreneur' yields 32,400 results, whilst the search for 'mumpreneur' results in 250,000 and 'mompreneur' in 1,910,000 findings.

3.5 The Transition to Motherhood: Prioritising the Private

Research highlights that the transition to motherhood starts from early pregnancy. From her study of 30 middle-class pregnant women in the UK, sociologist Lucy Bailey (1999), for instance, found an increased focus on family relationships, intimacy and the home. Similarly, psychologist Jonathan Smith (1999, 194), who interviewed four middle-class women three times during their first pregnancy (at 3, 6 and 9 months) as well as five months post-partum, observes a shift in focus "from the public world of work to the more intimate world of family" during pregnancy. This focus is even more pronounced after birth, where women review their future life prospects and projects, which are likely to have changed during their transition to motherhood. Comparing the expectations and anticipations of women during pregnancy with the lived reality post birth, indicates that the changes that women undergo are often unexpected and based on idealised and romanticised representations of motherhood in popular discourse (Huppatz 2018)[16]. For instance, interviews with 62 pregnant women conducted by Rachel Thomson et al. (2008) revealed that the transition was much more challenging than anticipated. The authors examined motherhood through the framework of choice biographies proposed in modern social theory and view having children as central to the reflexive biography of women, particularly between the ages of 25 and 35. For some of their study participants "one of the attractions of motherhood was the potential to abandon an individual project of self, putting others first and entering into a collective endeavour" (Thomson et al. 2008, 9). However, interviews conducted one year after the birth of the first child revealed more complex narratives and challenges, primarily related to the difficulty of navigating maternal and professional identities – reflecting the tension between the individuated and maternal discussed above.

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[16] However, a shift has been noted in recent years towards more realistic portrayals of mothers and motherhood in public discourse (Llurda Marí 2021).

To examine the impact of becoming a mother on a woman's identity, psychologists Elizabeth Laney et al. (2015) interviewed 30 middle-class women in their grounded theory US study. The participants reported a sense of self-loss – which was not in all cases experienced as a struggle – until they were able to integrate a maternal identity into their sense of self. The integration of this new identity, however, meant a compressing or fracturing of their sense of self to accommodate their children's needs. According to Buesken's (2018) dual identity framework, the compressed sense of self is the individuated self that women have to 'fracture' to make room for their maternal selves. With regards to identifying as a mother, participants stated that "being a mother meant identification with the status of being a mother in conjunction with doing the work of mothering" (Laney et al. 2015, 131). This study also shows that whilst some women perceive mothering as an activity rather than an identity, not all women do. Sociologist JaneMaree Maher (2005) from her study of Australian mothers, also proposes a focus on maternal activity rather than maternal identity. Her research revealed that women considered mothering activities as "part of their life, rather than definitive of their identity" (Maher 2005, 25). Maher also makes a conceptual argument for viewing mothering as a doing rather than a being, which emphasises the work that is involved in childrearing. Maher contends that conceptualising mothering this way renders distinctions such as mother/non-mother or stay-at-home mother/working mother meaningless and acknowledges that every woman performs some kind of labour and has to make choices around paid and unpaid work as well as other activities. Mahler's study also shows that the conception of gender as performative, which was considered radical at the time, has permeated public discourse and shapes how some – though not all – individuals experience their identities.

A few studies have looked specifically at how women navigate their maternal and professional identities and thus the challenge of performing convincingly "as their old selves" (Thomson et al. 2008, 9). These are of interest here as they relate to the broader topic of the tensions between the maternal and the individuated self. In her UK study of professional women's maternal and professional identities, accounting professor Kathryne Haynes (2008), for instance, found that the transition to motherhood impacted the importance of the worker identity in an unanticipated way. Whilst during pregnancy the participants did not expect their professional identity to be altered by motherhood, the majority renegotiated and decreased their workload after having children. However, interpreting this change simply as a signifier of women's preferences does not consider the lack of structural support systems that often also determine this decision (Stone 2007; 2012), including the unavailability of quality, affordable and accessible childcare discussed above. Similar to Haynes' study, organisational scholars Shireen Kanji and Emma Cahusac (2015) found that only two of the 26 professional and managerial women they interviewed in the UK, anticipated before they had children that there would be a conflict between their roles as professionals and their roles as mothers. As a result of their analysis, the authors identified four stages in which the transition to motherhood impacts women's work identities. In the first stage, the work identity is threatened during pregnancy and after giving birth by both the women (by prioritising the home over work life) and their co-workers (by practices of exclusion and stereotyping at work). In the second phase, women make sense of their identity change while being at home with their infants. This phase is accompanied by experiencing a loss of their former self whilst also enjoying the time spent at home, which can result in recreating work at home (such as starting a business or consultancy). Stage three then marks the creation of a new sense of self, where participants confidently claimed an identity such as "stay-at-home mother" or "not a housewife" (Kanji & Cahusac 2015, 1423) and a sense of belonging with other mothers. The last stage is a catalyst for action defined by a positive

outlook, setting boundaries around work and changed values with respect to what is considered meaningful work (future career aspirations tend to be more socially and less financially focused). Those four stages provide insight into the work-related changes that motherhood can instigate for professional, middle-class women and are useful for any analysis of the emergence of the mother-creative phenomenon, by highlighting a trend of shifting away from a professional career towards home-based work that is experienced as more fulfilling. Furthermore, these phases demonstrate that the changes women experience follow a certain, predictable pattern and are thus not a result of autonomous decisions and/or arbitrary circumstances.

While the return of women into the home once they have children might seem voluntarily and like a re-traditionalisation of gender roles, research shows how structural forces and the lack of flexible, family-friendly work options push women out of their careers. The discrimination that mothers face within work cultures, has been termed the 'maternal wall' (Williams (2001). Sociologist Pamela Stone (2007), for instance, demonstrated in her US study that the decision of 'successful' professional women to leave their career was only made reluctantly and mainly a result of institutional barriers and cultural expectations as well as the fact that their partners earned a higher income. Similarly, Shani Orgad (2019) found that professional women in the UK expressed an ambivalence at leaving their career and that their withdrawal from work was predominately shaped by external factors. Orgad (2019, 245) further observed an urge among study participants to foster their individuated selves:

> The women I interviewed had a deep yearning for "something more." They longed to regain their own world and to realize themselves by connecting to—not divorcing from—the public world around them.

Orgad claims that this desire for 'something more' and the search for fulfilment beyond motherhood and domesticity are encouraged and validated by cultural norms. Within this context, Orgad (2019, 250) views the "cultural fantasy of the gig economy" as particularly attractive for middle-class women when they become mothers, offering them a positive outlook. This research thus highlights the importance of considering the transition to motherhood when studying the mother-creative phenomenon, and the complex changes that women have to navigate as they provide insights into the structural factors contributing to this trend.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the central expectations contemporary women have to negotiate in relation to motherhood. Women find themselves in a historically new situation where they are free as individuals but constrained as mothers, simultaneously having to navigate intensified maternal labour as well as expectations associated with career and self-actualisation. Creating their own work-like opportunities at home around their care work seems to offer a way for women to accommodate those conflicting expectations. The transition to motherhood – and a lack of structural support – thus often requires women to change careers and revaluate their priorities to create a balance between their work and their family. Those insights from the maternal studies literature indicate the importance of considering the complexity of modern motherhood when studying creative work in relation to women with caring responsibilities as they do so under particular structural circumstances.

The two literatures surveyed in Chapters 2 and 3 focused on creative work and motherhood and provide the context for my study as they offer key insights into the expectations contemporary

women who have children have to navigate. Discourses and cultural norms in relation to work illustrate how creative work is particularly apt for satisfying current work expectations that value passionate, fulfilling work. Modern motherhood is characterised by the contradictory imperative to be both an intensive mother as well as a self-actualised, working woman. Consequently, working from home seemingly offers a way to negotiate work/care tensions for women with caring responsibilities. It is thus not surprising that self-employment is a growing trend among mothers in Australia (Baxter 2013), increasingly involving work that is of creative nature (Luckman 2015b). However, our understanding of how women navigate both forms of work – creative and maternal labour – within their homes is still very limited and my study seeks to address this gap. Investigating this issue is important to ensure that navigating work/care regimes is not solely a private responsibility of mothers/families and to make visible the challenges and benefits mother-creatives experience. This knowledge can then potentially inform policies, advocacy as well as practices in the workplace and increase the ability of these sectors to better cater for the needs of mother-creatives. Moving beyond the abstract discourses associated with work and motherhood, my aim was to explore the lived experiences of mother-creatives and to examine how they navigate those work/care expectations through creative home-based work. The key research question that motivated my empirical inquiry was to understand how women with young children who do not yet attend school, negotiate creative work and motherhood at home. Furthermore, I wanted to know what the appeal of creative work for mother-creatives is and to understand what role creative work plays in their lives. The next chapter presents the methodological approach adopted to address those questions, including the research paradigm, design and process.

Chapter 4

Methodological Approach:
Exploring the Lived Experiences of Mother-Writers

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters established the context and the conceptual framework underpinning my research. This chapter builds upon this literature and outlines the methodological approach I employed to explore how women negotiate motherhood and creative work at home. I chose a qualitative approach centred on in-depth interviews, which was appropriate as I was particularly interested in understanding the lived experiences and narratives of women with small children who engage in creative work; I also perceive my study as a feminist enquiry and qualitative methods, and in-depth interviews in particular, are central to feminist research because they are a seen as a means to "access voices of those who are marginalized in society" (Hesse-Biber 2007, 118). I am aware that mothers cannot be considered a marginalised group *per se* – as they are a highly diverse group that is differentiated by markers of advantage and disadvantage along intersectional lines. However, as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, women with childcare responsibilities experience specific forms of disadvantages and are marginalised from certain spheres of society, regardless of their social position. Furthermore, historically the voices of women have often been excluded in research and public discourses on matters that affect them – including motherhood – which is why feminist-inspired research in the past decades aimed to foreground women's voices and experiences (Smith 1974; Brooks 2007). Connecting individual stories to the structural conditions within which they are embedded is one of the aims of this thesis. To this end, I adopt a poststructuralist framework to understand how the structural manifests in the individual.

In outlining how I approached the empirical part of this thesis, this chapter is structured into the following four sections: First, I discuss the research paradigm that underpinned my empirical work – a fusion of poststructuralism and feminist methodology. Second, I introduce Constructivist Grounded Theory which guided my data collection and analysis. Third, I reflect on participant recruitment as well as data collection and present an overview of the women who participated in this study and on whose narratives this thesis is based. Lastly, I discuss how I conducted the analysis of the data and how I arrived at the themes for the three empirical chapters that follow.

4.2 Research Paradigm: Poststructuralism and Feminist Epistemology

Considering concepts such as motherhood, creativity and work as social constructs with normative/disciplinary power, my research can be generally located within the interpretivist/constructivist paradigm[17] (Guba & Lincoln 1989). The ontological assumptions underpinning it is that reality is socially constructed and can only be obtained through understanding the "subjective world of human experience" (Kivunja & Kujini 2017, 33). Consequently, there exist multiple realities and considering the context – political, social, cultural – is crucial for exploring and understanding them. More specifically, and in the tradition of feminist thinking and research, my analysis is underpinned by poststructuralist perspectives and the assumption that the social world is constructed through discourses and thus language. In particular, I use poststructuralism as an explanatory framework on the structural forces that

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[17] A research paradigm refers to the ontological (what is the nature of reality?) and epistemological (how do you access reality?) standpoint of the researcher, who necessarily – though often unconsciously – makes certain assumptions about reality and how to access it (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Hesse-Bieber 2017).

shape and constrain the actions and identities of individuals. The contribution of poststructuralist thinking regarding individuals and identities is to conceive them as discursive constructs produced in a specific historic context that prioritise and regulate certain ways of being over others (Hall 1996). This approach will provide me with an explanatory framework to understand how contemporary discourses/expectations associated with (creative) work and motherhood outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 shape the lived experiences of the mother-writers I interviewed for my study.

To understand how the structural manifests in the individual, the poststructuralist framework on identity proposed by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1996, 1997) is useful. Following French philosopher Michel Foucault, Hall refers to the individual as a subject that is constructed through discourses. Hall (1997, 4) defines as discourses:

> Ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.

Discourse structures and limits *how* subjects think, talk and act as well as *what* they think, say and do. They thus create identities, or in poststructuralist terms 'subject positions' – "a place for the subject" (Hall 1997, 40) – which are social locations from which the individual is subjected to the "meaning, power and regulation" (1997, 40) of a discourse. The quantity and quality of those subject positions has changed over the course of the twentieth century. Hall argues that identity in late modernity is "increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses,

practices and positions" (Hall 1996, 4). Hall (1996, 5-6) further describes his conceptualisation of identity as follows:

> I use identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes, that produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or 'chaining' of the subject into the flow of discourse.

In other words, subject positions are discursively constructed identity templates that subjects attach to themselves and perform. Hall (1996, 4) also points out the importance of considering the complex context in which subject positions are produced:

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are […] the product of the marking of difference and exclusion.

As argued here, a poststructuralist understanding of identity and subject positions includes a notion of power. Drawing on Derrida's (1981) conception of *différence*, Hall contends that identities are always constituted in relation to what they are not – the 'constitutive outside'. The category 'woman', for instance, only receives meaning in relationship to the category 'man' –

thus identifying as a woman entails the meaning that one is not identifying as a man. Furthermore, Hall (1996, 5) argues that in producing meaning through difference "a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles -- man/woman, etc" is established. This is where power comes into play as the force that determines the hierarchy of subject positions and discourses, which is not a stable, definitive state but a continuing process. Similarly, identities are fluid and thus "never completed – always in process" (Hall 1996, 2) given that subject positions are constantly changing and context-dependent. For instance, the subject position 'woman' or 'mother' changes over time and differs in different societies as well as within societies and institutions. However, Hall argues that subjects do not solely perform those discursively shaped identities – or subject positions – but that they *invest* in them, which means that identification – a term Hall prefers over identity – is not a one-sided process but actively enforced by the subject. The usefulness of Hall's poststructuralist identity conceptualisations is that it allows me to situate the individual accounts of the participants within its broader social conditions. According to a poststructuralist framework, the mother-creative is a time and context-specific subject position that is produced by broader discourses associated with work, creativity and motherhood. However, rather than only examining the discourses that produce this subject position, I was interested in the lived experiences of women and how they navigate those discourses. Thus, rather than assuming how women negotiate creative work and motherhood within the home, I wanted to understand how they *experience* it.

The decision to foreground the lived experiences of women is inspired by a feminist epistemology, which assumes that "women's concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge" (Brooks 2007, 56). Feminist standpoint scholars emphasise the need to "begin with women's lives, as they themselves experience them, in order to achieve an accurate and authentic understanding of what life is like for women today" (Brooks 2007,

56). Feminist philosopher Susan Harding (1986, 1987, 1992, 1996, 1998) who wrote extensively about a distinct feminist methodology and feminist standpoint epistemology in the 1980s and 1990s, argues that all knowledge is socially situated but that examining the lived experiences of members from marginalised groups provides opportunities to understand and deconstruct social hierarchies and dominant knowledge systems that are invisible from a privileged standpoint (Harding 1992). Consequently, insights into the lives of women who work creatively around their caring responsibilities, an often-overlooked cohort of creatives, has the potential to challenge dominant practices, norms and assumptions. Harding, along with other feminist writers, views motherhood and the care work of women as especially apt for generating "important questions about social order" (Harding 1992, 447). By foregrounding women's voices and lived experiences as well as identifying structural forces that constrain their agency and opportunities, my research aligns with broader feminist research goals, which ultimately seek to contribute to a more gender-equal transformation of society (Hesse-Biber 2007).

Historically, feminist standpoint epistemology originates from second wave feminism and the large-scale opening of higher education to female students. Once women increasingly entered universities in the 1960s and 70s, they realised that the mainstream theories, concepts, methods and research studies they encountered were male-centric and often did not reflect their experience in, and of, the social world (Smith 1974; DuBois 1983; Brooks 2007). As a result, female scholars saw the need to construct new and different theories, concepts and methods from the vantage point of their marginalised position in society (Smith 1974; Brooks 2007). The second-wave feminist mandate to make the personal political (Hanisch 1969), inspired this effort, with the critical analysis often starting from the women's own experience (Smith 1974; Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007). Adrienne Rich (1986 [1967], x) in the updated introduction to her influential book *Of Woman Born* writes that her work:

was both praised and attacked for what was sometimes seen as its odd-fangled approach: personal testimony mingled with research, and theory which derived from both. But this approach never seemed odd to me in the writing. What still seems odd is the absentee author, the writer who lays down speculations, theories, facts and fantasies without any personal grounding.

The 'present author' in feminist research is thus not seen as a weakness but a strength and personal experience is acknowledged as often being the starting point and catalyst for research. For instance, Ann Oakley (2019 [1979], xiv) wrote in her qualitative work on the transition to motherhood, a book inspired by her own experience of becoming a mother, that "academic research projects bear an intimate relationship to the researcher's life, however 'scientific' a sociologist pretends to be". Sociologist and standpoint theorist Dorothy Smith referred to this practice as "rediscovering the society from within" (Smith 1974, 11).

But what then is feminist research? And what sets it apart from other forms of research? A more general answer is that feminist research is research that feminists do (Robbins 1996), and thus is research done by women about women. In fact, there is not a single epistemology, methodology or method that all feminist researchers use but multiple approaches have been created and applied – both new and old ones (the latter often in modified form) – with a concern to expose lived experiences of women and other oppressed groups (Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007). However, a general feminist critique of positivism led to a strong preference of qualitative methods among feminist researchers (Duelli Klein 1981). Much of feminist qualitative research has been influenced and progressed through critical work by feminist researchers from marginalised communities, such as postcolonial and queer theorists (Olesen

2005). Insights from those studies, often accompanied by postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, has led to feminist researchers rejecting the idea of one essential female experience in favour of accommodating multiple and diverse lived experiences of women and their interpretations of social reality (Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007).

Reflexivity takes on a central position within feminist research, with the aim to acknowledge the fundamental nature of the researcher's role (Smith 1974; Harding 1992; Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007; Olesen 2007). Reflexivity demands that the social situatedness of the researcher is taken into account and that the researcher reflects on how this disposition impacts the research in all its stages. Harding (1992) claims that a practice of 'strong reflexivity' – integrating a critical reflection on one's own social values and interests into the research process – enhances rather than diminishes objectivity. Whilst there are arguments to abolish the term objectivity, Harding (1992, 461) argues that "the notion of objectivity is useful in providing a way to think about the gap that should exist between how any individual or group wants the world to be and how in fact it is". However, other feminist researchers have pointed out the importance of acknowledging that reflexivity can never be fully obtained (Maynard 2004, 140) and that there is a risk that the experience of the researcher is overemphasised and privileged over those of the participants (Finlay 2002). Whilst I agree with both arguments, I think that exposing the role of the researcher and their positionality enables the reader to better evaluate the merits of a study and its findings. Following a feminist research tradition, it is thus important that I provide an account of my own background and social location with the aim of making my own 'standpoint' as visible as possible.

In common with much feminist research, my study was inspired by personal experiences. I became a mother whilst undertaking a Master of Philosophy degree (2016-2018) that focused

on the value of diversity in urban neighbourhoods for residents. This research as well as my experience of motherhood awakened my interest in looking specifically at the lived realities of creative mothers and the challenges, as well as opportunities, that they face. Navigating research work alongside mothering, I sensed that the circumstances under which mothers engage in creative work must be fundamentally different to those of unencumbered creatives – a topic I wanted to explore further. Whilst I do not identify as a creative, I grew up in an environment that valued creativity and creative work. I have a twin sister who has studied fine art and is now an art therapist, an older sister, who is an architect, and parents who have been painting, writing – mostly poems and songs – and making music (including when raising us), whilst both working full-time in non-creative jobs. Both my parents attended university – my mother was trained as an engineer and my father studied philosophy, though left university for political reasons. I was born and grew up in Berlin (East) – which is considered a centre for creativity and the creative and cultural industries and is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities network since 2005 (Muehlhans 2016) – and went to a Rudolph Steiner school, which has a strong focus on creative subjects in their curriculum. So, I grew up in a heteronormative, middle-class household that provided me with the cultural, social and economic capital to attend university, as well as giving me an interest in the humanities and social sciences as well as creativity. At university, I studied sociology and political science. It was here that I was introduced to poststructuralist ideas and to the work of Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall, in particular. This encounter has greatly informed my further academic path and formed the theoretical framework for my bachelor, masters and PhD theses.

My own motherhood journey started with unexpectedly falling pregnant two months into my Master of Philosophy program at Western Sydney University. As an international student with a German partner, we navigated this transition into parenthood together with no familial,

institutional or governmental support. My partner submitted his PhD thesis ten days after the birth of our son, and I completed my MPhil a year later. Since then, both of us have constantly studied/worked from home, whilst sharing the care of our child more or less equally, as we did not have access to affordable and/or subsidised childcare. Through reading about maternal theory and conducting research for this project, I recognised my own subjection to the intensive mothering ideology and, more specifically, attachment parenting. My childrearing approach can be classified as child-centred (prioritising my child's needs), expert-guided (I follow the advice of certain educators/doctors), emotionally absorbing (the constant mental load of mothering), labour-intensive (i.e. co-sleeping, extended, on-demand breastfeeding, full-time caring), and financially expensive (especially in regards to a lack of income and career progression). During the course of my PhD, I reflected a lot on my own practices and beliefs about motherhood and came to perceive them as a product of a complex net of personal, socio-political, economic and cultural circumstances rather than of personal choices.

The main reason for reflecting on my upbringing and biography in such detail – which I have to admit feels rather peculiar within an academic project – is the assumption that my own standpoint is integral to all parts of the research process, from the development of the research question to the methods deployed and data analysis undertaken (Bueskens 2018). Whilst much more information and detail would be needed to capture fully my standpoint (not to mention all the aspects of my positionality that are inaccessible, such as unconscious biases etc.), this is an attempt to make the often 'absentee author' (Rich 1986) more present and visible in this research.

4.3 The Method: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Following feminist research principles, I sought to apply a qualitative research method that would foreground the experiences and narratives of the participants and Kathy Charmaz's (2014) Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach met those criteria and also aligns with an interpretivist/constructivist research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln 1989). CGT is an updated version of classic Grounded Theory (GT) that was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1965, 1967, 1968, 1971) in the 1960s alongside other qualitative approaches as an alternative to the positivist paradigm permeating social sciences at the time (Olesen 2007). At a most basic level, grounded theory means that theories (i.e. explanations) are grounded in the data. This implies that concrete empirical data builds the base for theories and, thus, that "theory emerges from the data" (Bryant & Charmaz 2007, 32). The aim of GT is to develop theories that explain the empirical world more appropriately and, consequently, to better understand the social world. To extract theory from qualitative data, the research process is guided by the following three flexibly applicable strategies:

1. Coding: labelling data and developing concepts
2. Memoing: writing short notes whilst engaging with data, for instance, relating to the relationships between the discovered concepts
3. Sorting: reading, rereading and grouping memos

These research steps are not conducted consecutively but concurrently, as one of the main principles of GT – and qualitative research in general – is the simultaneity and reciprocity of analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Data is collected and analysed until theoretical saturation is reached, which means that no additional information or codes are discovered by adding more data and explanations based on the data can be developed. Strauss

and Glaser's student, sociologist Kathy Charmaz, however, points out that only a minority of grounded theory studies actually formulate fleshed-out theories, but that "many provide an analytic handle on a specific experience" (Charmaz 2008, 401). Charmaz (2008) claims that Strauss and Glaser evoked a "democratisation of qualitative research", where practitioners could develop "middle-range theories" (Charmaz 2008, 397) without needing extensive experience and reputation. By the 1990s Grounded Theory had been widely adapted by researchers across disciplines (Charmaz 2008). However, the success of GT was soon challenged by postmodernist thinkers who criticised the objectivist and positivist assumptions of early GT and the "distanced inquiry by objective experts who assumed their training licensed them to define and represent research participants" (Charmaz 2008, 400).

To address the criticism that Grounded Theory has received, sociologist Kathy Charmaz developed a research approach called Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), which "takes into account the theoretical and methodological developments of the past four decades" (Charmaz 2006, 9) and "aligns it with 21st-century epistemologies" (Charmaz 2008, 402). Charmaz acknowledges the dominant academic paradigms within which classic Grounded Theory was developed and argues that rather than dismissing the method because of its out-dated, positivist assumptions, it offers useful flexible strategies, especially for "innovative social constructionist study" (Charmaz 2008, 401). Adaptions Charmaz made from classic Grounded Theory relate to the researcher's effect on the research process, the production of the data, the representation of the research participants and the positioning of the analysis. She argues that Glaser and Strauss' research methods "emphasized generality, not relativity, and objectivity, not reflexivity" (Charmaz 2008, 399). Objectivist grounded theorists assumed that there is a single reality that can be accessed by a passive and neutral researcher through value-free inquiry (Charmaz 2008). By not engaging with theory and other research literature before

data collection, they presumed that the researcher could enter the research field without prior knowledge. In contrast, Charmaz' (2008, 402) constructivist approach is based on the following four assumptions:

> (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. Researchers are part of the research situation, and their positions, privileges, perspectives, and interactions affect it. […] In this approach, research always reflects value positions. Thus the problem becomes identifying these positions and weighing their effect on research practice, not denying their existence.

Opposed to the assumption that researchers discover data and theories, CGT is based on the premise that researchers construct theories – or, more likely, concepts and explanations (Charmaz 2014) – from the data. Moreover, CGT assumes that foreclosing pre-existing (theoretical) knowledge is impossible, and that the research is necessarily partial, a fact that requires attention and discussion. In addition to the researcher's constructions of data and theory being subject of the analysis, how participants construct their reality is also considered and valued. Charmaz (2008, 403) argues that "in order to understand how research participants construct their world, researchers need to know that world from their participants' standpoints"– a goal that is consistent with feminist standpoint epistemology and something which (anti-positivist) Max Weber (1978 [1921]) called *Verstehen*. Overall, the central premises of CGT – the need for reflexivity as well as prioritising the participant's standpoint in

particular – indicate that CGT is a suitable methodology for a feminist enquiry (Allen 2011; Charmaz 2017; Dent 2017).

CGT also provides detailed instructions for collecting and analysing data. However, rather than understanding those instructions as a rigid toolbox that need to be followed step-by-step, they provide the researcher with flexible guidelines that support individual study designs. With regards to data collection, the aim of CGT is to gather "rich – detailed and full – data" (Charmaz 2014, 18), which "get beneath the surface of social and subjective life" (Charmaz 2014, 22). Rich data might be collected in various forms (including interviews, observations, participations, focus groups), however, the most prominent method of data gathering in CGT is through intensive interviews. The aim of interviews within CGT is not only to learn about the social world of the research participants but to "advance our progress in constructing theory" (Charmaz 2014, 83). Thus, intensive interviews entail focused interviewing by the researcher whilst allowing space for the participant's insights and views to emerge.

Whilst most of my data collection and analysis (see below) was guided by Charmaz's CGT framework, it is not a classical Grounded Theory study. The structure of my thesis follows a standard social science layout, where literature and theory review chapters precede the data presentation and analysis. Engaging with the literature before collecting data allowed me to identify gaps in the existing scholarship on motherhood and creative work, and formulate research and interview questions; it also provided me with an explanatory vocabulary. The strength of this approach for my study was the rigorous dissection of the interview transcripts which allowed for the participants' accounts to guide the data analysis.

4.4 Data Collection and Participants

To explore the relationship between motherhood and home-based creative work/writing, I conducted two intensive interviews with 12 women each (a 13th participant only participated in one interview). All women self-identified as writers, happened to live in either Sydney or Melbourne – potentially suggesting that mother-creatives are primarily located in creative urban hubs – and cared for at least one child who had not yet started school. This age span of the children was chosen because research has shown that creative work is more compatible with family life once children start school (Luckman et al. 2018). I was also particularly interested in the first years of motherhood and women's relationship to creative work during this time, as according to the literature, this is the period when women tend to leave the creative sector – measured by whether or not they work in an organisation – and thus stop engaging in creative work on a professional level (see Chapter 2). In addition, to contain the scope of the study and increase comparability across the interviews, I decided to only concentrate on one creative discipline – writing – rather than include various creative practices (see Chapter 1). Writing is a creative activity that due low space and equipment requirements can be engaged in at home and has not yet been researched within the mother-creative literature (see Chapter 2). Moreover, I could see similarities between writing as a screen-based and sedentary as well as cognitively demanding practice and other kinds of work, for instance academic work. The comparability to other forms of labour further reinforced my decision to concentrate on writing, as it indicated the potential for my study to be relevant for a broader field of research on motherhood and home-based, cognitive work.

The recruitment for the interviews took place over a six-month period from November 2019 until May 2020 and was targeted at women who self-identified as writers, primarily worked

from home, cared for at least one child below school age and lived in NSW or Victoria[18]. To recruit participants, I disseminated participation invitations through official creative organisations (i.e. Australian Writers Centre, Writer's Guild NSW) as well as relevant online and social media networks (i.e. Mama Creatives, Creative Women's Circle). Attempting to recruit mother-writers from more marginalised (culturally diverse areas with lower socio-economic profiles such as Western Sydney), I also circulated invitations to participate through local initiatives such as Sweatshop, WestWords and the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University. As a result of the call for participants, I was contacted by potential participants via email and arranged an initial phone call, during which I introduced myself, discussed the project and participation and, if still interested, arranged a date for the first interview. Since I was only able to get in touch with a small number of female writers in this indirect way, I also deployed snowball sampling, which relies on the private networking and referral of the participants (Parker et al. 2019). At the end of the interview, I asked each participant if they knew any other person that would fit the scope of my study and if they could pass on the recruitment flyer to them. As a result, I was able to recruit a number of participants through direct referral.

It has to be noted that because participation was voluntary and had to be initiated by the participants, recruitment for this study resulted in a self-selection bias whereby participants were most likely to take part in this study who see value in research and have the time, energy and resources to participate – attributes that can be expected to attract a participant pool of predominately tertiary educated and middle-class women, particularly in the context of a global pandemic. General difficulties regarding recruitment and conducting interviews arose because

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[18] As the initial plan was to conduct face-to-face interviews, I concentrated on recruiting writers from the Greater Sydney area. However, once COVID-19 lockdowns occurred, all interviews had to be done online anyway and I was still actively looking for participants, which is why I extended the scope of my recruitment efforts to all of NSW and Victoria.

of COVID-19 related restrictions and lockdowns in Australia. As has been well-documented, women with children have been particularly impacted by the pandemic, due to loss of income, lack of childcare and/or home schooling (Wood et al. 2021), which meant that this timeframe was not ideal for recruiting from this cohort. As a result, confirming participants and scheduling interviews was a challenge and significant rescheduling occurred, leading to the delay of the data collection.

All my efforts to recruit participants resulted in an expression of interest by 13 women who fitted the criteria for this study and were willing and available to participate. Whilst 13 is a relatively small sample size for a qualitative study (Baker & Edwards 2012), I want to make three arguments – in addition to saturation – as to why this number is appropriate for the scope of my research: first, determining the appropriate number of interviews for a qualitative study depends on many factors[19], such as "the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant" (Morse 2000, p. 1). Whereas the average number of participants in a qualitative PhD study is generally around 30 participants (Mason 2010; Bryman 2012), Baker and Edwards (2012, 8) argue:

> A small number of cases, or subjects, may be extremely valuable and represent adequate numbers for a research project. This is especially true for studying hidden or hard to access populations […]. Here, a relatively few people, such as between six and a dozen, may offer us insights.

Whilst my target group cannot be considered the most "hidden or hard to access", it has been pointed out that recruiting mothers for research can be challenging due to their time constraints

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[19] See Baker and Edwards (2012) for a comprehensive overview on issues associated with sample numbers in qualitative studies that is informed by information on this topic from leading qualitative researchers.

(Dent 2017). In addition, my study focuses on a very specific and, thus, homogenous group (women based in NSW ad Victoria who work as writers from home and have children under the age of six years) rather than a broad, heterogenous group (creative women with children in Australia) that would require larger participant numbers in order to draw any meaningful conclusions. Second, the group my participants are drawn from is statistically speaking not a large population in Australia. Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) estimate the writer population[20] in Australia consists of 7,900 persons. Only 30% (~2633) of those writers lived with dependent children. It is reasonable to assume that of this group a significant proportion have dependent children over the age of six and/or are male and live outside of NSW and Victoria, which suggests that the cohort I was targeting for my research only makes up a very small proportion of the Australian population. Whilst qualitative research does not aim for statistical representativeness, the small population size supports a similarly small sample group. Third, a small number of qualitative interviews is a common practice among qualitative inquiries in maternal studies scholarship (see, for instance, Smith (1999) 4 participants; Bueskens (2018) 10 participants; Molina (2019) 11 participants). Whilst it was my aim to recruit at least 10 women, I ended up interviewing 13 as I included every person who responded to the call for participants and who met the selection criteria for the study. By the end of the recruitment phase I had also already completed, transcribed and pre-analysed a majority of the interviews and found that the last interviews were not adding any new data to the key categories and thus indicated a saturation of the central topics.

In total, I conducted 25 interviews as all (except one[21]) participants were interviewed on two separate occasions approximately three to six months apart between November 2019 until

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[20] Not all of my participants would have qualified as writers under Throsby and Petetskaya's (2017) definition of artistic occupations (outlined in Chapter 1).

[21] Miryam was unable to attend a second interview due to time constraints caused by a university deadline and COVID lockdown.

September 2020. The interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes, with the average duration ranging from 45 to 60 minutes. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the rest were conducted via video communication (n=21) or over the phone (n=2), due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Whilst I was initially concerned that the quality of the data and the rapport with the interviewees would suffer from the virtual nature of the interviews, this ended up not being my experience. In contrast, I did not detect much of a difference between face-to-face and virtual interviews. I was able to collect rich data through both interview modes and generally experienced considerable rapport with the participants, who, to varying degrees, were open and trusting. Based on my own experience during this research, video communication is an appropriate tool for conducting in-depth interviews with mothers of young children, as their schedules are constantly changing and last-minute cancellations cause fewer logistical issues and reduce the pressure on participants to meet an interview appointment when problems arise (i.e. in case that a child gets sick, needs attention etc.). All interviews were conducted at a date and time most suitable to the participants and could be easily rescheduled. As per ethics requirements, every participant received a participant information sheet and signed a consent form before partaking in an interview. These documents clearly outlined that participation was anonymous, voluntary, unremunerated and that withdrawal from the study was possible at any point.

The interviews were loosely guided by pre-formulated interview questions which were informed by the literature on motherhood and creative work and my overarching research question. The aim of the interview guide was to create a similar approach to each interview whilst also allowing for the participants to determine the direction of the conversation as well as for spontaneous follow-up questions. Some more interview questions were added after the first few interviews had been conducted, reflecting the open and iterative nature of the interview

process. The questions covered themes such as: challenges and benefits of working from home, becoming a writer, work/education background, motherhood, work schedules/routines and identity (see Appendix A for the interview guidelines for the initial and follow-up interviews). All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full using an online transcription service (Transcribe by Wreally[22]) for self-transcription (13 interviews) and automated transcription (12 interviews) – the latter still required a significant amount of manual editing. I decided to use automated transcription for the second round of interviews to make up for time lost during the recruitment process. All interview transcripts were anonymised, and pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis. Pseudonyms were created by me and I chose names that reflected the cultural backgrounds of the participants, acknowledging names are a significant bearer of information.

The demographic profile of my participant cohort was central to determining the scope of my study, as the mother-writer phenomenon is reflective of a particular group in society – highly educated, middle-class women. All 13 women I interviewed self-identified as writers. The type of writing the participants mainly engaged in ranged from creative writing (n=9) to freelance writing (n=2) and screenwriting (n=2) (although some participants engaged in more than one form of writing as detailed in Table 4.1, below). Table 4.1 provides an overview of the demographic make-up of the participants while short biographical summaries of each participant can be found in Appendix B. All participating women had at least one child under the age of six in their care. Of those women, seven had two children, four had one child and two had three children (Table 4.1 also indicates the age and gender of each child at the time of the first interview). The age span of the participants was fairly homogenous and ranged from the early thirties to the early forties, with most being in their mid-to-late thirties at the time of

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22 Transcribe by Wreally is a paid service that guarantees high levels of data security. Audio filed and transcribed data is not stored on their website but only on the user's local computer or browser.

the interviews. This indicates that most participants had their children in their thirties after completing their tertiary education and establishing a career, which is currently the norm for highly educated women in Western societies (Qu & Weston 2016; Nitsche & Brückner 2021). The participant cohort was highly educated, with all having at least completed a bachelor's degree. This high education status is reflective of the general Australian writer population, which was the most educated cohort among the surveyed artist groups in Throsby's and Petetskaya's (2017) study on Australian artists. Looking more closely at the highest education level, three women had a PhD degree and three were currently enrolled in a PhD program, three women had a master's degree and four a bachelor's degree. With respect to the field of study that participants had completed their degrees in, most had undertaken studies in writing or writing-related subjects, such as creative writing, journalism or communication. This fact emphasises the participants' general interest in writing, which (importantly) existed before they became mothers. In spite of these educational backgrounds, however, before having their first child most were working in professional although not specifically creative areas, including academia, media, marketing and university administration. With regards to relationship status, all participants were either married or in a de-facto partnership and cohabitating with the father of their children, except for Raquel, who was divorced and, as the primary carer, co-parenting with her ex-husband. This high representation of women partnered with men is significant as the coupled participants reported that they received significant support from their partner for their creative work, both directly (proof-reading or editing) and indirectly (financial support or carving out time for them to write). Lastly, considering the cultural background of the participants, most women stated having an Anglo-Australian background, three a South-East-Asian background and one participant grew up in North America and lived in the Middle East for several years. Three further participants identified as second-generation migrants, with parents either migrating from South America or South Europe.

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of the Participants

Name	Type of Writing	Number, Gender, Age of Children	Highest Education *Currently enrolled	Area of Work Before Motherhood	Cultural Background	Partner
Amrita	Creative Writing	2 Daughter (7) Daughter (4)	PhD Social Sciences	Academia	South-Asian	Married
Amy	Creative Writing	2 Son (4) Son (2)	BA Professional Communi-cation	Author, Teaching (Creative Writing)	Australian	Married
Bhavini	Screenwriting	2 Son (4) Daughter (pregnant)	MBA BA Media arts	University Administration	South-Asian	Married
Chloe	Freelance Copy Writing	3 Daughter (6) Daughter (3) Daughter(7m)	BA Journalism	Media	Australian	Married
Clara	Freelance Copy Writing Creative Writing	2 Son (6) Son (2)	BA Journalism	Media	Australian	Married
Felipa	Creative Writing Freelance Writing	2 Daughter (5) Daughter (2)	MA Arts Policy	Marketing	European, South America (parents)	Married
Lauren	Creative Writing	1 Daughter (4)	PhD Social Sciences*	PR	South European (parents)	Married
Miryam	Creative Writing	2 Daughter (5) Daughter (3)	PhD Creative Writing*	Academia	Middle-East/North America (Jewish)	Married
Raquel	Copy Writing Creative Writing	1 Son (3)	MA Publishing	Publishing/IT	South America (father)	Divorced
Safia	Screenwriting	1 Son (5)	BA Media and Communi-cations	PR	South-East Asian (Muslim)	Married
Sarah	Creative Writing	1 Daughter (1)	PhD English Literature PhD Creative Writing*	University Administration	Australian	Defacto partner
Valerie	Creative Writing	2 Son (3) Son (4m)	PhD (science) MA Creative Writing	Consultant	Australian	Defacto partner
Vanessa	Creative Writing Editing	3 Son (8) Daughter (5) Daughter (1)	PhD Creative Writing*	Politics	Australian	Married

The demographic make-up of the participants shows them to be diverse in some respects (i.e. with regards to their cultural and religious backgrounds), however, less diverse regarding other aspects (i.e. education, age, family status, class and sexual orientation). So, the participant cohort for this research can be classified as middle-class, which is representative of the "creative class" (Florida 2002), and thus consistent with findings from the literature (Brook et al. 2018). With regards to my position in relation to the participants, I inhabited an "insider-outsider" (Dwyer & Buckle 2009) perspective, providing me with an enhanced "depth and breadth of understanding" (Kanuha 2000, 444) of the daily life as well as care and work conflicts of the participants, whilst having some distance from their experiences involving creative work.

4.5 Data Generation and Analysis

Upon the scheduling of interviews, I commenced the data collection and analysis. As proposed by Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), I entered the collection of data via interviews with a broad question of enquiry, which in my case was to investigate the relationship between motherhood, home-based working and creative work. In addition, a list of interview questions was developed based on reading relevant literature on those themes before the data collection and was approved by the ethics committee. I then amended the interview guides during the interviewing process as the initial interviews suggested some relevant new directions that seemed worth exploring. According to Charmaz (2014) – and numerous other qualitative social scientists that foreground the viewpoints of interviewees – this flexibility is another way of ensuring that the theory and analysis is grounded in the data and not determined by pre-existing knowledge. Once I had conducted the first round of interviews, I transcribed and analysed them using line-by-line coding, focused coding and memo writing (outlined below). This was when I realised that certain themes were emerging across the interviews notably, that most of the

interviewees had started to write after the birth of their first child, that they were seeking to negotiate family and care, and that they wanted to be 'more than a mother'. These were findings that I had not encountered much in the literature on motherhood and creative work at this stage. I thus explored these themes in more depth in the second round of interviews. As Charmaz (2014) and others argue, if questions arise that cannot be answered by the gathered data, the researcher should aim to close the gaps either by conducting follow-up interviews or collecting further data in different from and/or from different sources (through documents, observations etc.). New data should be collected until all relevant queries for theory formation have been addressed and no new codes, categories and themes emerge and thus the data collection has reached saturation. Conducting two rounds of interviews positively benefitted my research in several ways. It allowed me to identify a clear focus of my study and I was able to test my preliminary findings and see if they held up when presented back to the participants, which enabled me to get a more nuanced insight into the findings. The two-interview process acknowledged in a more serious way one of the main premises of CGT that data is co-constructed by the interviewer and the participants. The advantages of conducting more than one interview with study participants have also been recognised in other qualitative research studies. For instance, political scientist Benjamin Read (2018, 1-2) argues that the use of "one-and-done interviews" underlies the assumption that:

> The desired information exists and is relatively straightforward to conceptualize and understand; the research participants know this information; and given the right assurances and motivation, they can and will convey it to the researcher in one fairly expeditious interview session.

However, Read argues that this is not the case in many studies and that unpacking topics in interviews is often less straightforward, especially if the theme is complex and multi-dimensional. This was certainly the case in my study. Whilst some topics were quite easily covered during the first round of interviews – such as daily routines and work schedules – other topics were more complex, unexpected and underexplored – for instance, questions relating to identity and gender inequality. In those instances, Read claims that multiple interviews increase the validity (i.e. through the ability to cross-reference) and the depth of the data as well as the familiarity and trust with the interviewees. The second interview also provided the ability to cross-check information given over a period of time (in my case three to six months) and thus to identify inconsistencies or shifts in participant accounts. Therefore, the ability to conduct a pre-analysis, determine a direction of the study grounded in the empirical material and then go back and specifically test themes with the participants was highly beneficial for my research and significantly enriched the data collected.

The analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted following the guidelines proposed by Charmaz (2014) and consisted of line-by-line coding, focused coding, memo writing and keeping a reflexive research journal. The first phase of coding, *line-by-line coding,* is where the researcher creates codes for each line of the transcription and thus closely reviews the empirical material and simultaneously starts to conceptualise ideas. This type of coding should reflect the data as closely as possible to elicit the experiences, meanings and actions of the participants. Following CGT, I primarily coded the actions (rather than themes) of the participants using gerunds to centre the participant's experience, which is reflected in the section titles of each empirical chapter (see Appendix C for examples of each coding stage). Charmaz (2014, 117) argues that action coding assists the researcher to stay close to the data and to avoid making "conceptual leaps" and push theoretical insight before the "necessary analytic work" has been

done. All the line-by-line coding was done in Microsoft Word, which I found to be the most practical solution to establishing a large number of unique codes, as each line in CGT analysis can generate a distinctive code. Moving from line-to-line to *focused coding*, I grouped all the line-by-line codes for each participant into different thematic groups, such as 'time', 'identity', 'finances' or 'living environment', using Microsoft Excel (see Appendix C). This way, I was able to view all topic-related codes next to each other and establish codes with "analytical significance" (Charmaz 2014, 19) – a standard practice within qualitative research – which are codes that came up repeatedly across different interviews, such as 'quarantining time for oneself', 'needing something else' or 'being more than a mum'. During the whole coding process, I noted any comments, ideas or questions in a separate journal, which helped to organise and advance my thoughts in relation to the data. Based on my notes, I started to write *memos* on those core categories and added analytical thoughts and insights to each memo whilst conducting the second round of interviews. Charmaz (2014) argues that memo writing helps the researcher to detect gaps that can be filled through subsequent data collection as well as to check whether preliminary categories hold up when further pursued in the empirical world. With the follow-up interviews, I was able to explore in more detail specific themes that emerged in the first interview, such as identity changes and surprising insights into the relationship between motherhood and writing. During this phase, I used a more targeted approach to reading relevant literature and studies focused on the themes that emerged from the interviews, for instance literature on work and identity. The memos then formed the basis for raising some focused codes to *categories*, which "explicate ideas, events or processes in [the]data" (Charmaz 2014, 189). For example, treating the focused code 'being more than a mum' as a category subsumed other focused codes such as 'needing something else' and 'quarantining time for oneself'. Overall, I wrote memos on over thirty codes, in which I paired interview excerpts with analytical thoughts in relation to the literature. I then started to connect those memos to each

other. Focusing on the negotiations participants had to make in relation to motherhood and creative work, I identified three key themes – the transition to motherhood, the everyday, and identity – that I could each allocate a number of categories to. Those formed the basis for my three empirical chapters, each consisting of four sub-sections.

Before moving on to the data presentation and analysis, I want to address three issues regarding some of the choices I made during the writing of the empirical chapters. First, rather than focusing on individual biographies, experiences and narratives, I generally highlight those statements that best reflect a common theme. In some cases, the statements are illustrated by a more detailed description or contrasted by opposing accounts to highlight alternative experiences. I am not telling the story of one particular participant but aim to create a collective biography based on the most dominant narratives. Second, throughout the empirical chapters, I use the pronouns she/her when referring to my participants. I am aware of the complex issues surrounding pronouns in contemporary social sciences, and gender studies in particular, and acknowledge their importance in academic and public discourse. However, since issues relating to gender identities are not central to my thesis, I have decided to use female pronouns for two reasons: First, feminine pronouns highlight the gendered nature of maternal work and the complex issues that impact women's lives in a way they do not usually impact men's. Second, to my knowledge, none of the participants identified outside of the traditional female/male gender binary. Thus, I chose to be consistent throughout the thesis by referring to all the participants by the same pronouns. Third, whilst my study specifically focuses on writing as the selected creative practice, I sometimes refer to it more generally as creative work. Some participants engaged in more than one creative practice – which is common among creative people (Throsby & Petatskaya 2017).

4.6 Conclusion

With this chapter, my aim was to position my research, introduce and outline the research design and methodological details I developed for this study, explaining why this approach was undertaken to address the research topic. There are four key points I make in this chapter that I want to reiterate as they are integral for the context of the following empirical chapters. First, this study is inspired by feminist research in that I am centring the voices of the female participants – women who write and care for small children. I view their standpoint as critical in order to access knowledge about contemporary motherhood and home-based creative working. Second, my intellectual approach is guided by poststructuralist thinking on identity – or identification – and how the structural is reflected and reproduced but also possibly subverted by the individual. I am foregrounding women's voices whilst simultaneously perceiving them as reflective of, and constrained by, broader cultural discourses. Third, my own positionality, including growing up in a middle-class, white, heteronormative family, studying at a tertiary level and being a mother, inform all parts of the research project. To emphasise my author role, I am using an active voice throughout the thesis and aim to document my interpretations as clearly as possible. Fourth, whilst not following a classic grounded theory structure, I attributed precedence to the data and the themes that emerged from the participant accounts. Conducting two interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of key themes that emerged after the initial analysis. In the next three chapters, I present and discuss my empirical enquiry. Each chapter is structured to address a specific aspect of the negotiation work mother-writers perform when engaging in creative work at home: negotiations in relation to (1) the transition to motherhood, (2) the everyday, and (3) identity.

Chapter 5

Negotiating the Transition to Motherhood:
A Pathway into Writing

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the transition to motherhood affected most participant's lives in a way that resulted in their uptake of writing. Out of my 13 participants, 10 started to write after they became mothers. This was a very surprising finding, as I was interested generally in how women who engage in creative work from home navigate this work alongside mothering. My study thus shows that motherhood can be a pathway into creative work and this chapter examines how and why this is the case. In order to understand how this life stage is conducive to creative work, this chapter mainly focuses on the 10 participants who started writing after they had children. So far, not much research attention has been given to the changes that occur when women transition to motherhood and to how they facilitate creative work. This chapter thus explores in detail the narratives the participants mobilised to rationalise their decision to engage in writing. Whilst the individual stories and experiences were quite varied, they also shared certain commonalities, mainly that the decision to engage in writing was related to, and prompted by, motherhood, which this chapter is organised to explore. Four aspects in relation to the transition to motherhood and the way in which it facilitated engagement with creative work emerged from the data. First, I examine how and when participants took up writing after having children and provide more context to some of their stories. Second, I illustrate how temporal and spatial changes associated with becoming a mother provided them with the time and space to write. Third, I consider work/care tensions and how they pushed some participants out of professional work into self-created work opportunities which emerged on becoming a

mother. Last, I present the discourses that women mobilised to make sense of their changed circumstances and examine how these encouraged their engagement in writing.

5.2 Becoming a Mother and a Writer

One of the unexpected and thus surprising findings from my research on home-based writers who were mothers of small children was that most of the women I interviewed started writing in a more serious and dedicated manner only *after* they had children. Out of the 13 participants, 10 began to write more consistently while caring for their young children, which suggests that this phenomenon is reflective of a collective and not just an individual phenomenon. For instance, Lauren used her maternity leave following the birth of her first, and only, child to write:

> When I had my daughter, who was born in 2015, I obviously had 6 months leave from work – maternity leave – so during that period of time I really started writing a lot more and then I started getting a lot of stuff published.

Whilst Lauren initially wrote shorter pieces which she published in various newspapers and journals, she has since written and published three books (fiction and non-fiction). However, not all of the 10 participants started writing as soon as possible after giving birth, and maternity leave periods also varied significantly among the participants from 18 weeks to 2 years[23]. For instance, Felipa's path into writing was initiated by her second pregnancy:

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[23] Maternity leave among participants included paid and unpaid periods, some of which involved a connection to an employer. 18 weeks of Parental Leave Pay – the equivalent to the minimum wage – is currently available to all Australian residents and citizens if they earn less than ~$150,000 AUD per year and have worked an equivalent of one workday per week for 10 months before the birth or adoption of the child (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). In addition, employers might have their own parental leave policies that provide female employees with additional maternity pay and/or longer leave periods (paid or unpaid).

I was pregnant with my second child it was a really tough pregnancy and I basically run out of things that I could do. Like I couldn't work, […] because I had to go to doctors appointments all the time and I found sitting up even very difficult so basically I was like: Okay, I am gonna go and do all these courses etc and I just found myself really wanting to give [writing] a go. And then I just did an online course on how to be a freelance writer because I knew because it was my second pregnancy that actually the first few months of having a child you can actually do quite a lot.

Whilst Felipa did not start to write when she became a mother for the first time, her engagement with writing is still linked to her position as a (expectant) mother and a result of her having to negotiate work/care tensions during her second pregnancy. Since leaving her marketing career, Felipa published regularly as a freelance writer and was working on a memoir. Similar to Lauren and Felipa, many of the participants engaged in various forms of writing (see details in Table 4.1. above and Appendix B); however, a combination of freelance writing or editing to have a more regular income and novel writing on the side was a common arrangement.

The need to generate an income from writing did not exist for every participant, but almost all desired to publish and make money from their writing in some form at some stage and perceived it as more than a hobby. This point was made by some participants in relation to other people, such as family members, who treated their writing as a leisure pursuit:

My mother in-law is very supportive in a lot of ways and looks after my son, but I can tell that in her heart of hearts she sees my writing and filmmaking as my silly hobby that I have on the side. (Bhavini)

> Both my parents are like "you don't really have to try too hard, you have your children".
>
> For my parents like really that's the big deal. (Felipa)

Whilst others might perceive writing as a leisure activity and expect women to foreground their maternal role, the participants in my study ascribed more importance to it. Seeing their writing as 'more than a hobby' reflects an attempt by the participants to differentiate themselves from amateur writers as well as to demand respect and recognition from the outside world for it. In addition, given the high status of paid work, it is unsurprising that the participants did not frame their writing as a leisure activity or a hobby but an activity that needs to be taken seriously by themselves as well as others, so that it can serve as a replacement for their former professional accomplishments/identities. I thus generally refer to their writing as creative work rather than a creative activity, emphasising the participants' desire to stay integrated in the labour market, which is an important feature of this creative cohort.

Although most women started to write in a consistent manner at some point after they had children, they all had been considering becoming a writer or enjoyed writing well before that – often since childhood. Most of the participants had writers in their families – mothers, grandmothers or siblings – or otherwise creatively-oriented parents and families, which highlights the role socialisation and the family plays in the tendency of engaging in creative work (Tan & Grigorenko 2013). I am thus not claiming that motherhood turns women into writers or creatives but that motherhood can provide an entry point into a writing career for writing inclined women. For despite long having an interest in writing, most of the women I interviewed had commonly chosen a more traditional and stable education and career path, though often closely related to writing, such as journalism and communications (see Table 4.1,

above). Some participants were actively discouraged by their parents to pursue a creative career as the following excerpts show:

> My degree was in communications and journalism – that was basically because I wanted to write, but my parents were really worried about me going down this path of writing and thought that, you know, I wouldn't make any money or anything like that, so they really actively discouraged me from just going down a creative path. (Lauren)

> I've always enjoyed writing and like that kind of creative work but I kind of grew up with that idea that that kind of stuff is not a financially stable kind of career to go into. (Raquel)

It was striking that this explicit discouragement from pursuing a creative career after finishing school was prevalent among participants whose parents had a migration background. For those women in particular, motherhood and maternity leave provided them with socially licensed time to engage in writing with less risk and opposition.

Other participants undertook creative studies but then faced difficulties in earning an income from their practice. For instance, Bhavini studied filmmaking and wanted to write screenplays but was not able to find work in her industry after graduating and instead worked in the health sector for eight years. Having a child enabled her to get back into writing:

> After I had my son and I had a really terrible experience – I had a lot of complications, I was about a month in ICU. I found myself glued to the couch, you know, hours and hours a day and I wrote a screen play.

Subsequently, Bhavini was able to make connections in the film industry, participated in different initiatives and was able to secure her first paid writing job. At the time of the second interview, she considered herself as a "mid-career writer". Looking after her son afforded her time away from her non-creative work, which she used to write and establish her career.

There were also differences in how participants approached their writing. For instance, not all women began by wanting to turn their writing practice into a source of income. For some, it was a leisure activity at first that later was seen as an opportunity to potentially generate an income from, as illustrated by Vanessa:

> I started writing novels when my son was a baby, so about sevenish years ago. Because I had time at that time. After I have been doing this for a few years I was like I should just go and do a PhD and get paid to write novels.

When Vanessa had her first child, she left her position as a political campaigner and started to write. She had two more children in the subsequent years and completed a master's degree in creative writing, and, at the time of the interviews, had started a PhD. Both of these degrees offered her a scholarship stipend with which she could finance her writing and, according to her, add legitimacy to it. She also talked jokingly about her dream to "write a million dollar novel", indicating that she sees financial potential in writing – reflecting what Duffy Jones (2016) termed 'aspirational labour', discussed in Chapter 2.

These selected examples indicate that the pathway into writing following the transition to motherhood was different for each participant and, for some, did not occur immediately.

Furthermore, participants negotiated mothering, writing and (non-creative) working (some still had to make an income) in different ways. One participant returned to work full-time and wrote after work (Lauren), others did not return to work after their maternity leave and wrote whilst primarily caring for their children at home (Vanessa, Amrita, Sarah, Amy, Valerie), others returned to work and then were made redundant/took redundancy and established a home-based writing/publishing business (Raquel, Chloe, Clara). However, whilst the ways women engaged in writing varied, all of their stories highlighted how their uptake of writing was related to the transition to motherhood. To better understand how becoming a mother facilitated women's engagement in writing, I next look at the temporal and spatial changes that restructured the participants' lives in a way that made it more conducive to writing.

5.3 Temporal and Spatial Changes: Having the Time and Space to Write

The women in my study all spoke of the impact that the transition to motherhood had on their lives and said that having a child significantly restructured the time available to them. As indicated in the participants profiles set out in Table 4.1, almost all interviewees worked full-time outside the house before they had children and thus had limited time to engage in creative activities. However, in the first year(s) after giving birth most time was spent at home. Thus, one of the common themes from the participants was that having a child and a break from full-time work provided them with the time to write:

> I always wanted to actually have the time to write a novel, but I have never really been able to carve it out in my life. And it seemed like a good time to start it. I am on two-years maternity leave […] so I thought, why not do that. (Sarah)

I've kind of felt like I've never had enough time to focus on the things that I wanted actually to do rather than the work or the study or whatever it was. (Raquel)

All I wrote before [deciding to become a freelance writer] was marketing related. So, I was in a kind of job that you just wrote emails and emails and emails and wrote minutes and documents all day long. So [creative writing] was a dream for a long time but then I am not gonna go home and do any more writing. (Felipa)

I just felt like not working, it just pulled this creative energy. And the book just fell out of me like cereal out of the box. I loved it. (Clea)

Whilst all the participants wrote occasionally before they had children, they did so in a less dedicated manner and primarily as a leisure activity. For instance, Felipa in her statement above mentioned how she was too tired from her day-time job in marketing to do more writing in the evening, a theme that came up in several other interviews as well. This experience indicates that a common adult woman biography leaves little time for creative pursuits. Rather than investing time in creative work, the participants were dedicated to building their professional career and thus concentrated on paid work. Transitioning to motherhood then provided an opportunity to step away from the daily grind of full-time work. The participants were aware that this break from their professional lives was enabled and sanctioned by taking up the socially valued role of a mother:

If you were a woman without children who took a year off to stay at home and write a novel, I think people would raise eyebrows. But you are just sort of on maternity leave

and you happen to be chipping away at a book, people don't really care. They're like, oh, well, you're at home with the kids. So, whatever. (Bhavini)

This statement suggests that maternity leave in particular is a time that allows women to pursue less secure interests or career paths without provoking social disapproval, because they perform a role that is socially respected and expected from women of childbearing age (Weaver & Ussher 1997; Douglas & Michaels 2004).

However, experiencing maternity leave as an opportunity to pursue creative interests was not shared by all participants. Raquel, for instance, talked about the lack of time she had for herself as a new mother, which was amplified by the fact that she and her then-husband had separated when their son was four months old:

> So then when my son came along, that was quite – it was a bit of a rude awakening. Not so much in terms of the amount that you have to spend caring for an infant, I mean that was kind of to be expected, but the feeling of exhaustion and like nothing ever stops. It's like people can explain it to you but you don't understand until it happens to you. So, you quickly realise, "I don't actually have time to have a shower today". So, any sort of ideas that you had of having time to do stuff on maternity leave at the beginning at least is not realistic because there is an impact on your body that you don't expect. (Raquel)

Raquel talked about how she never reached the point where she could "enjoy" maternity leave because she struggled with the physical and mental impact of mothering a newborn whilst also having to navigate a separation from her partner and establishing a life as a single-mother and

co-parent. This experience was shared by a few other participants who felt all-consumed by the responsibilities that come with caring for a newborn and thus did not instantly think about this transition as an opportunity to pursue their creative interests. Raquel, however, started writing a blog when her son was eight months old alongside working in publishing/IT, where she shared her personal experiences on topics such as single-parenting and divorce. Through blogging, she realised that she wanted to focus more on writing in her work and ultimately started her own business as a writer and publisher. Raquel's experience further highlights that not all women took up writing immediately after they became mothers but that some started at a later stage during the first years of motherhood.

Given the lack of leisure time, it is compelling to ask why women start writing during a period where their personal time is probably the most limited in their lives. The interview data suggests that the precarious nature of personal time during early motherhood increases the perceived value of this time. The lack of predictable personal time is thus critical for understanding why mothers engage in creative work, because it heightens the importance of the decision about what to do with this small pocket of private time. As shown in the excerpt from Sarah's interview above, personal time is perceived as very precious and other interview participants also felt encouraged to use it as productively as possible. For instance, Bhavini talked about how she had prioritised time differently since she became a mother:

> I am really surprised when I reflect on my pre-baby life and I am just like, yeah I went out and drank with friends and played pub trivia, that's all time I could have been writing, you know. But I didn't have the drive then.

Access to personal/leisure time before having children was taken for granted but once the women had children this time was perceived as especially valuable. For instance, socialising with peers was a priority for Bhavini before having her first child, but since becoming a mother she was motivated to use the time she had to herself more productively. This experience was shared by other participants who reported that they are particularly efficient and productive in these short intervals. The heightened productivity is promoted by the transient nature of personal time as it comes with an uncertainty about how much work can be completed in the coming days, weeks and months, which increases the pressure to be as productive as possible whenever an opportunity presents itself. This productivity pressure was particularly pertinent for writers who had to meet deadlines. The interviews thus indicate a positive relationship between motherhood and productivity intriguingly due to the limited availability and uncertainty of personal time as well as the high value participants attributed to this time, motivating them to use it productively. Sarah, for instance, described how she used every opportunity she gets to write:

Pretty much every minute of downtime I have is spent writing it's good. But yeah, there's not a lot of relaxation or anything else unfortunately.

However, whilst acknowledging a link between motherhood and productivity[24] and finding it useful for understanding why women start to engage in creative work when they become mothers, I think that it is important to reflect on the pressure of productivity as a symptom of contemporary capitalist society. As outlined in Chapter 3, modern motherhood is associated with high levels of stress and exhaustion due to the increasing demands that women face both

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[24] A positive link between motherhood and productivity has also been identified in other studies. For instance, in the context of work mothers have been found to be more productive than non-mothers (Krapf et al. 2014) and part-time working mothers have been identified as the most productive group of workers, wasting less time at work than other cohorts (Ernst & Young 2013).

in relation to care and work. Maternal studies scholar Andrea O'Reilly (2016) interprets the tendency of middle-class mothers to be overtly productive as a response to the devaluation of care and domestic labour, which makes them invest in work that is visible and approved. Thus, from a mental health perspective the urge to be productive during child-free times can negatively impact on wellbeing as it adds an extra layer of pressure onto the high demands mothering women face in a neoliberal capitalist society – aptly termed "burnout society" (Han 2015).

Closely related to carving out *time* to write is also being in a *space* where one can write. Given that almost all the women I interviewed were engaged in full-time professional work before they had children, they were out of the house for the majority of the day. However, since becoming a mother and having to care for a child, most of the day was spent at home – especially during the first year of their child's life. This home-boundness was experienced as conducive to writing:

> I think that part of the reason why I started to write was just the fact that I was suddenly at home and I had time. So, before I used to always work nine to six o'clock at least and I would, you know, travel into a workplace, so it was basically the entire day. And then really, I only had time to decompress and then go to sleep or whatever and weekends were for socialising, so I didn't have a lot of time to write. (Lauren)

> I think the conditions [of having a small baby] are actually not terrible for writing, because you are at home. [Before] it just wasn't my lifestyle, to sort of go home and devote four or five hours to writing. But once I had a kid, I was at home all the time anyway. (Bhavini)

This physical tie to the home was experienced as particularly productive during the children's sleep times since they could not be left unsupervised:

> My husband came home very late, he didn't finish work until 9.30/10 o'clock at night, so I put [my child] to bed and I'd write my novel and it was such a pleasure. (Clara)

Whilst evenings and weekends might have been spent out of the house in the past, participants were more likely to be bound to the home once they had children with the home becoming the realm around which most of their everyday life revolved. This finding reflects other research outlined in Chapter 3 that shows that early motherhood is associated with a withdrawal from the public into the private sphere of the home and family. Simultaneously, however, the participant's quest to engage in creative work links them to the labour market, indicating that the public/private dichotomy is less rigid and that a complete retreat into the private sphere was not desired (see Chapter 6).

For many participants, the shift into the home extended beyond their maternity leave period. An exception here is Lauren, who returned to her full-time job six months after the birth of her child. All the other women started spending significant time at home or eventually created a lifestyle that allowed them to be home, for instance, by building a freelance business (Clara, Chloe, Raquel), starting a doctoral degree (Vanessa, Sarah, Miryam) or writing with the goal of publication (Amy, Valerie, Felipa). The central position of the home is thus further deepened by setting up a workspace there and blurring the boundaries of home and work life. However, my findings show that the relationship participants have to the home is ambivalent, as the home-boundness in many cases was experienced as a lack of choices – an issue that only came up

when discussing workplace preferences (which is explored in Chapter 6). The interviews indicated several reasons for this attitude, including a resistance against being pushed back into traditional gender roles, a desire to maintain a professional identity and the need/quest to contribute to the family's income.

When initially talking about their home-centric lifestyle, participants tended to mobilise intensive mothering discourses. Rationales for staying home with their children mainly referred to a desire to be present and available for their children's development, as discussed by Amy:

> One of the things that I understood pretty early on being a parent is that you know that those moments with your children happen at random times and if you're always out of the home you miss them. Yeah. So even though it's difficult and can be frustrating working from home, just having those little moments is just wonderful […]. Even though it can be harder depending on the support that you have that sense of presence in each other's lives is priceless.

Whilst Amy, who had two young children, reported ambivalent feelings about her home-centric life, she framed it as a positive choice. In general, shifting the centre of their lives into the home was perceived as facilitating a close mother-child relationship, which is supported by the dominant 'good mother' discourse promoted under the intensive mothering ideology. In most cases, the home-boundness was seen as a temporal phenomenon that was expected to last for the first years of their children's lives. It was mentioned by several participants how fleeting this time is and that the transient nature of this life stage justified putting on hold other aspects of life, such as pursuing a career outside the home.

What was unspoken but is evident from these findings, is the gendered nature of the transition to parenthood that impacts women's life and career trajectories in a way that it does not impact those of men. Looking at the spatial changes that come with early motherhood illustrates how the life focus of middle-class women shifts away from the public sphere of work to the private sphere of the home and family. The work life is then organised around this private realm, reinforcing the gendered nature of the home sphere and care work. In contrast, most of the participant's partners/husbands continued to work full-time outside the home, indicating that their spatial and temporal conditions remained almost unchanged as a result of parenthood. The interviews thus suggest that choices about space and time are much more restricted for women once they have children, given their position as the default primary carer. That is why Petra Bueskens (2018) argues that women are free as individuals, with equal life opportunities to those of men, but constrained as mothers (see Chapter 3). Whilst women were liberated from the domestic into the public sphere over the course of the 20th century, their default position as primary carers sequesters them back into the private sphere as is evident from almost all the participant accounts. In the case of my study participants, however, the sequestration is enabled by having a partner who is financially able to support the whole family. It is this status of privilege that allowed these women to engage in creative work without the pressure of having to earn a living wage, though most of the interviewed women contributed financially to the family income through, for instance, a scholarship or income from their freelance work which thus challenged the public/private dichotomy. What my study shows is that whilst those structural changes constrain or disadvantage women with regards to their spatial and temporal liberties, they also provide an escape from a traditional model of work and the opportunity to explore less financially viable forms of work. Therefore, the ability to start writing after having children was largely framed by the participants as a positive change, but, as the next section

highlights, this story is somewhat more complex and complicated, especially with respect to participants' relationship to paid work.

5.4 Work/Care Tensions: Navigating the Mother-Worker Role Conflict

One of the reoccurring themes that emerged in the interviews was that full-time professional work is incompatible with raising children – a topic that has been well-documented and researched (Hakim 2000, 2002, 2011; Stone 2007; Duberley & Carrigan 2013; Crowley & Kolenikov 2014; Ciciolla et al. 2017; Foley et al. 2018; Orgad 2019). As discussed in Chapter 3, this work/care conflict has been attributed to a 'maternal wall' (Williams 2001) referring to the "hostile climate created by discrimination, glass ceilings, sexual harassment, and an antifamily work culture" (Stone 2007, 18) that push many women with children out of employment. The involuntary withdrawal from professional jobs also affected a number of participants in my study. Among the 13 women I interviewed, five reported that they lost their jobs after having a child, something which interviewees felt indicated that female workers with dependants are less desirable from an employer's perspective, as discussed by Amy:

> You don't realise how expendable you are in the job market until you have children. So, I didn't get my teaching job back when I had children. You are not seen as, you know, this sure bet. I know lots of women who have casually been faded out of their jobs when they had children. And you simply don't think that this will happen to you until it does.

This experience also highlights the precarious nature of the work that women engaged in before they had children, regardless of whether it was casual work as in Amy's case or permanent,

full-time employment, as in Clara's, Chloe's and Raquel's case. Clara, who worked as a senior product manager at a news agency, talked about how she was made redundant a year after she had her first child, an experience she shared with other co-workers:

> Everyone who got made redundant at the same time as me was either expecting a child or had a child under the age of two years old. It was a little bit obvious. And that had also happened in the previous round of redundancies, it was pretty much only mothers who were affected.

The transition to motherhood can affect women's position within the workforce and can turn them into less desirable employees from an employer's perspective. Chloe shared a similar experience in the news and media industry. Whilst her employer granted her some flexibility after her maternity leave, her position was eventually made redundant, and she was offered a role that she felt was untenable for someone with caring responsibilities to perform:

> They offered me another job, but it was gonna be working 5am till 2pm. It was early in the morning and my husband also works early in the morning. So, he starts work at 4am – and I was like: Who is going to look after my baby at 4 in the morning or 5 in the morning? I couldn't see how that would work.

These statements indicate that the decision to leave the workforce after having a child was often involuntary for some participants, emphasising the vulnerability of mothers in the labour market. Consequently, these women had to look for alternative employment options on top of navigating early motherhood. For instance, single mother Raquel searched nine months for a job after her redundancy and was not able to find one that would suit her life situation:

I found it really hard to find something that I would enjoy but that fit also around what I needed. Because I sort of got to a point where I was like I can't keep bending myself to fit work, I need work to fit around my situation with my son and everything.

The idea that work had to suit family needs as well as be considered worthwhile, was a common thread in the interviews, suggesting that work was selected carefully based on its potential to bring fulfilment, provide the ability to mother in a particular (intensive) way, and make it possible to justify taking time away from the children. These experiences thus confirm findings from other studies that traditional, inflexible work structures fail to accommodate care and work requirements of women in contemporary society (Stone 2007; Stone & Lovejoy 2019; Orgad 2019). What my research shows, however, is how those work/care tensions opened up a space for participants to engage in creative pursuits that offer higher levels of flexibility and enjoyment – as well as insecurity.

Mothering preferences also impacted how work/care tensions were negotiated. As outlined in Chapter 3, the intensive mothering ideology expects women to prioritise childrearing over their careers, indicating the push and pull factors that impact women's relationship with paid employment once they have children. Most participants ascribed a high priority to their maternal role, and some did not aspire to return to their old workplaces. This preference included the desire personally to care for their children, especially in the first months and often years of the child/ren's lives. Whilst many first-time pregnant women do not expect their lives and priorities to change drastically when they became mothers, they often shift significantly for most women (Thomson et al. 2008). Valerie's comment illustrates a common experience:

I planned to go back to work at six months, but I really didn't want to. It wasn't how I expected it, I just liked being at home with [my son].

Whilst the plan before a baby is born often is to return to work after a fixed period of maternity leave – which in Australia is on average 32 weeks (ABS 2013), of which a minimum of 18 weeks is paid – many mothers decide not to leave their children in someone else's care at this age and so postpone their return to work. For instance, an Australian study looking at the timing of women's return to work after giving birth showed that only 22% of mothers started working six months after giving birth, 44% after 12 months and 54% after 18 months (Baxter 2008). It is thus worth exploring why participants decided to stay home longer than anticipated and/or not to return to their jobs at all, as this provides further insight into their decision to engage in creative work when they became mothers. This inquiry highlights the decision-making that is required from women as part of their project of the self, including decisions on whether to return to work, whether to stay home with the child and what work to engage in. However, whilst these 'decisions' might feel unique to the individual, they are generally driven by larger cultural trends and discourses and thus follow distinct patterns.

One dominant narrative I heard from the interviewees was the incompatibility of an office job with their maternal preferences, as Vanessa explained:

I was breastfeeding and I could have gone back to work after a year, but there was no childcare at work. The only childcare was like a 15-minute walk away and that would have pretty much killed our breastfeeding relationship and I just didn't feel good about it. So, I didn't go back to work.

For Vanessa, the lack of care opportunities available to support her mothering preferences – in this case breastfeeding her child for an extended period of time – prevented her from returning to work, though she was in a position that allowed her to make this choice. Evident is that Vanessa's maternal and professional identities are in tension but that she prioritised her mothering role over her work role. It also demonstrates how mothering practices that reflect wider cultural trends and discourses of 'good' motherhood shape the biographies of many middle-class women during early motherhood. The value Vanessa ascribes to breastfeeding her child beyond infancy, for instance, is indicative of a parenting trend called attachment parenting, that is said to promote a close mother-child bond. But as discussed in Chapter 3, attachment theory was first formulated and propagated in the 1940s and is viewed critically by feminists as a way to tie women to the home and family after their increased economic activity during the Second World War (Thurer 1994). Since then, attachment parenting has experienced a revival – though the feminist critique still exists – and was most prominently promoted by paediatrician William Sears and his wife Martha (2001) from the late 1980s onwards, who appeal for a return to "instinctive" and "natural" parenting (Hamilton 2020). Whilst attachment parenting can be classified as a form of intensive mothering, as it is child-centred, labour intensive, emotionally absorbing, financially expensive and expert-guided (see Chapter 3), it represents the extreme end of the spectrum and is also associated with privilege (Faircloth 2014). However, it is a growing parenting trend in Western societies that provides mothers with a set of norms by which to orient their maternal identity work and a source of guilt for those not in a position to engage in it (Faircloth 2013, 2014). The intense nature of the mother-child relationship that this parenting style promotes, requires the – at least temporal – relinquishment of paid work outside the home (Hamilton 2020). Breastfeeding is a dominant feature in this parenting discourse and plays a central role in contemporary constructions of 'good' motherhood (Faircloth 2013). The desire to breastfeed unobstructed and be the full-time carer

for their children for the first years was shared by other participants of my study. Chloe, a mother of three children, for instance, stated:

> Freelancing was a way to kind of preserving the time with her [daughter] whilst also earning money. […] Working like this has always been so I can avoid day care as long as possible. I really don't want to put them into day care until after they are one and breastfed. I have always exclusively breastfed and none of my kids have taken bottles. I have never pushed that but none of them has taken bottles and so this is a way to kind of preserve that and be there for them, you know, in that first – particularly that first year. But also, I don't want to put them into day care more than two or three days. That's always been like, you know, my thing. I am happy to send them to day care, but I just don't want them to be there all week. So, this is another way that I can earn a decent income but not have to send them to day care that much.

Only one participant had her child in day care full-time – and thus would have fallen into the category of the 'hardcore' mother (Dent 2021) discussed in Chapter 2 – all of the others had part-time childcare arrangements (2-3 days). Whilst this ratio might be reflective of an affordability issue (childcare rates in Australia are calculated per day), what was apparent was how childcare was framed as a welcome form of temporary support but not as a desirable full-time solution. This attitude is reflective of how some participants negotiate the intensive mothering ideology (and attachment parenting in particular), which postulates that the most appropriate environment for an under-school-aged child is the home and under the mother's care whilst simultaneously meeting expectations to engage in paid work. Those conflicting expectations show that navigating children and employment under the intensive mothering ideology is difficult and that creating your own work(-like) opportunities around the family

needs can be seen as the most practical solution to those work/care tensions. Consequently, self-employment for women with children is often a result of necessity rather than free choice, as is generally assumed in policy discourse (Foley et al. 2018). My research thus indicates that creative work can be predominately opportunistic and that it reflects an attempt to make the best of a contradicting situation between work and care that most women need to negotiate.

The subject position of the mother-writer or mother-creative is further encouraged by a general trend to self-employment, which, in Australia, is actively supported by the government and specifically targeted at women (see Chapter 2). The shift away from employment towards self-created work opportunities such as those engaged in by my study participants, is emblematic of this wider cultural trend and foregrounds the inability of the employment sector to meet the needs of mothers (mainly spatial and temporal flexibility as well as quality care). As a response to work/care tensions, the mother-writer phenomenon shares key characteristics with the trend of 'mumpreneurship'. As outlined in Chapter 3, the term mumpreneur refers to a specific sub-group of female entrepreneurs, who prioritise family commitments over their business (Eskynsmith 2011; Surangu & Ranwala 2018). Duberly and Carrigan (2013, 629) have attributed the popularity of mumpreneurship to the fact that it provides the opportunity to women to generate an income (which, however, is often low) and simultaneously engage in intensive mothering by "facilitating far greater engagement with children than was possible during previous corporate lives". Highlighting the secondary nature of work in this business model, it has been found that many mumpreneurs are often not seeking to develop their businesses, do not view it as a long-term strategy and are not existentially dependent on it (Vadnjal et al. 2009). A similar relationship to their creative work was prevalent among some of my participants, with the data suggesting that writing was in many cases opportunistic and a supplement to their maternal role rather than the other way around. Some participants were also

unsure as to whether they would continue writing in this form when their children get older, suggesting that this phase may be transitional. For instance, when asked about where she sees herself in five years, Vanessa replied:

> Yeah, I don't know. I'm like, you know, hopefully I kind of would have got a novel published by then. But I think if you'd asked me five years ago, I would have said the same thing (laughs). Hmm. Yeah, but I don't know. I'm just really enjoying the chance to kind of unwind and be creative.

The focus of writing and the role it played in the lives of participants was mainly on the present rather than on the future. The engagement with writing in this context thus does not fit the criteria of passionate work as the main factor that motivates participants to engage in creative work. Whilst participants mobilised the passionate work discourse when accounting for their uptake of writing, it seems unlikely in most cases that this change in their career path would have occurred without their transition to motherhood. There are thus a lot of parallels between mumpreneurs and the mother-writers of my study, who are both prompted by motherhood to make new arrangements to accommodate their care work alongside their professional (though not always paid) work.

Paradoxically, the mother-writer phenomenon (as well as mumpreneurship) is both an indicator of privilege and often precarity. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary work in neoliberal societies is characterised by a destabilisation and casualisation that affects most people, regardless of their status and income (Gill & Pratt 2008). Self-employment has been increasingly normalised in this environment, which does not come with a guarantee of success and is often a financially risky endeavour. For instance, there is no income security provided

by self-directed work such as writing, leaving women in vulnerable financial positions. In addition, self-employed people do not have automatic access to annual leave pay, sick pay or superannuation, increasing their financial precarity, which, due to the gender pay gap, is heightened for women (Eastough & Miller 2004; Lawter et al. 2016). As a result, the ability to engage in work that is not essential and does not necessarily guarantee an income is only obtainable for a privileged group of people. A path into self-employment is thus not available to every woman as it requires significant savings and/or a partner who can provide financial support. For instance, those participants in my study who decided to take redundancy after having children used their redundancy payment as a financial enabler to establish their own writing business. Three of them also had partners with a stable and relatively high income. Other women financed their writing through the support of a scholarship stipend (which provides a regular but low income) or being contracted to write a book, article or screenplay (which, in most cases, is unreliable and low income). The precarity that comes with being a writer was discussed by Amy:

> I had some early successes but years and years of just rejection and then pain and agony with it. And also, I think poverty is worth mentioning because even if you have success as a writer that can very easily not translate into financial success.

So, while becoming a mother-writer might seem like a panacea to work/care tensions on an individual level, the wider social implications of this trend need to be considered. For instance, the fact that most participants were in full-time employment that offered social benefits before they had children and now engage in precarious self-employment, increases their financial vulnerability and dependence on their partners. It has thus been argued that this individual 'solution' to work/care tensions, perpetuates a trend that does not encourage the increase of

structural support for mothers nor does it challenge the issue at its core – the incompatibility of contemporary work and care culture (Luckman 2015b). However, similar to other studies discussed in Chapter 2, I found very little reference from the participants to structural inequalities among the participants, rather they attributed their shift in work and lifestyle to a change of values – what is perceived as valuable, important, preferable or desirable (Thome 2015) – which was prompted by becoming a mother. The next section thus explores in more detail the narratives the participants mobilised to make sense of their changed life situation.

5.5 Reinventing the Self: Making Sense of Life Changes

When talking about their decision to take up writing in relation to becoming mothers, participants engaged in a variety of narratives and generally perceived this transformation as an opportunity to reinvent themselves. One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was that the transition to motherhood and the break from employment allowed for a general revaluation of life choices:

> I think that when you spend six months off, you start thinking about, you know, "Well what did I really want to do at the start?" Like, you know, before all of the rest happened – I went to uni and before my parents said "You should do this" and before I went into this job and just went down a path, like right back at the genesis, like what did I want to do and I wanted to write. (Lauren)

> Motherhood definitely crystallised like what I want to actually be doing with my life, you know like that opportunity to stop and kind of shift modes gave me the space to say

okay actually, like I don't want to work in an office. I don't want to work in this job. I want to be writing and like if I don't do it now, I'm never going to do it. (Sarah)

Having my son and you know my mother passing away and all of these things – and all of these big life changes you kind of figure that life is short. And that I am capable of much more than what I give myself credit for. So, I just kind of dug my toes in – not even dug my toes in, jumped right in and did it. (Safia)

Feeling prompted by motherhood and having a break from their full-time jobs (and loss, in Safia's case), some participants revaluated their life choices and purpose – a common phenomenon among mothers as discussed in Chapter 3. Consequently, they took up writing, hinting that this is the work they actually wanted to do. In other words, the work they feel most passionate about. Lauren has since published several books and journal articles, Sarah has enrolled in a creative writing PhD program and started writing a novel and Safia has written a short film, which she ended up producing herself due to not being able to engage external producers. Those narratives show that becoming a mother is a life event the participants frame as an opportunity for reimagining themselves and changing their life trajectory, a theme that was reflected in most other interviews as well.

In addition to a general revaluation of life, another theme that emerged in the interviews was that of 'changing values' which was evident from the discussions about different areas of the participants' lives, such as work and lifestyle. Participants engaged this narrative to rationalise their decision to start writing rather than returning to their previous jobs. For instance, Vanessa talked about how her work as a political campaigner was very meaningful to her before she had children, whereas she felt differently about it in retrospect:

I don't know, I don't really know who I was before I had kids so (laughs). I am pretty sure I wasn't actually a fully formed human being, weirdly. So yeah, I feel like pre-kids I was kind of like working jobs for politicians, but they were pretty meaningless. But they felt meaningful. They felt like you were striving for progressive social change.

This statement indicates how motherhood can transform middle-class women's relationship to, and appraisal of, paid work and if the value of work decreases after having children, there is less motivation and urgency to return to it. This experience was shared by other participants who subsequently decided to step back from their pre-motherhood professional career and look for work that seemed more meaningful from their changed context and more aligned with their new life situation.

The interviewees also linked the changing of their professional focus to becoming a mother by expressing a desire to model a life and certain values for their children. For instance, by taking time to write a novel, Vanessa wanted to impart positive gender roles to her children, especially her daughter:

In terms of my kids, because every now and again I'm like: "Jesus, why would I put myself through that [writing a novel], when I could just be at home taking care of them the whole time and just being completely present for them?" But I often think about my daughter, the middle-child, and I think, I don't want her to think that you are just a mum. And I don't think that any mum is just a mum. I think that every mum has other things and like, one of my favourite slogans is "Every mother is a working mother", which is

absolutely true, but I think that the creative work has given me another thing to say that I am doing, both to my kids and to you know, random friends and family.

Vanessa's account provides an explanation to the question of why women do not just succumb to full-time intensive mothering but strive to keep engaging in work, even though they face numerous barriers to do so. By writing, Vanessa thinks that she demonstrates to her daughter (as well as family and friends) that she, as a mother and woman, has interests and priorities beyond motherhood. Engaging in writing thus allows her to model certain values around gender roles that challenge the traditional notion of the housewife. Similarly, Miryam talked about how having her daughter prompted her to revaluate and change her life:

> Until I had my older daughter, I was very happy with my master's degree, very happy with my full-time job at the university. I was the head of Publication and it was a full-time job, I had tenure. And I didn't know whether I had a boy or a girl before they were born – you know, how could I possibly raise a daughter and how could she accomplish any of her dreams, if I hadn't accomplished my dreams like finishing a novel and writing a novel? It really motivated me to once again devote myself to my writing and get my doctorate and realising my dream that I had since my childhood. You know, I think it would have been different if I had a boy rather than a girl.

Those statements highlight that with raising children, some participants felt an altered responsibility with regards to their life choices, especially if they had daughters. Miryam mobilised the passionate work discourse when talking about realising her dream and self-actualisation, which shows how the cultural values outlined in Chapter 2 shape women's biographies.

A similar discourse that was deployed by some participants to explain their engagement with writing after becoming a mother was that of passing on their own unfulfilled dreams to their children, as discussed by Amy:

> I think it was Carl Jung who said that one of the most dangerous things a parent could do is not fulfil their own dreams, because they pass those unfulfilled dreams on to their children. And I definitely felt that from my mother, who I think wanted to be a writer. She is a writer, but I think she wanted to publish and things like that...and I feel like that even if I had very limited success as a writer, if I am doing it in a way that I find satisfying, that is the best thing that I could be passing onto my children.

Achieving self-realisation and fulfilment through writing is seen not just as an enhancement of the participant's own life but also that of their children. For middle-class mothers, the project of the self appears to be intrinsically linked to their children's 'self project', as expressed by Amrita:

> I am really conscious of that. That my identity and their identity are really tied now.

Thus, some participants considered the impact of their life choices on their children' socialisation, reflecting a phenomenon associated with the intensive mothering ideology, where the mother is made responsible for the 'outcome' of their children (Chapter 3). Consequently, they reflected on their way of living from their children's perspective and made life decisions that consider the effect they think they will have on their children. Engaging in writing at home alongside raising their children is thus perceived as a work and career option that models a

certain lifestyle and values which the participants regard as valuable. Looking at the particular values (gender equality and self-actualisation) and the lifestyle (fusing work and leisure, doing what you love) provides insight into the participant's cultural norms, that reflect dominant middle-class principles.

One last narrative that some of the study participants mobilised with regards to why they started to write when they became mothers was what they described as an inner urge for creative expression, as illustrated by the following quotes:

> During the time when I was pregnant, I used to leave [for work] ten minutes early on purpose, I would walk to the bus stop and I would sit for like ten minutes and I would write down my impressions and my feelings and how my body felt with the pregnancy. And then right before my daughter was born, I took all those notes and turned them into a series of poems. You know about the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth and the expectation – pregnancy inspired me in a way that I haven't been in many years. (Miryam)

> There is something really quite magical about having a child and, you know, I am not a religious person but when I had my daughter it was just like this strange sense of being connected to the universe or being connected to something bigger – and to be honest, it disappeared over time but at that point it was very fresh and I feel like it sort of was like this interesting space where creativity could occur more within. (Lauren)

> Motherhood is what opens up that notion that we can create because we've literally created life and now it's like: okay, what else can I create? (Raquel)

All three women attributed their feelings of creative inspiration to the changes instigated by pregnancy and childbirth. From a poststructuralist perspective, the experience of feeling a creative inspiration around pregnancy and childbirth reflects a wider discourse that frames the transition to motherhood as a spiritual, empowering or creativity-enhancing event.

This section shows that participants mobilised diverse narratives to make sense of their career and life shifts towards writing when they became mothers. Because there was not one dominant rationale, I presented those that were engaged by at least three participants. Thus, rather than highlighting and analysing one discourse in detail, what was of interest to me was how participants integrated their career and life shifts into a coherent story of the self. Framing the uptake of writing in a positive and intentional way implies that rather than being coerced by external circumstances (work/care conflict) and expectations (being a good intensive mother), they present – and possibly perceive – it as a product of deliberate and meaningful choices. Utilising the passionate work discourse in this context allows the participants to make sense and take ownership of their career and life shift that was often not foreseen and, in many cases, forced rather than voluntary. These accounts thus suggest that the passionate work discourse provides an attractive narrative for women with childcare responsibilities who want to achieve a more equal work-family balance. By framing writing in terms of the realisation of a dream/passion, it allows participants to structure their project of the self, alongside dominant middle-class discourses of both contemporary work and motherhood.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored the ways in which the transition to motherhood can facilitate a woman's engagement in creative work, as the majority of participants in my study only started to write after they had children. Writing allowed them to negotiate work/care tensions by engaging in work that can be performed at home and around family needs and that was also perceived as more meaningful from their perspective as mothers. Whilst the passionate work discourse was present, it is questionable whether the participants would have started to write if they had not entered the life stage of motherhood, a transition that foregrounds work/care tensions and provoked a revaluation of their priorities. Passion alone was not the driving force behind the uptake of writing, rather a break from full-time work and becoming a mother opened up the possibility and/or need to seek out alternative work arrangements. The uptake of creative work was thus primarily opportunistic and a consequence of the external and internal changes that those middle-class women experienced when they became mothers. Those changes include the time they had available, the spaces they occupied, the incompatibility of care work with their previous jobs, the creation of their own work opportunities, and a shift in values that led to a revaluation of various aspects in their lives, which was amplified by the presence of their children. The analysis of the interview data also showed that external/structural and internal/individual-level changes are difficult to separate as they reinforce each other. For instance, the failure of workplace structures to accommodate the needs of some women during early motherhood, led them to create their own work opportunities. These, in turn, were then often perceived as a choice or even an opportunity by the individual women, who are driven by a desire to be the primary carer for their child/ren in ways that are consistent with the discourses of intensive mothering.

This chapter has thus shown that considering the context of participant's lives and the conditions under which they transition into this new life stage of motherhood, is crucial for understanding their relationship to, and engagement with, creative work. Motherhood was primarily an opportunistic pathway into creative work for participants, as writing within the home allowed them more effectively to navigate contemporary mothering and work expectations. By engaging in writing, participants were able to align their project of the self with dominant work and mothering discourses – passionate work and intensive motherhood – and to reduce the work/care conflicts they faced in relation to their previous jobs/careers. Thus, one reason why creative work is particularly appealing to women when they have children is the fact that it provides them with a positive narrative about their life changes and career transition that often was not voluntary. To further understand the unique benefits participants attributed to creative work, the role of writing in their everyday lives will be explored in the next chapter. Moreover, considering how women integrate writing into their daily routines provides insights into the question of whether motherhood and creative work are actually more compatible when both performed at home.

Chapter 6

Negotiating Writing in the Everyday: Wellbeing and Vital Work

6.1 Introduction

The main concern of this thesis is to understand how women negotiate and experience creative work and motherhood within the physical and emotional context of the home. This chapter explores how participants navigate their creative and care work in their everyday lives and the role they ascribe to writing in this process, which is the second of the three key themes to emerge from the interview data. So far, not much is known about the everyday negotiations of home-based mother-creatives but given that they need to organise their creative work around care and domestic responsibilities within the home, they face specific challenges as creatives that warrant investigation. Central issues relate to how participants negotiate writing in their everyday lives, the benefits and the challenges that arise and have to be negotiated. Also important is the role participants ascribe to writing in their everyday lives and the ways in which they negotiate time and space to engage in it. Understanding these issues is important because it provides insights into how this cohort of mother-writers manages their roles as mothers and creatives within the home.

This chapter examines four different aspects of how participants experience and negotiate their engagement in writing in their daily lives. First, I assess the role and meaning ascribed to writing. Second, I discuss how participants experience and relate to their writing, providing insights into the particularity of creative work and what sets it apart from other types of work.

In the last two sections, I consider how participants negotiate time and space in order to create opportunities for their writing practice.

6.2 Writing as Self-Care: The Role of Writing in Everyday Life

One of the main themes to emerge from the interviews regarding the role of writing in participants everyday lives was the positive impact they saw it as having on their mental wellbeing. The following comments are illustrative:

> I feel way better for the rest of the day if I get any writing done. (Vanessa)

> Basically, since I started writing, I feel like my life has been just happier and better. (Valerie)

> I can't really intellectualise it because just the drive to write and make films is so strong and it's when I am my happiest and it's when I am most at peace. (Bhavini)

> The reality is that if I didn't write I would feel like those images of fifties housewives, you know, drugging themselves and dying quietly inside. But because I do do it, I am happy, I am functioning, I feel fulfilled. (Amy)

Those statements highlight the integral role of writing in the lives of these women as they link writing to feelings of wellbeing, fulfilment and happiness. Elaborating further on her relationship with writing, Sarah, who started writing a novel when she was at home on maternity leave with her first child, stated:

I've been surprised by how essential writing feels now, given that I wasn't doing it before. It has been really, really good for my mental health as a new mother. I am very conscious of it. […] I would say now I can't imagine going back to not doing it. Like if I have a week where I didn't get any actual writing done, I feel crap. Yeah, so it's interesting, it has become essential.

Sarah's account also indicates that she does not perceive writing as a chore but as something that she desires to engage in as it provides tangible mental health benefits. Those statements highlight that writing serves an essential function in the everyday life of participants that not every form of work can fulfil. Also emphasising the fundamental role of writing in her life, Vanessa considered writing in relation to mental illness:

I don't know I feel like a lot of writing is a form of mental illness. I know that this is a weird thing to say but like there has been a lot of times where I have gone "wow, I feel so unbalanced and weird" and then "oh, I haven't written for days".

Interestingly, even though Vanessa described similar effects on her mental health as Sarah – feeling unbalanced when not writing – she did not frame it as an activity to improve her mental health but rather perceived the strong need to write as an addiction/mental illness. In both cases, writing is experienced as a tool that enhances the mental state.

The positive impact of creative work on mental health was also a discourse Safia mobilised. Safia spoke of having suffered from clinical depression and anxiety since she was eighteen as well as from postnatal depression following the birth of her son five years ago, which she

described as a period that "was really the worst it has ever been and hopefully the worst it ever will be". She talked about how her wellbeing and that of her son are interrelated:

> I have recognised, very recently, not a moment too soon, that I am the most important factor in my son's wellbeing. So, my knowledge of myself and my own mental health and my physical health are critical to my son's mental health, physical health etc. And writing only helps that. Writing and art and filmmaking only helps that, because it brings me more in touch with myself.

The linking of writing to her own wellbeing as well as to that of her family is important in that it reflects a contemporary middle-class discourse of self-care in which the mother's wellbeing is central to the thriving of her child(ren) and family (Barkin & Wisner 2013; Dong & To 2021). It is also noteworthy that mental health issues in relation to motherhood were reported unprompted by most of the participants; concerns included traumatic experience associated with miscarriages, birth, breastfeeding and depression. What was clear, is that these experiences intensify the beliefs about the essential role that writing, as a self-care practice, played in the lives of the participants and again emphasises the importance of considering the role of writing within the context of motherhood, a life stage that for many women is related to experiences of mental health issues (McLeish & Redshaw 2017).

Looking more closely at the ways in which wellbeing is said to be enhanced by writing, some participants equated it with escapism:

> I can get quite frustrated, and depressed even, if I don't get that creative outlet. It is just kind of time to dream, really and be among dreamers. Which sort of gives me hope as

well. […] As a mum, I'd say it's also a way to simply give me something that's mine. It feels like my life and my time belong to someone else, mostly. (Safia)

For Safia writing served as an escape from the hardships of everyday life, importantly including mothering, by creating an alternative reality. Writing as a form of escapism or inner refuge is a strategy through which some participants experienced and constructed wellbeing. Research by Baverstock and Steinitz (2019) on writers shows that utilising writing as a form of escapism has also been identified among the general writer population as a response to various life stressors. What is interesting about my cohort of mother-writers is the fact that, at least some of them, 'chose' this home-centric lifestyle but simultaneously desired a break from the intensity of it, indicating the ambivalence they experienced in relation to the home and mothering.

By providing an escape from motherhood, writing as a creative practice is at the same time also, in the view of participants, an enabler of intensive mothering. This sentiment was expressed by participants when they talked about the role of writing in their lives:

I think I am a better mother because I have a creative outlet. (Bhavini)

How can I be a good mother if I don't do things that you know make me feel happy and make me feel accomplished and you know capable? (Raquel)

I see being a writer as something I do for myself primarily. […] I think I can do it for myself, because it's good for the children if I had something that I do for myself. […] I think it's good for the children to have a mother who has her own interest, her own

passion, her own life outside of them, who takes time for herself. Because my mother had that and that was, I think really good, but that's how I justify having those things. (Amy)

Bhavini, Raquel and Amy use the discourse of intensive mothering to legitimate their engagement in writing as they relate their capacity to be a 'good mother' directly to making the time and space to express themselves creatively. The decision to prioritise their own needs and wellbeing through writing can thus, simultaneously, contest and reproduce intensive motherhood. Whilst the intensity of motherhood creates the desire to engage in non-maternal activities that enhance wellbeing – an indicator that the mother prioritises her own needs, and thus an act of resistance to the intensive mothering discourse – writing as an escape restores the capacity to mother intensively. Motherhood and writing as a form of creative work can thus be understood as reinforcing and enabling each other.

What becomes clear from those accounts is that the motivation to engage in creative work cannot be labelled solely as an expression of passion, and it is not focused on future rewards but on the tangible, immediate benefits writing provides in managing the everyday life as a mother. Consequently, both concepts introduced in Chapter 2, 'passionate work' (McRobbie 2016) and 'aspirational labour' (Duffy 2016), are insufficient to explain the relationship to writing as experienced by my study participants. By emphasising the immediate benefits of their engagement in creative work, the everyday role of writing in the lives of participants further questions the applicability of Berlant's (2011) concept of 'cruel optimism' in this context. Rather than being an "obstacle to [their] flourishing" (Berlant 2011, 1), writing was experienced by participants as *enabling* their 'flourishing' and as making their life bearable (though whether it continues to do so in the long term is uncertain). What is needed is a concept

of creative work that focuses on the meaning and function of writing in the present moment and the immediate reward it produces for the creative. So far, insights into this aspect of creative work are scarce and it has been pointed out that the way creative labour is experienced by practitioners is often not considered (Banks 2010; McRobbie 2016).

Based on my findings, the term that I want to propose that captures the everyday function of writing for the participants is *vital work*. This term highlights the role of writing as a self-care practice and, thus, something of a lifeline for the participants in this study. Whilst expressions such as 'vital' work and 'lifeline' can seem far-reaching and inappropriate in the context of middle-class women – they certainly would have a different, more literal meaning within a working-class context – they foreground the essential role that writing plays for participants in managing their everyday lives and motherhood. Vital work emphasises how creative work enables women to negotiate contemporary mothering by providing a counterbalance to it. Consequently, mothers might be particularly likely to engage in creative work because they feel a need to invest in non-maternal activities that increase their wellbeing and fulfilment. Extending the insights relating to wellbeing, this next section looks further at the particularities of writing as creative work that set it apart from other types of work and highlight why it is particularly attractive for women with dependent children.

6.3 Between Leisure and Work: Enjoying Writing

Whilst participants perceived their engagement in writing as work (see Chapter 5), it was generally experienced as enjoyable and fulfilling, an insight that is illustrated by the following statements:

I find the process of writing really nourishing it connects me to my heart. It's not lonely, it's the opposite of lonely, it's just the most fulfilling thing. (Amrita)

I've been wanting for a long time a combination of creativity and to be able to do work that I enjoy as I feel like for my whole career it was disjointed. (Raquel)

These statements are in line with research on creative work which shows that it is experienced as satisfying and fulfilling, because it offers opportunities for self-expression and self-actualisation (Gill & Pratt 2008). Engaging in work that is personally rewarding was an important factor for all participants, a finding that is reflective of a larger cultural trend which stipulates that work should make you happy, be fulfilling and enjoyable, qualities that seem to be of particular relevance among stay-at-home mothers.

In contrast to the non-creative work many participants engaged in before they had children, writing was also perceived as being a source of energy:

Because writing is the only thing that I do for me it should be rewarding and it should be something that, you know, feeds my brain instead of drains it, like every other job that I've had until now. (Raquel)

I am less burnt out than I would be if it weren't creative work. I think if I was trying to do really strictly academic work, which I have done in the past, I probably would be struggling more. But because it's sort of a creative project that like when it's working it's very pleasurable, you know, it's not hard work when it's going well. And it's not always going well, obviously, but like when it's flowing it makes me feel more

energised rather than less. There are other types of work or writing that might not feel

that way. So, I think in that way I'm less burnt-out than I probably would be. (Sarah)

Writing is a way to alleviate boredom I guess, because it can get quite repetitive being

a mother of a very small child, you always do the same things over and over again. It is

challenging – but it is not challenging necessarily in an intellectual way or in a

stimulating way. Storytelling is challenging in a more intellectual stimulating way.

(Safia)

The relationship with work that most of the participants had during the first years of motherhood

was driven by a search for personal fulfilment and a source of vitality. Those participants who

took up writing, thus specifically looked for a kind of work that would enhance their everyday

life and provide a balance to their demanding maternal work. Consequently, writing was

experienced as work that study participants engaged in voluntarily and they portrayed high

levels of intrinsic motivation to engage in it. The interviews showed that very few incentives

were needed for the participants to write:

Because it is creative work and I haven't actually written long creative work before, I

want to do it. So, it hasn't been hard to motivate myself to do it. I am sort of waiting for

[my daughter] to go to sleep so that I can go back to it a lot of times. (Sarah)

At the stage of her interview, Sarah had not yet formally started her PhD in creative writing, so

there was no explicit external pressure for her to produce any writing. Nevertheless, she had

started writing a novel and already "written quite a lot". What is evident is that for Sarah the

nature of creative work itself generates enough motivation to engage in writing and to prioritise

it over other activities, such as resting, when her child is asleep or in someone else's care. Similarly, for Lauren writing was a way to recharge whilst on holiday with her family:

> My husband and I and my daughter went to Vietnam and every morning I would just sit there and write a chapter, another chapter yeah do it like that. So, I find writing very easy, like it comes very natural and there is a flow to it.

At the time of the interview, Lauren had a full-time job, was enrolled in a non-creative PhD program and had written a book. There was no financial reason for her to write but she enjoyed writing so much that she did it in her 'leisure time' on top of all her other commitments. My research suggests that motivation is driven by multiple factors including the determination to make the most of the little personal time that is available to women during the first years of motherhood (as discussed in Chapter 5). The high motivation participants experienced in relation to writing makes it comparable to other recreational pursuits, such as hobbies. Leisure activities have been defined as "separate from obligations […] to which the individual turns at will" (Pöllänen & Voutilainen 2018, 619), generating pleasure, recreation, and wellbeing (Rojek 2010) – all aspects that also apply to how participants related to writing. So, the attractiveness of writing for the participants can be linked to the fact that it provides an opportunity to engage in a fulfilling activity whilst also maintaining a professional identity, by proclaiming writing as something that is more than a hobby.

Whilst the benefits of writing were overwhelmingly described as positive, writing can also generate negative emotions, such as frustration, stress and anxiety. Flagging the disconnect with notions of mental wellbeing, this emotional instability was especially prevalent for participants who ran their own writing business and were dependent on its income. However, it was

noticeable that in most cases, the negative aspects of writing did not directly relate to writing itself but to external, uncontrollable factors, such as the lack of time or clients or the inability to get published. Interestingly, some participants found that challenges related directly to the writing process (for example, writer's block) were less confronting compared to the tediousness of motherhood. Safia explained it as follows:

> I don't find the blank page that frightening anymore. It feels like I face much worse things than a blank page and the prospect of kind of spilling my heart onto the page seems enjoyable now.

Writing itself is experienced as more manageable and pleasant than the domestic and care labour the participants have to perform, which highlights again the benefits that they derive from writing and how it serves as an enabler of 'good' and intensive mothering.

The amalgamation of pleasure and work stands in stark contrast to the tediousness and monotony the participants associated with care and domestic labour – even though they have 'chosen' to prioritise it – which cannot measure up against such a standard of work. If the cultural imperative is to pursue work that offers enjoyment, happiness and fulfilment, then work that does not generate those outcomes will be less appealing. Lauren, for instance, raised the ambivalence she experienced with respect to prioritising creative work (she writes and paints) over housework:

> Sometimes as a woman being creative is a luxury. And I should be washing the dishes or I should be putting the clothes up on the line or I should be keeping the house clean – cause my house is a pigsty. Now if I look at my sister's house, it's all clean and perfect

and all that sort of stuff. Sometimes I feel like instead of pursuing the creative stuff, I should be doing those other things but it just wouldn't make me happy. I would be deeply unhappy if I was focused on those other elements.

The pursuit and appraisal of self-fulfilling work as well as the distinguishment between desirable and undesirable work creates role conflicts, especially for women, who statistically perform the most undesirable work at home (Carlson et al. 2018). The prioritisation of creative work and self-fulfilment over domestic responsibilities is thus a result of negotiations women have to make whilst caring for their children at home. In addition to making writing a priority, participants also had to carve out the time to actually engage in it. The temporal aspects of integrating creative work into their daily lives will be discussed next, providing further insights into the lived-experience of mother-writers.

6.4 Temporal Tensions: Not/Having the Time to Write

Whilst Chapter 5 discussed that the participants perceived the temporal changes that were prompted by the transition to motherhood as freeing up time to engage in creative work, looking more closely at the availability of personal, child-free time that they had at their own disposal and could use for writing, shows that it did not necessarily increase, but that it was utilised more productively and experienced as being more valuable than it was before having children. Lauren, for instance, talked about how she used all the time she could get to write a book whilst her daughter was young:

I would sometimes write in the evening, so when [my daughter] was asleep, like as soon as she fell asleep I would just be typing and get a chapter done. I know that my time is

limited, so when I get like a clear two or three hours I am like, okay this is it, you know, I've got to write it.

Thus, it is less about *having* the time to write and more about *making* and *utilising* the time to write that is characteristic of these mother-writers. Whilst the children were small and in the full-time care of the mother at home, this personal or creative time was most commonly available when the children were asleep – either by waking up early in the morning, staying up in the evening or working during nap times. Talking about her writing routine, Sarah, who started writing a novel a few months after her daughter's birth, stated:

I definitely prioritise it [writing when my daughter is asleep]. To be honest, it doesn't even occur to me to do housework or other things when she is asleep. It's like that's the time when I sit down and write. […] I make sure that I get everything that needs to get done around the house done whilst she is awake. She can just follow me around, because I know that I don't want to spend her naps doing that. The time is precious.

Sarah structures her day to ensure that the time her daughter (aged 14 months at the time of interview) is asleep can be used exclusively for writing, and to this end she prioritises her creative work over domestic duties. Day-to-day care and domestic tasks thus need to be organised strategically to enable this time to be used for personal endeavours such as writing. The small pockets of time that participants carved out and used for themselves were perceived as very valuable but, at the same time, also as uncertain. Sarah talked about the challenges that arise from her dependency on nap times:

I am so conscious of needing the time. Like that has probably been the biggest challenge, the fact that I am so reliant on her to give me this time and she is just a little baby who has no control over what's happening in her brain. Hm so that's been emotionally challenging.

Similarly, Vanessa described the difficulties that result from the unreliable nature of this personal (writing) time:

It's hard to get into the right headspace when it is up in the air. Like it is hard, if you don't know how long you are going to have to put into it that day or if you are even going to have any time or if someone is going to come knocking at your door.

These two interview excerpts illustrate the precarious nature of the personal, child-free time that is available to women when their children are still very young and the impact that has on writing, a practice which according to many established writers requires blocks of uninterrupted time. American writer Joyce Carol Oates (2019), for instance, in her masterclass on creative writing states: "The great enemy of writing isn't your own lack of talent, it's being interrupted by other people". Additionally, a routine is seen as essential for a productive writing practice (Currey 2020). However, both uninterrupted time and routines assume temporal liberties that most mothers of small children do not have. Children do not nap reliably every day and sleep patterns are constantly changing, as discussed by Amy:

The reality is, you can ask any women with young children what her writing structure looks like and I could tell you what it is for this month but next month it will look different and the month before it looked very different.

Participants have thus little control over the time they can write, particularly if their children are still very young. The dependency on children's sleep times to write also indicates that the women's partners play a marginal role in the everyday care work. This paternal absence is due to the fact that almost all of the participants' partners were working out of the house full-time. Any additional working time had then to be organised sporadically after work hours or during the weekend, when the partner could look after the child/ren[25].

Consequently, high levels of flexibility and adaptivity were required and participants needed to constantly negotiate writing time with other aspects of their lives, including the relationships with their partners:

> I can't imagine returning to it [writing] in the evening actually. That's the time that [my husband] and I actually get to spend together. I can't think, my brain is just mush by then. Like I am not a person who can work easily in the evenings. (Sarah)

> Lots of parents talk about working at night. And I tried to do that, because, you know that's the only time potentially where you – when you are able to write. But I just can't. That made me unhappy. Because the night time is my only time where I have time with my husband where I can just relax. (Clara)

Not all child-free times could be used for writing as participants had personal writing-time preferences, which were often during the day rather than in the evenings. In contrast, Vanessa described herself as a night-owl and was able to accommodate her writing well with just one

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[25] Interestingly, this dynamic changed when some of the partners had to work from home during COVID-19, which allowed the women to invest more time in their personal endeavours.

child, using the first three hours of her child's night sleep to get uninterrupted writing time. She described this phase as her most productive. However, when she had another child and her first-born started childcare her writing time was affected by additional – and often conflicting – schedules. Mothers thus have to navigate their own sleep/work preferences, their kids' sleep/wake preference as well as institutional schedules (childcare, partners working hours, etc.). Consequently, some participants had to adapt their own schedules and preference to find any time to write during the day:

> So, I think I'm gonna have to not be a night-owl. But I've got to figure that out (laughs) figure out how to get up at 6:30am and write instead. I think that's my only chance to get anything done in the future. (Vanessa)

> I also need to be kind of better at also being able to work at different times of the day and different times of the week because I do find, for instance, that at night time I am too tired (laughs) to do anything, like I don't – and on the weekends they are just so consumed with children that – maybe it is different if you are more successful, maybe you do say "Hey, Saturday mornings it's mum's time to do loads of work" but at the moment I can't do that – I mean I can in special circumstances, if I have a deadline or you know, but at the moment I can't do that to my husband. […] Sometimes he says "why don't you get up at five am?" "Because I am exhausted, I'm exhausted!" And my son gets up at six, so I don't want an extra 60 minutes, I want an extra 180 minutes. So yeah, that's possibly a learning that I have to get better at, just being able to just sit down and get 50 minutes or 10 minutes done here and there. (Felipa)

Felipa's comment also highlights how taking and requesting time for writing is linked to the role ascribed to this creative work and suggests that making money from it, would provide her with greater bargaining powers. This further explains the desire on the part of participants to associate their writing with work rather than leisure, as it provides them with legitimacy to prioritise it – especially if it generates an income. The lack of recognition for writing as more than a leisure activity, has consequences with regards to the time and resources available to invest in writing, as Bhavini explained:

> That's the thing if it's not recognised, if everybody in your life just treats it as like a silly hobby that you do sometimes but really your job and your responsibility is to be a mother, it's very hard. It's very hard to give your craft the time it deserves, that's kind of what I'm realising. You know, I work faster, that's out of necessity. But now I really want to restructure my life so that I can actually give my work the time it really deserves, as if it was any other job. I did much less useful work when I worked at the university, but nobody ever queried that I went to the university to make money. No one ever queried that, and I potentially could make a lot more money as a writer than as a university admin person.

If creative work receives less recognition than a traditional job, getting the time and support to further invest in this work/career is difficult. However, one way to increase legitimacy and respect for writing is by being remunerated:

> Having the scholarship is a huge thing for our family because it means not only that it contributes to the family but that I can go "Look, I am getting paid to do this, so you all need to take this much more seriously". (Vanessa)

Clearly important in terms of gaining legitimacy, however, getting paid is not always possible for creatives who have not yet established themselves in their field of practice. To some extent this also highlights the barriers that exist for female writers who navigate their creative practice with care work at home because if they do not get the time to write, they are also unable to establish themselves as writers.

Analysis of the data highlights that the time available to women to engage in creative work/activities during early motherhood is mostly out of their control and they have to adapt to their children's (and partner's) often unpredictable schedules rather than being able to work in accordance with their own preferences. These findings suggests that creative work is not necessarily more compatible with motherhood if it can be engaged in from home, rather, women actively have to carve out time for their writing but are able to do this more flexibly compared to out of house, organisational employment. The lack of time study participants had and the effort they had to put into making time to write, further suggests why they engaged in creative work in particular: Because it is work they do voluntarily, and receive personal benefits from. However, the tensions mother-writers faced in relation to engaging in their creative work at home did not just relate to the time they had available but also to having access to a space that was conducive for writing. The next section will thus explore how participants navigated spatial tensions that arose from the lack of work/care separation.

6.5 A Room of Their Own: Creating Care-Free Spaces

Given that both creative and care work took place at home, finding an appropriate space to write was an issue for the mother-writers of my study. One of the main issues to emerge from the

interviews was the centrality of formal childcare for getting writing done at home, suggesting that engaging in writing gets easier to navigate the older children get and the more support is available – further linking the practice of writing into those of work not leisure. The dependency on childcare was discussed by both Vanessa and Miryam:

> It [writing] has always been contingent on childcare. So, if my mum comes over it does not provide me with the time and space that I need to do it. It's got to be like organised childcare. (Vanessa)

> That's the hardest thing that when I know that I am home with the girls, I know I can't do any writing, any schoolwork, any creative work, like nothing, like I have to be fully devoted to them. So, really the only time I can do anything is when the schools are open, when there is childcare. (Miryam)

The reliance on childcare was also mentioned by many of the other participants. With regards to the type of care, formal childcare was preferred over private arrangements, which were described as unreliable and sometimes even as "more a hindrance than a help" (Amrita). The inability to access childcare during COVID-19 related lockdown periods thus caused significant difficulties and stress for the participating women.

Participants discussed strategies that they employed if the children were home to create a writing conducive environment and thus a space that they could use for their personal pursuits. For instance, Vanessa, who had three children under the age of eight, reflected on the following two tactics she used:

If I get the family to give me a few *pomodoros* [a 25-minute interval working technique] on the weekend, they go outside, I'm inside, it's great. But to try and work when people are there, it's really hard. Like I have to put on noise cancelling headphones (laughs) and have like full white noise going to get anything done.

For Vanessa doing cognitive and creative work such as writing from home was only possible when creating a situation where family noises could be blanked out. Chloe, also a mother of three young children, reported a similar situation:

I can't parent and work and think I'm going to be productive with the kids at home because even when my husband is minding them, I can hear them and they're crying, you know and I want to go – that instinct of wanting to go and help, that doesn't work. You can't be productive when you're constantly hearing them. So, one thing I've been doing this week actually is putting on music in my earphones. So at least I can't hear them as much. I've never been able to work with music, but I'm finding it's preferable to crying and talking and "Mum" [imitates children's voice] and stuff like that. So that's been quite good this week to have that. Yeah, but leaving the house I think is the key.

Again, Chloe describes a strategy – listening to music – she used to create an environment that simulates a child-free space to be able to write from home while her children are present. This shows that working from home – particularly if this work requires high levels of concentration and creativity – is not a straight-forward activity and that mothers rely on having access to and/or replicating child-free times and spaces at home. Chloe also mentioned how leaving the house was crucial for her to write when the children were around. The importance of this spatial

separation from the home was further reinforced by her GP (medical doctor), who Chloe had consulted after experiencing stress-related health issues:

> I went to the GP before lockdown actually and post lockdown complaining of anxiety and the thing that she said to me twice and reminded me was that I need to leave the house. Like I can't work at home because at the moment I'm trying to be all things to all people.

Here she draws on the authority of medical discourse to justify her need to carve out work time and space for herself. The importance of leaving the house came through in other interviews as well and links to both discontentment with and resistance to being 'confined' to the home as mothers. It also further suggests that creative and care work within the home are not necessarily compatible, and that participants felt a need to separate both forms of work.

The quest to find workspaces outside the home is reflective of a larger issue, namely the urge, spatially and temporarily, to escape the intensity of motherhood and domesticity to engage in self-actualising activities such as writing. In other words, the interview participants were looking for a room of their own. The idea of "a room of one's own" was formulated by Virginia Woolf's (2004 [1929]) influential feminist essay that looks at the conditions that women need to write. Woolf argued that to write fiction, women need a room of their own and sufficient financial means. Although Woolf was referring to women in general and their struggles at the beginning of the 20th century and not specifically to mothers, the symbol of a private room is nevertheless resonant. The room in Woolf's work can be understood both literally as well as a metaphor. My research found this personal room for mother-writers to be a physical, emotional and mental space that they can claim as theirs for a period of time and that does not intersect

with their mothering and domestic work. It can be a private office, a bed, a café or even a frame of mind. I will call this 'room' a *care-free space* – in the sense of being free from caring responsibilities for the children, family and house. This care-free space is a potent symbol of an identity as a creative worker that women establish separately from their role as mothers.

This care-free space was preferably outside the home, replicating going to work. The interviews showed that places such as cafés and pubs, followed by public libraries, were the most frequented out-of-home workspaces by the participants. For instance, Amy spoke about her preference for working in a café:

> When I've got someone else looking after the children I go and write in a café just because you never don't know exactly where the child is and what they are doing and how the person they are with is not doing the right thing by them (laughs) […]. So, when I really have to get stuff done I'll take my computer to a café and do it there.

This passage demonstrates the difficulty of blanking out mothering responsibilities when children are within audible distance. Frequenting a café also suggests that the desire for a room of their own is more driven by escaping domesticity than about creating the kind of space that helps their writing to flourish. Similar experiences were described by Sarah, who went to a café or the "quiet part of the pub" when her partner was looking after their daughter after he returned home from work during the week:

> I have done that [going to a pub to work] a few times and it's really helpful because I was trying to go into the bedroom and write and I just...it doesn't work. Like she wants

to come and play with me or I can hear them. Or, you know, if she cries then I am naturally "Oh my god is everything okay?" So, I had to get out of the house.

These examples highlight the challenges that mother-writers face when working from home, a space which blurs the boundary between mothering and creative work. The statements above also illustrate that the participants do not perceive working from home as a "magical solution", contrary to Susan Luckman's argument (2015b, 151) (see Chapter 2), and specifically seek out spaces outside the home in which to work when the children were around. Thus, rather than blurring work and family life, my study participants actively sought to compartmentalise and keep those spheres separate. Consequently, for them the blending of home and work is primarily an undesirable outcome and a result of necessity/lack of options rather than reflective of a preference or active choice.

The desire to spatially distance from their mothering responsibilities was not the only reason participants sought to leave their house. The interviews revealed that another challenge of working from home was the intrusion of housework:

> Generally speaking, definitely the housework intrudes on the professional work. That definitely can become quite a big issue, which is again why I was considering taking my work outdoors and either work in a café or work somewhere else so that I could kind of not have the laundry or the dishes or the cooking or whatever, on my to-do list as well. (Safia)

Similarly, Amy described how going to a café offered her a refuge from housework and family life:

I've always written from home and there is times when you just need to get away from, you know, the kitchen, the bathroom, the laundry everything. But generally, I find it much easier working from home than a café. But since I had children, I find it much easier working from a café (laughs) if the children are home.

Amy's statement indicates that workplace preferences can change with having children. Although the home used to be Amy's preferred workplace, once she had children she favoured working outside the house. Writing is an activity that requires a certain level of concentration and silence, so these requirements alone do not explain the spatial separation the participants seek out from their mothering responsibilities, given that cafés can be busy and noisy places as well. Indeed, rather than just looking for a place to write without interruption, participants specifically looked for places where they can escape their maternal and domestic responsibilities. Moreover, both Amy's and Safia's statements suggest that the problem of a lack of separation of home and work is not only related to the presence of children, but also to the constant demands of household chores. To alleviate this pressure, some of the participants have made it their rule to only do housework when the children are awake and present to make sure that a child-free home means time to write/work. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants still preferred to leave the home to write and actively sought out non-private spaces in which to engage in this work. What is clear, is that participants' feelings towards the home space were highly ambivalent.

Having access to spaces outside the house such as cafés was important to the participants. Valerie, for instance, recounted how she used to go to a café on the weekends before she had her second child and decided to turn her children's room into an office space:

Before we had the study, I used to go out to cafés and write a lot. Like there is a particular café […] that I always used to go to. On Saturday, we'd divide the day in half and each of us would get half of the day off and I've gone right into the café in the morning.

Valerie went on to describe how she enjoyed going to a particular café in her neighbourhood because it had a "cosy feel" and was not too "busy" or "noisy". In that sense, Valerie created her own workplace outside of the house by seeking out a location and atmosphere that provided her with time and space away from her child, was conducive to the creative process and made writing an enjoyable experience. By returning to the same café on a regular basis and forming relationships with the café staff, she appropriated this commercial space for a more private purpose.

Although most participants said they preferred to work outside the house, finding an adequate workspace was a challenge. Felipa, for instance, talked about the difficulty of locating an affordable place that suited her specific needs as a freelance writer:

I have tried [working in cafés] and you end up spending – then you feel guilty because you spend your money on all this food you don't really want to eat, or you go to the library and everybody is noisy, or you want to interview someone and you can't do that from the library.

Felipa described her ideal workspace as a desk in a co-working space, where she hoped to get more easily into an "office mentality" to increase her productivity. However, due to their

relatively high costs, co-working spaces present a financial barrier for many women. Amy and Chloe, for instance, also would have liked to work in an office outside the house, but spoke of the difficulties associated with doing so:

> I think actually my preferred way of working would be to work in an office outside of the house. But the practicalities of that, of hiring a space and all that kind of thing make it a bit too difficult. (Amy)

> I've looked into co-working spaces, but you've got to commit and they're quite expensive. I mean if you could do a casual thing, it would be good, but I don't want to commit to – some of them were like a thousand dollars a month or five hundred dollars a month. (Chloe)

Whilst co-working spaces seem like a solution to the home/work problem the participants faced, the costs associated with shared workspaces can serve as a barrier, especially given the financial vulnerability of many women with dependent children. The result is that self-employed mothers who do not have access to an office space are encouraged to work from home, even though this is often not their preference. Rather than sharing home and work spaces, the ideal work place for most participants was either a studio in the garden or an office within walking distance of their home. This quest for a working space that is separate from the family home highlights the tension that working from home can present for mother-writers.

Of the complex issues that arise for women who write while caring for young children, the most relevant and unexpected finding was that working from home was *not* the preferred working mode for most of my participants. Indeed, rather than electing to work from home, the

participants were actually structurally confined to the home. The dissatisfaction of the interviewees with working from home and thus negotiating motherhood and creative work is easily understood, given the fact that most participants engaged in full-time work outside the house before they had children. The structural barriers that often exclude mothers with dependent children from the public sphere, such as the incompatibility of motherhood and work and the lack of accessible spaces for stay-at-home mothers to use for work purposes, deprive them of their free, autonomous position in society. The quest for care-free spaces to write, can thus be interpreted as a desire to be the free, autonomous individual that they were before having children – a topic that the next chapter will further explore.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insights into how participants negotiate and experience creative work and motherhood in their everyday lives. The narratives drawn from the interviews highlight that being home with their young children created a desire in participants to engage in work that is experienced as fulfilling. They saw writing as a way of enhancing their wellbeing and as a form of escapism, serving as an antidote to motherhood and domesticity which often involve monotonous and tedious labour. Considering the immediate benefit associated with creative work in managing the everyday, I propose the term 'vital work' as appropriate for this cohort, as it emphasises the essential role that participants ascribe to writing in navigating their everyday care and domestic responsibilities at home. Participants' voluntary engagement in writing and the recreational benefits they associate with it, positions writing close to leisure. Creative work is thus particularly appealing because it allows women to engage in meaningful, rewarding work whilst mothering, providing specific benefits within the everyday lives of participants that cannot be fulfilled by every form of paid work. Nevertheless, the accounts of

the participants also suggest that creative and care work performed at home are not actually more compatible – space and time have to be negotiated strategically and participants preferred to keep both forms of work separate – with the difference that home-based creative work can be arranged flexibly around caring responsibilities unlike in organisational settings.

Whilst Chapter 5 found that participants mobilised the intensive mothering discourse to rationalise their uptake of creative work and decision to stay at home with their children, this chapter suggests that creative work can actually be a response to the intensity of motherhood. The role of creative work in the lives of mother-writers thus only becomes apparent in relation to their everyday life at home. Moreover, challenging the assumption established in Chapter 5 that motherhood can provide women with space and time to engage in creative work, this chapter has illustrated that both need to be negotiated strategically to create opportunities for writing. Participants expressed a strong desire for what I termed 'care-free spaces', a 'room of their own', that they can use for their creative pursuits and self-actualisation. I see this space as reflective of a quest on the part of participants to cultivate their individuated selves alongside their maternal role – a topic that will be further explored in the next chapter, which examines how participants negotiated their mother and writer role as part of their identity/project of the self.

Chapter 7

Navigating Identity:

The Project of the Non-Maternal, Creative Self

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how women negotiate motherhood and creative work in relation to their identity – their project of the self. Identity emerged as a strong thread in the first round of interviews and my follow-up interviews concentrated more on understanding how women located the roles of mother and writer/creative in their sense of self, which, in most cases, were both identities participants established after having children. Chapter 6 has already demonstrated how participants sought to keep their roles as mother and writer separate by creating care-free spaces and times. In this chapter, I examine more specifically the importance they attributed to their creative role as this provides further insights into the significance they ascribe to their writing and the kind of self they want to construct. As discussed in Chapter 2, the project of the self means that every individual strives to create a coherent narrative about their life. Consequently, being interviewed is an opportunity for participants to form and share this 'story of themselves', including how they want to be seen and how they understand themselves. I am interested in the narratives and discourses they engage in to do so, as these are a reflection of how the structural (cultural norms) manifests in the individual.

So far, no research has explored the relationship between identity and women's dual roles as mothers and creatives. To understand this link, however, is important because it clarifies the nature of this relationship – notably whether one role is prioritised over the other – and the function a creative identity fulfils for women who negotiate creative work and care of children

at home. To explore this topic, I first look at how participants classify their roles as a mother and writer within their projects of the self. Next, I examine how participants relate to their writer identity, which for most women was a relatively new identity they established after becoming mothers. I then present some external expectations in relation to women's engagement in the labour market that fostered the investment of the participants in their non-maternal, creative selves. Lastly, I discuss the narratives the participants used to describe, what they experience as, an inner urge to be 'more than a mother' and, from this discussion, identify the purposes this non-maternal self serves within their lives.

7.2 Positioning the Self: Mother-Writer or Writer-Mother?

During the follow-up interviews, I asked every participant if they identified with the roles mother and writer and whether they perceived themselves more as a mother-writer or writer-mother, and thus emphasise one particular identity over the other. From the responses, the following four constellations between mother and writer emerged: (1) prioritising the writer/creative role; (2) prioritising the maternal role; (3) attributing equal importance to the mother and writer role; (4) rejecting both categories. In the following, I will elaborate on those four cohorts to better understand the function attributed to those two identities.

Only two participants, Bhavini and Clara, explicitly stated that they prioritised their writing/professional over their maternal role. Bhavini stated:

> I'm a writer. I'm a writer first and yeah, I happen to have made the lifestyle choice to
> have children who I'm now responsible for but it's funny because I always wanted to
> do both. I always wanted to have children. I always wanted to be a writer. Yeah. So

yeah, I guess I'm a writer who's also a mother. Yeah, it's funny that I put my writing first.

Bhavini placed high importance on her creative identity, and intriguingly saw mothering as a 'lifestyle choice'. Having studied media arts, Bhavini had wanted to become a screen writer and filmmaker since she was a teenager and has, since becoming a mother, invested a lot of time and energy into establishing this identity. She was also unable to work creatively for a longer period of time because she was trying to save to buy a house, which, she said, "came at huge personal cost". Consequently, she wanted to focus more on her creative career in the future. Bhavini perceived of her creative identity as something that she *is* rather than what she *does*, linking her creative self to an authentic core and passion. In contrast, she explicitly mentioned that she did not find a great sense of fulfilment in motherhood:

> So much of motherhood is so fucking tedious it's conversations with other mums, it's conversations with like the day care, it's packing lunches, it's going to the park and it's very, very boring. And particularly I find it's so challenging because everything about my taste is so adult.

Bhavini felt more ambivalent about her maternal than her creative role and, consequently, foregrounds her non-maternal, creative self when asked about her identity. This experience was similar for Clara, who also emphasised her professional over her maternal identity:

> My professional identity is a big deal and I always see it as a bit bigger than my mother identity because I just don't see myself as that traditional mother type of woman.

Clara, who was running her own writing business and was the main income earner in her family, discussed her inability to identify with dominant notions of mothering and motherhood. However, despite her open rejection of a maternal identity, the interviews revealed that she was actively involved in raising her children (aged 6 and 2 years at the time of the interview) and identified as the primary carer. Her comments suggest that for her identifying as a mother encompasses more than performing maternal activities. For instance, similarly to Bhavini, she mentioned that she did not find a great sense of fulfilment in motherhood and that there are several aspects about mothering that she did not enjoy, like "making sandwiches and meeting their nutritional needs". However, it is also critical to note that the importance attributed to writing and creative working occurred in a cultural context in which creativity and creative work are highly valued. Some participants explicitly discussed the acknowledgement and status that come with identifying as a writer, which adds an additional appeal to this identity and a social status that they felt was lacking with respect to motherhood.

In contrast to Bhavini and Clara who prioritised their writer/creative identity, only one participant, Amy, attributed more salience to her mother role:

> When I first had my first child, I wanted to be a writer first and the mother as an activity and that had broken me, trying to maintain that because I couldn't write as much as I wanted to. So, for survival I had to see myself as a mother first. Yeah, and even now, I have to see myself as a mother first. There has been that shift that I see myself as a mother first because it means that I don't resent mothering whereas when I saw myself as a writer first, I resented mothering and that was just so difficult emotionally, the guilt. And I'm now – I mean the children are still very young. They're not at school, but I'm wondering how that reversion will go when they go to school – reverting back to writer-

mother. Because at the moment, I'm very much mother-writer. Yeah, and partly it's been just not fighting it. It hasn't been a choice. It's just been like not fighting it really.

What is interesting about this statement is that, in contrast to most participants, Amy was already an established writer before she had children. Whilst the other participants started to construct a new identity as a writer after becoming a mother, they also had to reconfigure some of their pre-maternal sense of self (see Chapter 5) – mainly their professional identity. Amy, on the other hand, had to renegotiate her writer identity that was part of her pre-maternal self, alongside establishing her identity as a mother. Both sets of women had to adjust their identities after they became mothers. Rather than forming a new non-maternal identity as a writer as most other participants did, Amy rethought her old writer identity in the context of her new role as a mother and, in foregrounding her maternal role, frames it not as a choice but as a necessity. In the interview, she discussed the prioritisation of the mother role as a response to the postnatal mental health issues she experienced:

> I had postnatal depression with both the children. And I think for me the guilt from that is so strong that there is a part of me that feels that I need to make it up to them by being a mother first and I don't think that that is in any way right and correct. […] But I think the guilt that I have over not jumping into the identity of mother straight away shifted it for me.

Evident here is the complexity of the hierarchisation of identities. Amy's experience illustrates how maternal guilt, a topic that has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention[26] and is particularly potent in the context of intensive mothering, resulted in the prioritisation of her

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[26] Primarily by psychology scholars but there exists also some sociological work on maternal guilt (see, for instance, Sutherland 2010; Collins 2021).

maternal role, which she perceived as an ambivalent, involuntary act. Her experience as well as the fact that she was the only one prioritising her maternal over her writer role, underline the salience of the non-maternal, creative and professional identity among the participants. Both of these 'outlier' examples also highlight the particular experiences that can shape women's relationship to their roles as mothers and creatives, which are specific to their life stage of early motherhood.

Rather than prioritising either role, most participants claimed equal status for their mother and writer identities, which is reflected in the following statements:

> I would see myself as a writer and a mother. I wouldn't want to see myself as a mum who writes because that diminishes my work. (Chloe)

> I kind of think like my mothering and writing is two separate things, even though they're often intertwined thematically. I think they're linked but they're not the same really, I'd more be like I'm a writer and also a mother. (Vanessa)

> It feels like referring to it like that [as mother-writer or writer-mother] creates a link that makes either of those roles indistinguishable from the other and how I feel is that they work alongside each other. So, they're not dependent on each other. (Raquel)

For Valerie, too, both identities – although she preferred the gender-neutral term parent – were defining to her sense of self:

If I think about myself, I don't think mother, I think parent[27]. I'm not really fussed about the order mother-writer, writer-mother. I do feel like those are the two identifying things about me. Like I think before I had kids I was like, I won't feel like being a parent is like a deep part of me, it'll be just like sort of something I'm doing but actually I do feel like being a parent it really defines me in a great way. I think also being a writer feels like a deep part of me that was always there. I mean being a parent obviously isn't a deep part of me that was always there, but it really feels like it is part of who I am. Like the way I am as a parent how I am with my kids that now feels very, very defining but the writer thing I think it just was always there. I just didn't feel the confidence to define or identify myself in that way.

Although Valerie distinguished between mothering/parenting as doing (a mere performance) and being (a state of being), she assigns a lower value to 'mothering as a mere performance' compared to 'mothering as a state of being'. This observation highlights that identity in popular discourse is often associated with a belief in an authentic, inherent self and that the amalgamation of identity and authenticity is an ideal to strive for.

Felipa also favoured an equal carer/writer identity, however, like Valerie, she contemplated different, gender-neutral identity constellations:

I like the idea of a writer with children. Yeah, you know, I like that but then I also agree that I would be treated very differently if I was a man.

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27 Valerie has lived in Sweden for a number of years and her partner and father of her children is Swedish, which could explain her preference for the gender-neutral term parent, given the high levels of gender equality in Sweden.

While Felipa would prefer a gender-neutral term, she pointed out that it would conceal the unequal lived experiences of women. For instance, she stated that it was unlikely that a hyphenated identity such as a writer-father or father-writer would be considered for male writers who have children. I have included Felipa's statement here because I was very surprised by the lack of discussion of gender inequality in the interviews, even though I directly asked the participants about their experiences and views on this issue. Intriguingly, this lack of discussion and awareness of gender inequality is consistent with research in the creative industries, where discourses of equal opportunity, post-feminism and individual responsibility pervade, which make gender inequalities difficult to address (Gill 2014, 511; Allen 2013; see Chapter 2). The absence of any discussion of gender inequality highlights that the silences and unspoken words in interviews can be as telling as the spoken ones (Brannen 2019), given that gender-based disadvantages were evident in many of the participant's experiences, for instance in relation to work discrimination and the unequal distribution of care work.

Finally, three participants reported having ambivalent feelings towards both identity categories – mother and writer:

> I wouldn't necessarily ever describe myself as a writer-mother and a mother-writer or yeah any of those sorts of terms. (Lauren)

> I have huge challenges with identity, so that could be why as a second-generation migrant I've always hated labelling myself as anything. So maybe that's one of the reasons I don't talk about myself as a writer. I don't know, maybe it's why I don't like defining myself. I just don't. (Amrita)

Even though I suppose I am writing now and if I'm lucky enough to get published, I will be a writer, it's not a category that I've ever identified with. I don't know whether that's a sort of imposter syndrome thing or that sort of self-doubt that like calling yourself a writer takes a particular confidence in that identity. But yeah, I think I probably have like a kind of slightly ambivalent relationship to both of those categories as identities. (Sarah)

Those statements highlight that identity is a concept that is highly dependent on subjective definitions and experiences. Whilst some participants rejected both mother and writer as sub-identities, others saw them as being on something of a continuum from identity as performative/fluid to inherent/essential. However, except for Amy, all participants said that the term mother-writer – which I use as an analytical tool to describe the phenomenon of mothers who organise their writing around their childrearing responsibilities – is not an expression with which they identify. More importantly, the interview narratives indicated that the subject position of the mother-writer is not one that individuals are necessarily consciously aware of and actively claim, even though they fall into a pattern of navigating motherhood and work that is symptomatic of a wider cultural trend.

Overall, and despite having different conceptions of identity, the participants exhibited a general preference towards assigning equal significance to the mother and writer identities indicating the importance that both these roles assume in their project of the self. This finding further suggests that participants did not prioritise their children's needs above their own but sought to balance their maternal responsibilities and their self-actualisation through their creative work. Given that writing was an activity most participants engaged in seriously only

after they became mothers, I was particularly interested in how they constructed and related to this identity, as it provides further insights into the role they ascribed to writing in their lives.

7.3 Establishing the Writing Self

Asking whether the participants identified as writers showed that writing and making it part of an 'official' identity did not happen instantly, as expressed by Vanessa and Sarah:

> For a long time, I just didn't tell anyone that I was doing any writing. And it wasn't until we [Vanessa and her partner] started joking around going "I'm gonna write a million-dollar novel" that it was like, "oh by the way everyone, I am a writer". (Vanessa)

> I don't make a habit of it. I have always sort of...it always felt a little bit like, you know, well I haven't really published anything yet so how could I possibly be a writer kind of thing. You know that imposter syndrome thing. (Sarah)

The uptake of writing and forming an identity as a writer did not occur simultaneously. Claiming to be a writer was often linked to the assumption that one has to have published something. However, temporal investment and education were also factors related to the likelihood of identifying as a writer. Whilst Sarah had only been writing for a few months by the time she participated in the interviews, Vanessa had already spent seven years writing (novels, short stories and poems), published some pieces and completed a master's in creative writing. Consequently, confidence to identify as a writer can come from being published, having engaged in writing for a long time, having undertaken studies, and/or getting paid for

one's work. Chloe, a mother of three and a freelance writer, described how earning money from her work gave her confidence to identify as a writer:

> I think I do now identify as a writer. When people ask me what I do I say that I am a writer. […] But I think it is certainly kind of a confident thing to say that you are a writer really because it sounds quite – It's kind of one of those jobs where people go "oh wow, I always wanted to do that" you know and so to be able to say that you are successful as a writer it does feel like you have to be quite confident about it I guess. So hm yeah, I think it has taken a while to kind of feel like, yeah, you know, that's what I am doing.

Chloe alludes to the high status attributed to writing in contemporary society, which provides further insights into the attractiveness of creative work for stay-at-home mothers, as it offers an identity that is valued – unlike care work – in a context where mothers are expected to work (Wolfinger 2020). Valerie has also only started to publicly identify as a writer since she has published some of her writing, stating:

> Yeah, I do actually [introduce myself as a writer] now. Yeah, I sort of started doing that after I started getting some things published. But yeah, I do actually put on forms now [consultant] slash writer. Because I feel like I am a writer now.

Publishing as a form of external approval was perceived as a source of legitimisation for participant's creative pursuits and gave Valerie confidence to officially identify as a writer, for instance on bureaucratic forms, though she did so alongside her other, non-creative, professional identity – a tactic also used by Felipa:

I should [introduce myself as a writer] but I tend to just kind of deflect the question. But yeah, I have to try and be less – imposter-syndrome. And so now I do say – yeah, I do try to say it but I find myself saying things like "I am a writer but I used to work in marketing". Or "I am just starting out". (Felipa)

Felipa only started to write more seriously and thus referred to her previous career in marketing when asked about her profession, a more stable and established career choice. While she always wanted to be a writer, she did not yet have the confidence publicly to claim this identity. This reluctance might have a gendered dimension – imposter-syndrome was a reoccurring theme – but, more importantly, it highlights how participants negotiate their identity in relation to external validation systems.

Lauren and Amrita talked about how even when they feel confident about introducing themselves as writers, the legitimacy is often queried:

I find it really hard to identify myself and most of the times I say to people I am a writer because it's just easier and I do write and get published all the time, so I feel like, you know, it's easier to say that. But the weird thing is, when you say to people "I'm a writer" the first thing they say to you is "Oh and would you have written anything that I know?" and then you sort of say "oh I have written this book called […]" and then their faces are like "oh I don't know that" so it's really hard. (Lauren)

The minute I tell the world that I am a writer, there is something wrong. There is the next level. "Oh, so you are a writer, where would I have seen your work? Oh, you've got it there, what about that? Oh, are your writing your next book yet? Are you thinking

about that? It just raises more questions that it takes the writing away from me and makes it external. So, I just don't tell. (Amrita)

Establishing a public identity as a writer, means navigating external expectations and opinions. Thus, unsurprisingly, it was observable that the more participants had published and the longer they had written, the more likely they were to publicly identify as writers. This finding highlights the importance of publishing for writers, which for some participants was a challenge given their time and spatial constraints, which has implications for their ability to establish themselves within this creative field as well as earning an income from their creative work.

Claiming a writer identity was not just associated with external validation but has also been seen as a statement to take this creative work more seriously, as discussed by Vanessa:

And I feel like that [taking time to write] is a bit of an assertion of my identity as well and it's a bit of a statement about that I take it seriously and that it is a valid pursuit in and amongst everything else. Even if we all rationally say "yes it's a valid pursuit, it's a good thing", if I'm not getting the time to do it then it's stressful for me. Because then it's like are we just saying that I am a writer and I am not?

Requesting space and time to write is a way of expressing, constructing and strengthening an identity as a writer – to oneself as well as to others. Amy also talked about why she thinks it is important for her to identify, and for others to acknowledge her, as a writer:

I do yeah [identify as a writer] because I think it is really important to value it and I think it's really important for other people to value it as well. And I think that it [writing]

is so difficult in a lot of ways and it takes so much work. So, I do think it is important to identify yourself as that [a writer] because it is saying "I have spent years and years on this, this is my profession".

Amy emphasises the work, time and expertise that goes into writing a book and, thus, claims it as her profession and not just a hobby. Establishing writing as a profession that requires skills, experience, training and practice has come up in other interviews as well. Valerie, for instance, talked about how more than just talent is needed to become a writer:

I think I really thought before that writing was something that you had to have a natural flair for. Which I do think a lot of people do and that helps. And I think maybe that in some ways I did actually have a bit of a natural flair for it, just I didn't think that it was enough. But then in just solidly writing like thousands and thousands of words, like the amount that I improved, I realised like actually, you know, maybe some natural talent is like a little bit part of it but I don't think that's the main thing. The main thing is to solidly write more and more and more and practising and getting better at it.

The meaning the participants attributed to their writing as a work-like activity highlights the significance they ascribe to writing as a professional identity and the importance it has to their sense of self. This finding is particularly relevant within the context of this study, as the decision to withdraw from their professional jobs after the birth of their child was in many cases not voluntary but a result of the incompatibility of traditional, inflexible work structures and their mothering preferences. Establishing writing as work and distinguishing it from a hobby thus serves as a substitute for this former professional self and allows participants to differentiate themselves from stay-at-home mothers, who receive little social recognition.

To integrate the writer identity into their project of the self, some participants drew on the discourse of 'vocation/calling' and reported a feeling of being destined to be a writer. For instance, Valerie stated:

> Being a writer feels like a deep part of me that was always there.

Writing can be seen as an expression of one's 'authentic self', a statement that is based on the assumption that writing is something inherent and essential rather than a performative act. There is thus a tension between passion, fulfilment and opportunism, given that participants draw on the passionate work discourse, but their uptake of creative work was predominately opportunistic and pragmatic. The sentiment that writing was her destiny/vocation was also expressed by Safia, who grew up in South-East Asia and came from a background where creative work was not highly valued:

> If I could have done something else, I would have done it and been happy, but I couldn't do anything else. I can't do anything else really.

Despite the opposition of her parents, Safia chose to invest time and energy in creative, "fulfilling" work since becoming a mother rather than continuing her career path in communications. After graduating from university, she worked in a non-creative professional job for several years but since having a child five years ago, she has not been formally employed and, thus, motherhood provided her with more time and space to pursue her creative work (writing and filmmaking), whilst simultaneously fulfilling her family's expectations of her

reproductive role. Similarly, Amy also explored careers outside of writing but felt most 'authentic' when writing:

> Yeah, it's funny, I think I knew early on that I was going to be a writer and I sort of rejected it because it just seemed too hard and unrewarding. And I wanted power and money (laughs) and writing did not give either. So, I tried a lot of other things and to be honest it was the only thing that made me feel real, like myself. And it's hard to put it into words, it's like a knowing that that's what you are meant to be doing. And then it was this kind of "oh damn it" because I just knew how hard it would be. […] I feel like writing is a combination of my greatest skills and passion all meeting.

Amy links writing to passion, vocation and authenticity, which, as outlined in Chapter 2, are potent discourses among the middle-class, stipulating how they (should) relate to work. To legitimise her creative endeavour as an expression of her 'calling', Felipa draws on her family's reaction to her desire to become a writer:

> I did this [writing] course and I loved it and I said to my husband and my mum, really, I just want to be a writer and I want to be published in magazines and newspapers and websites and they said: "yes, you should be doing this all along, like this is what you need to be doing, like why are you asking for permission?".

Those statements show how writing by some participants is linked to the discourse of authenticity as an expression of the genuine, authentic self. Giddens (1991, 9) claimed, for instance, that "'authenticity' becomes both a pre-eminent value and a framework for self-actualization" and is thus an integral part of the modern project of the self. The narrative of an

authentic self implies that there is an inherent core to the self. However, from a poststructuralist perspective on identity discussed in Chapter 4, the subject positions that individuals assume are shaped by discourses, in this case, discourses of 'authenticity' and 'self-actualisation', structuring the way individuals are supposed to make sense of, talk about and experience, their relationship to work. The perception 'to be born to be a writer' represents a modern work imperative which postulates that individuals should have/find their vocation/'true calling'. These discourses offered participants a way to narrate a coherent story of themselves, that is dominated by choice rather than external constraints.

What has become clear is that participants invested time and energy into establishing their identity as writers and, thus, expressed a strong desire to not be recognised only as mothers, which is a topic that will be further explored in the following sections. The objective to 'be more than mothers' comes both from the outside, in form of social expectations, as well as from the inside, as a quest by the participants themselves.

7.4 When Are You Going Back to Work? Navigating External Expectations

The interviews revealed how external expectations encouraged participants to 'be more than mothers' – which was one of the key codes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Most strikingly, the interviewees reported a social expectation to engage in employment, highlighting the centrality of paid work/a professional identity for middle-class women in late-modern society. As discussed in Chapter 2, engagement in work is central to the project of the self and an individual's position in society, and mothers are no longer exempted from this expectation (Wolfinger 2020). While Chapter 5 showed that it is socially accepted for women who have

children to withdraw from professional work, this acceptance seems only to be of a temporary nature and at a certain point women experience pressure to engage in other activities alongside mothering. Consequently, study participants felt external pressure to be 'more than 'just' a mother' and to foster their worker role at some point after they had children, as mentioned by Valerie:

> People really look down on you when you say that you are a stay-at-home mum. And just being able to say that I am doing some work means I don't always have to feel that kind of societal pressure or judgement, I guess. Cause you know "Oh when are you going back to work?" or, you know, "When does your parental leave finish?". And I planned to go back to work at six months, but I really didn't want to.

Valerie felt external pressure to return to work after she had her first child to prove that she is not a "stay-at-home mum", reflecting the lack of acknowledgement and value she feels that society attributes to the care work mothers perform. Engaging in writing thus provided her with a legitimate reason to keep staying at home with her son. Vanessa, who had three children under the age of eight at the time of my study, had a similar experience:

> I think that the creative work has given me another thing to say that I am doing, both to my kids and to random friends and family, when they are like "so, what have you been up to?". It's like "well, I am working on a novel". So, it's like, you know, stick that into your pipe and smoke it.

For Vanessa, writing is to some extent an opportunity to show to her children and friends that she is more than 'just' a mother. Her account again reflects the general assumption that

mothering in itself is not a sufficient activity for (middle-class) women to perform. Those two statements highlight how identity work is not an isolated activity but that the project of the self is co-constructed with, and reinforced by, external actors, such as family members, friends or, more abstractly, society. By asking certain questions or evaluating women's life choices, social networks reinforce social norms associated with the 'good worker' and the 'good mother' as well as disciplining women who deviate from them. Those statements thus illustrate how discourses shape the subject positions that people then attach themselves to, or – from a deterministic perspective – are 'chained' into (Hall 1996). It becomes apparent, however, that this external expectation actually enables the mother-writer phenomenon as it demands that women engage in work or work-like activities while they are mothering.

The pressure to prioritise work and a career was perceived by Amrita as emanating, in particular, from women, including other mothers:

> Women place expectations on other women. I think there's this kind of expectation that we have to be at work and we have to have a career and we're taught that and every mum I speak to feels this pull of I've got to leave my kids in childcare and go back to work.

This observation by Amrita illustrates the normalisation of women working and pursuing careers despite having children as well as the expectation that they outsource childcare – at least partially – to do so. Most participants had their children enrolled in day care part-time at some point after they turned two. Furthermore, Amrita discussed her experiences of women disciplining each other with regards to parenting and work choices, referring to an antagonism that supposedly exists between stay-at-home and working mothers. This conflict of opinion –

or the so called 'mommy wars' (Darnton 1990) – has been exploited and reinforced by media discourses, encouraging competition between mothers (Moore & Abetz 2016). Regardless of whether real or fabricated, combative mothering normalises competition between mothers and, as Amrita's comment shows, is something that modern mothers have to navigate when making choices about motherhood and work.

Another work-related reason that encourages women to be 'more than a mother' that emerged in the interviews was the need to stay relevant to the job market while being at home with the children. Chloe, who established a freelance writing business, for instance elaborated on this in her interview:

> I don't want to be in a position where I have a career break and not being able to get back into the [media] industry. I wanted to make sure I was always in the industry. So that's another thing. Like it felt like being a freelancer feels like […] if I go back into the workplace, at least I've got something to show for my time, you know, out of a job, like, at least I have done something else. Like I learnt a lot and I've been trying to do a lot of courses and stuff like that to be constantly learning and I am, you know, it's important for me to stay relevant in the industry.

Chloe has a background in journalism and sees freelance writing as a flexible way to combine working from home with caring for her three children, positioning the mother-writer as a pragmatic solution in her case. To have "something to show for" in case she decides to return to an office job, Chloe has completed several training courses and invested significant time and money in maintaining a professional identity. Valerie also talked about the pressure to keep up a worker identity while being home with her two young children:

I just feel like I didn't want to stop having a foot in the door. And it was very easy – the [consultancy and editing] work that I do it's not a lot of work, but it was something, you know, that I could at least then have on my CV, you know, "I have been doing this during that time", which I mean it's stupid – it should be enough to say, you know, "I was full-time caring for a child at that time". It's truly the most difficult job I've ever had, like it's way harder than anything else (laughs) and, you know, I think I have way more skills from that but yeah, because of the way society is, I wanted to be able to have something.

What is noteworthy is the power of those external expectations that made Valerie invest in, and maintain, her worker identity, even though she neither enjoyed nor valued that work, nor was it a financial necessity to maintain it. Valerie does her creative writing on top of consultancy and mothering and so engaging in paid work for her is primarily a way to satisfy social expectations. Valerie's assumption of always needing to stay relevant and not having gaps in her resume also reflects a society that values formal, paid employment as well as professional contexts that do not allow for gaps in CVs and whose expectations have been shaped by an ideal worker type who is male.

Participants experienced social pressure to engage in non-maternal activities – paid work in particular – once their children were of a certain age (typically from 6 months onwards), indicating how internalised and salient the mandate to work is among modern women. Whilst female work participation has only been normalised for less than two generations, it now seems essential to keep engaged in work-like, non-maternal activities whilst mothering – at least among highly educated, middle-class women. Following Buesken's (2018) dual identity

concept discussed in Chapter 3, this external pressure on mothers is reflective of an expectation that women will continue investing in their project of the self – the individuated, non-maternal self – whilst raising children. To further this analysis of the dual identities, I next explore how the quest to cultivate a non-maternal self was expressed by the participants and discuss the role this desire plays in understanding why some women start to engage in creative work once they have children.

7.5 Being More Than a Mother: The Non-Maternal Self

Even though the participants talked about external expectations with respect to investing in their individuated self, all of them also expressed an internal desire to be 'more than a mother'. This quest can be linked to the fact that all the participants had an accomplished life before they had children, including university degrees, careers and social lives[28]. These achievements are integral aspects of the identity work that these women performed before having children. Motherhood then presents the challenge of balancing and fostering their autonomous, pre-child selves with their maternal selves. As outlined in Chapter 3, the terms maternal and individuated selves were coined by Petra Bueskens (2018) to highlight the dual subject positions that structure the sense of self of mothers in late-modern society. She argues that modern women experience a tension between their maternal and their individuated selves, evident in the quest to be 'more than a mother', a central code that also emerged from my data. Whilst Bueskens's empirical research is based on women who periodically left the home to work, my study found that women also navigate those two modes of self within the home by creating care-free spaces. To foreground the oppositional relationship of those two modes of self, it is useful to expand the term 'individuated self' with the prefix 'non-maternal' – a term Bueskens did not employ.

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[28] The advanced state of women's biographies by the time they become mothers is also a result of middle-class women having children later in life. The majority of participants in my study were in their thirties when they became mothers for the first time.

Stuart Hall (1996) argues that identities are always formed in relation to its 'constitutive outside', and gain meaning through the marking of difference and exclusion (see Chapter 4). Because I am looking at women who navigate both modes of self within a relatively confined space – mostly the home – this need for a well-defined separation between the maternal and non-maternal is particularly relevant. I have identified six purposes the participants' investment in their individuated, non-maternal selves serves, which I will elaborate on in the following.

First, the determination to be 'more than a mother' was made in reference to work and self-actualisation and as an antidote to motherhood. For instance, most participants emphasised that they needed to work/write at some point after they had children, though the content of, and their relationship to, work had changed since becoming a mother. Chloe rationalised her decision to start her freelance writing business as follows:

> I don't identify as being a stay-at-home mother. Like I knew I could never do it. But I just knew that I wasn't as passionate about working as I had been. And that lasted a few years (laughs) where I just wanted to be at home, you know, most of the time. Then probably when I had my second and I started freelancing that's when I started getting more passionate about working again. Because motherhood can be so all-consuming, I needed something else. And the novelty [of motherhood] had kind of worn off. So, when I started freelancing it was because I needed something else for me, you know, as well. And I just knew I was never going to be a stay-at-home mother. And financially like we can't afford it anyway, but I just knew I couldn't do that. And it has certainly gotten even more – like I am even more passionate about working since having this one [her third daughter] because she has been so hard and I need a break. So, it is actually a relief to be working and using my brain.

Chloe was not as "passionate" about working as she was before she had children but she did not want to stay home with her children without "using her brain" – a statement that came up repeatedly in other interviews as well. This indicates that working/writing – for many participants, the distinction between creative and paid/commissioned writing was blurred – serves the function of getting a break from maternal responsibilities and is simultaneously an investment in the individuated self. The rejection of the stay-at-home mother position and the desire to work creatively is also indicative of a resistance to being pushed back into the traditional roles of the mother and housewife. Furthermore, the desire to work – both for financial and personal reasons – highlights the importance of the worker identity for Chloe, though it is less central to her project of the self as it was before she had children.

The need to engage in writing – a non-maternal activity – has been related to the mundaneness and repetitiveness of mothering work. Whilst caring for small children takes up more time than the previous professional job, the quality of the work involved is different, as Sarah explained:

> Your brain is like engaged in one way all the time being a mum but it's actually not particularly intellectual. So, I found like I had a lot of intellectual energy left over. Whereas when I was working in an office all day, I had totally exhausted my brain. I wouldn't have had the space in my mind to do it [writing]. Whereas like even though being a mum is exhausting it doesn't kind of use up that energy. So, I think it is a good time in some ways to do it.

Whilst care work was experienced as draining on a physical level it was perceived as not consuming but rather of freeing up cognitive capabilities (see also Chapter 6). The participants

who were used to engaging in intellectual work – noting that most had postgraduate degrees – reported feeling an urge to use that cognitive capacity as an antidote to the mundanity of their mothering work. Creative work in this instance provides an opportunity to engage in a cognitive activity. For Bhavini, the repetitiveness and monotony of mothering work was conducive to creative work, by heightening a quest for self-expression:

> I think I became very driven to express myself from being just at home with a little kid doing tedious things like going to the park all day. I think more than ever in my life, I just had this drive to kind of have my voice heard.

Bhavini talked about how her life as a mother revolved around places like the home and the park, spaces she did not inhabit – at least not to the same extent – before she had children. The quest for self-expression through writing can thus be interpreted as a reaction to this perceived spatial and social marginalisation from her previous adult life, as well as a desire to connect with other adults and the outside world beyond the private realm. What stands out here again is that the interviewees were accomplished, ambitious and busy individuals before they had children, in stark contrast to the ordinariness and monotony of much of maternal work. It is thus not surprising that they expressed a desire to be recognised beyond their mothering capacities by engaging in work that they perceived as mentally stimulating and fostering their sense of self and identity. Those statements illustrate that although the participants subscribed to the intensive motherhood discourse and structured some, perhaps many, of their decisions in accordance with it, their relationship to motherhood was ambivalent and the intensity of it was generally not enjoyed. Thus, my findings suggest that the intensive motherhood ideology does not only facilitate creative work because it allows women to also care for their children at home

– an argument commonly promoted in the mother-creative literature – but also because its intensity creates a need for an escape from it.

The quest to have something outside of motherhood was most strongly expressed by Lauren, who started writing during her six months of maternity leave but, in addition, also decided to return to work:

> I am just not really very good at staying at home and looking after – like I will just be frank, I am not a mother, like I would tear my hair out. I love my daughter so much, but the nappies and the milk and the pushing the pram – it was just like the end of the world to me. Like I would not do it again sort of thing. And if I was to do it again, I would make sure that I was stimulated in other ways. So, besides the fact that I had to go to work after six months, I would have gone anyway because it was just the being in the house was too much for me. So yeah, basically at six months we put her into day care.

Lauren's account is interesting as she is going against the intensive mothering paradigm, where the 'good' mother is "intimately engaged with the everyday minutiae of their children's lives, infinitely emotionally and physically available to her children and spouse, placing their needs above her own" (von Benzon 2021, 479). However, the desire not to be fully absorbed by their mothering responsibilities was expressed by all the participants, with writing offering a particularly appealing opportunity for self-actualisation.

Second, the quest to be 'more than a mother' represents a search for fulfilment outside motherhood. Raquel, for instance, who was divorced and the primary carer for her three-year-old child, specifically talked about this subject:

I think becoming a mother in the specific situation that I became a mother [splitting from her partner shortly after the birth of her child], it just really amplified my need for some kind of fulfilment that wasn't related to my identity as a mother.

Thus, in contrast to findings discussed above, which illustrate that the external expectations that women with children will be more than mothers are primarily linked to their involvement in paid employment, the main intrinsic motivation for participants to foster their non-maternal selves through engaging in creative work was self-actualisation. This quest for self-fulfilment illustrates how internalised the individualisation thesis was among participants, which demands constant self-actualisation and self-innovation (Giddens 1991). The fact that self-realisation is sought in non-maternal activities – writing in particular – also suggests that participants did not perceive mothering as an activity that alone fosters fulfilment and self-actualisation. This perception can be attributed in part to the lack of social recognition of maternal work as well as the idealisation of stimulating, passionate work – such as creative work – that contrasts the monotony and tediousness of mothering work. However, seeking fulfilment outside of motherhood also indicates that the world beyond the family is perceived as desirable and work experienced as fulfilling – a privilege that is not shared by everyone, for instance, non-white and working-class women (hooks 2000; see Chapter 3).

Third, the participants indicated that the quest for self-actualisation and fulfilment, and thus their investment in creative work, is related to a loss of control over significant parts of their lives. Following on from her previous statement above, Raquel mentioned that she felt that her freelance writing business was the only space that she could claim control over:

Pursing creativity is one of the only ways that I can really express what I feel and really be who I want to be. […] So, in a way it's kind of the only way that I can do what I want to do without having to be accountable to someone else, even if it's my child or whatever.

Raquel perceives her creative work as the only aspect in her life that she can claim for herself, noting that even though she was a single mother she was still co-parenting with her ex-husband, which meant that she had to discuss anything related to her son with him. The theme of control (and the loss thereof) was also an issue for Safia who said:

As a mum, I'd say, [writing and filmmaking] is also a way to simply give me something that's mine. It feels like my life and my time belong to someone else, mostly. […] I want something outside of my motherhood. So, this, even though I am working to support me and my son, the thing that I am doing is for me. Because everything else that I do is for my son, it revolves around my son. Even the time that I work revolves around my son, but the actual work that I do is for me.

For Safia a loss of control over her own life was determined by the needs of her 5-year-old son, who had recently been diagnosed with autism. The area in her life that she felt she could control was determining the content and nature of her creative work. She also considered writing and filmmaking to be more fulfilling than the other professional jobs she had held in the past. This, again, highlights that it was not work *per se* that was desired, but creative work, in particular – an activity that provided satisfaction and potential for self-realisation.

Fourth, the theme to be 'more than a mother' is also a reflection of the fact that the participants prioritised their own needs. For instance, Amy said that by giving priority to her writing she was making an important statement:

> I wrote the book last year from home with my child at home when someone else was looking after him and it's just itched into my psyche, him coming into the room and me kind of having to call out to whoever was looking after him "Can you take him!" and him not understanding. And like it's such a small moment but calling someone to take your child away so you can write feels so selfish (laughs) and yet I knew it was symbolic of something bigger. It was symbolic of me saying this is important as well. He won't remember that moment in time if I give him enough good moments. But I will remember having put my work and my time – given it a priority. And what that tells me about myself is really important.

By prioritising writing over her child's quest for maternal attention, Amy asserts that her own needs and interests are valuable and worthwhile. Her statement shows that navigating work and childrearing is a constant negotiation and balancing act between one's own and one's child(ren)'s needs and two different forms of work. By actively engaging in creative work participants thus challenge an intensive mothering ideology, which assumes that mothers will prioritise their children's needs above their own at all times. Rather than *prioritising* their children over themselves, the participants appear to *balance* their own needs with those of their children, attributing at least equal importance to them. And whilst they arrange their work around their children's needs and schedules – and draw on the intensive mothering discourse to justify their decision not to return to the outside workforce – they do not perceive it as being of lower priority or value.

The constant navigation of their maternal and non-maternal selves was also reflected in the time the participants dedicated (or desired to dedicate) to their creative work and their children/family. Felipa, for instance, contemplated her preferred work-family balance:

> I think the more independence I have from my children, the more of that [freelance writing] I can do but within a healthy balance. Like at the moment, my son is going to day care five days a week and that is probably a bit too much for me, cause I miss him and I just have so much fun being with him but I also understand that by having him in three to four times a week, for instance, it allows me to be fully present in work-mode those times rather than, you know, when my daughter was little and I was in the park all day, I was bored out of my mind (laughs).

Felipa's contemplation of a suitable balance between spending time with her children and fulfilling her own needs and desires as a freelance writer highlights the significance of outsourcing childcare. This outsourcing served two functions, freeing up time for creative work/self-actualisation as well as circumventing tedious aspects of maternal work, as described by Chloe:

> I want day care to be somewhere they go for a few days for fun, you know. To meet other kids to do all the boring things that I don't want to do like craft. And, you know, get all of that [writing] done so that when I am with them, I get to do the things that I want to do, which is, you know, take them to the zoo and cook and all the stuff I enjoy doing.

Outsourcing the undesirable parts of mothering was also a way the participants prioritised their own needs, as sending their children to day care allowed them to increase fulfilment in their maternal work by reducing it from a full-time to a part-time commitment. The quest to be 'more than a mother' thus demonstrates that rather than prioritising their children's needs over their own, motherhood is a balancing act for women between different aspects of their own needs/work demands. This trend indicates how the intensive mothering ideology that is based on the assumption that children's needs are prioritised (Hays 1996) is being subverted by modern middle-class mothers. Among my participant cohort it was apparent that their own self-actualisation through creative work was attributed high importance.

A fifth thread that emerged in relation to the quest to be 'more than a mother' was that engaging in work – especially if it was creative – was seen as positively affecting the ability to be a 'good' mother, as illustrated by the following statements:

> Sometimes having something else makes you a better parent. […] I feel like, if I could have one day of work or even two days of work, that would be amazing. Like I think then I would actually be a better parent than the other days, to be honest. (Valerie)

> The times when I have been able to get away from the kids on a regular basis to write has in some ways made me a better mum. (Vanessa)

The underlying assumption here is that if mothers have an outlet for self-actualisation or simply time away from their children, they are in turn more balanced and content mothers. This was mentioned by several other interview participants, with the majority favouring a work/write-family balance of three days of work per week (enabled through formal childcare), two days

with their children and the weekend usually spent with the family, with the possibility to write if needed. The main benefit seen by the participants in a three-day work week was that it enabled them to be more present and involved mothers for their children on the other days, as discussed by Raquel:

I would really like it if I could just work on the days where [my son] went to day care. Because I do still want to be able to be present with him and do activities with him. […] Ideally, I would like to confine my work activities to days where my son is not home so my son does not feel unseen and that I am not present. […] My ideal situation is to work sort of like three days a week but earn a full salary or even a close-to-full salary.

The discourse of 'presentism' emerged in many interviews, indicating the intensity of the mother-child relationship that is requested and which leaves little room for self-actualisation while the children are around. A clear boundary between work days and mothering days was thus desired. While only a few other participants were as dependent on an income as Raquel, who is a single mother, the majority favoured a three-day work week. This preference suggests that the family time (usually the weekends) and two mother-child days together slightly outweighed the personal time, which the participants desired for their own individual pursuits. The dominant part-time work/care regime among middle-class women in Australia twenty to thirty years ago (Pocock 2003) is thus still prevalent today. This model is built around the part-time working mother as the primary carer and a full-time working partner.

A sixth, and final, aspect of the participant's quest to 'be more than mothers' was that creative work provides them with an identity and sense of self beyond motherhood. Engaging in creative

work was seen by some participants as a strategy to establish a lifestyle and identity for when their children leave home:

> For me writing is also a process of something that I can continue even past the point of when they are older. (Amrita)

> I don't think it is healthy if women sacrifice their identities for their children, because that sets them up for disappointment when their kids leave them. They'll grow up and move out, it's going to happen, you know, it's just part of life. (Bhavini)

Bhavini talked about the importance of women pursuing their own interests and not being completely absorbed by maternal responsibilities as this would result in "disappointment" when their children grow up. Participating in creative work during motherhood thus serves the purpose of maintaining or creating a part of life that can continue into the future beyond the mothering of dependent children. Amy also reflected on this conflicted expectation of being both a dedicated but not fully absorbed mother:

> We have to somehow morph ourselves into these domestic caring beings, learn how to do it on the job while tired but not too much so that you don't lose yourself and just become someone who lives through their children. So, then you have to keep one foot in the outside world enough, so that when the children grow up you can go back to being an individual again.

Fostering an individuated identity alongside a maternal identity does not only serve a purpose in the present but also in the future and highlights a perception on the part of the participants

that this intensive stage of early motherhood was a transient phase. The individuated identity can then exist beyond caring for dependent children and is thus, simultaneously, a continuance of a pre-child self as well as a preparation for "being an individual again" (Amy) in the future.

The discourse of being 'more than a mother' is central to why women engage in creative work once they have children with writing being the main self-actualising activity that the participants in my study engaged in. The preference for a relatively equal balance between mothering and self-actualisation through creative work indicates that in order to be a 'good' mother the participants felt the need to temporarily *not be* a mother. This claim, in turn, suggests that intensive mothering exists *because* women have 'something else', which could also explain why mothering has become more intensive since women started to work. There might actually be less of a contradiction between intensive mothering and work (if it is perceived as fulfilling) than is usually thought to be the case (see, for instance, Hays (1996) and Chapter 3): Because creative work provides women with a break from mothering, they are able to invest more energy into it.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored how participants negotiate their maternal and creative identities and has shown that the writer/creative identity serves complex functions within the context of motherhood. The main finding discussed in this chapter is that participants desired – and were expected – to 'be more than mothers' and identifying as writers offered them this opportunity. The data revealed six purposes the participant's investment in the non-maternal, creative self represents: (1) an antidote to motherhood; (2) a quest for fulfilment and self-actualisation outside of motherhood; (3) a reaction to a loss of control; (4) an equalisation of the mother's

personal needs; (5) an enabler of the 'good mother'; (6) future-oriented identity work. Establishing an identity as a writer was a way for participants to stay home with their children whilst maintaining a professional identity, which is ascribed high value in contemporary society. The mother-writer phenomenon can thus also be understood as a response and repair attempt to an (often involuntary) identity disruption, offering women a continuation of their pre-maternal project of the self and a substitute for the lost professional identity that makes up an integral part of the self.

This chapter has also questioned the primary role that motherhood plays in the lives of participants. While I demonstrated in Chapter 5 that women engage in intensive mothering practices and prioritise their family commitments over their careers, this chapter has shown that this happens alongside, and not to the detriment of, their own self-actualisation. Creative work was often emphasised in juxtaposition to the tediousness of motherhood, highlighting that whilst the participants engage in intensive mothering practices, they also resent a lot of maternal work and feel a need to escape from it, at least temporarily. The participants thus navigated modern motherhood by balancing their own needs with those of their children, ascribing equal importance to both and thus challenging key assumptions of intensive motherhood. However, rather than dismissing intensive mothering, my data suggests an enabling relationship between the cultivation of the creative worker self and the capacity to mother intensively. Because the participants had 'something else' through their writing and thus were able to take time off from mothering, they reported an increased desire as well as ability more intensively to engage with their children. In other words, certain kinds of work – such as writing – can enable part-time intensive mothering and, at the same time, decrease the contradictions that women experience between work and care. My data thus suggests that it is not primarily intensive motherhood and the desire to stay home with their children that drives women into home-based creative work,

but their quest to continue the project of their individuated, non-maternal self while caring for their children at home.

The findings presented and discussed in this chapter have further shown how creative work can allow women to be both mothers and workers and thus how it enables them to adhere to dominant social norms of mothering as well as to invest in their own self-actualisation. This chapter has also further highlighted the importance of understanding the engagement by participants in creative work in relation to their particular context as home-based mothers. The role of the creative identity becomes particularly meaningful in relation to women's maternal role and their desire to cultivate a sense of self beyond motherhood – the non-maternal self. The creative identity for mothers thus fulfils a unique function that only becomes apparent in the context of the work and care expectations contemporary middle-class women have to negotiate.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

8.1 Modern Subjectivities: Mother-Writers

The aim of this thesis was to explore how women with pre-school aged children navigate creative work and motherhood at home. There is a growing trend for women to combine childrearing and home-based creative work with the intention of generating an income. As yet, their lived experiences – what motivates them to engage in this work/care regime, how they navigate both kinds of work within the home and the role their creative practices play in their everyday lives – have not been researched in depth. With a focus on writing as a creative practice, I set out to address this gap in knowledge. Interview data collected from 13 female writers who cared for young children allowed me to provide new insights that both challenge and build on existing explanatory frameworks and highlight the importance of understanding engagement in creative work in the context of the life stage of its practitioners. Specifically, my thesis set out to address the question of how women with young children negotiate creative work and motherhood at home. I was particularly interested in finding out what the appeal of creative work is for this cohort of creatives, including the role it plays in their everyday lives. My research shows that creative work was particularly attractive for the participants of my study because it offered the opportunity effectively to navigate expectations associated with contemporary mothering, work and the self. They were able to engage in meaningful, fulfilling work with high levels of social legitimacy and, simultaneously, adhere to dominant cultural norms of intensive mothering and invest in their own processes of self-actualisation. At the centre of my enquiry is a group of women I call mother-writers – women who negotiate their creative work alongside childrearing, often from home and in a self-employed capacity. My

sample of mother-writers is predominately tertiary educated, cohabits with a main income earning partner, are the primary carer of their child/ren and, for many of them, motherhood was a pathway into creative work, which can be flexibly organised around childcaring responsibilities. I perceive mother-writers as a reference to a middle-class subject position that is produced by contemporary discourses on motherhood and work.

A review of the literature on contemporary work and creativity, which was the focus of Chapter 2, highlighted the existence of a cultural mandate for women to engage in work that is passionate, meaningful and fulfilling – expectations that creative work, in particular, is often said to satisfy. Over the last decades, work conditions have become more precarious and strong attachment to the employer has been replaced by a higher investment into the work itself, a shift that demands new career narratives (Luckman 2015b). The work that people engage in is seen as forming an integral part of their 'project of the self' (Giddens 1991), highlighting a general appeal associated with creative work, by providing individuals with a socially valued identity. Two concepts are often utilised to explain the positive effects associated with creative work and what draws people into it: passionate work (McRobbie 2016) and aspirational labour (Duffy 2016). Angela McRobbie (2015, 2016) views passionate work as an ideology that ties work to pleasure and self-reward and produces forms of enthusiasm, especially among young, female creative workers. She argues that under the influence of neoliberalism, the passionate work ideology is being utilised to encourage people to invent their own jobs, which McRobbie interprets as a political low-risk response to under- or unemployment. By resolving employment issues privately, individuals relieve the government and former employers from any social responsibilities. In contrast, Duffy's concept highlights the future-oriented nature of creative work, where intense, precarious labour and minimal reward in the present are tolerated in the hope of future success. I set out to explore whether passion and hope/aspiration inform the

relationship of mother-writers to their creative work, given that they engage in it under very particular circumstances.

In addition to navigating modern work imperatives, Chapter 3 showed how women with caring responsibilities face an additional set of cultural expectations associated with motherhood and what it means to be a 'good mother'. Dominant contemporary maternal discourses value women who mother intensively, which involves investing an unprecedented amount of personal time, energy and resources into childrearing. The cultural model of intensive motherhood, first formulated by Sharon Hays (1996), serves a number of purposes and is reinforced by social, cultural, political, economic, and technological factors. The expectation/desire to engage in intensive mothering practices has been identified as the main driver into self-employment among women when they have children (Duberley & Carrigan 2013; Foley 2015). Simultaneously, however, women also want (and, for financial reasons, often need) to continue to work as well as have access to leisure time (Hakim 2011), seeking to balance their maternal and their individuated selves (Bueskens 2018). There is thus also an imperative for mothers to pursue their self-actualisation primarily through engaging in paid employment. For the participants in my study, navigating the competing expectations associated with both motherhood and work was central for their decision to engage in home-based creative work. I found that their negotiations centred on three aspects in particular: the transition to motherhood, the everyday and identity and the empirical chapters are organised around these themes.

The transition to motherhood is a phase in contemporary middle-class women's lives where they are often required to renegotiate work arrangements to accommodate their new caring role. For the majority of the participants in my study their uptake of writing was prompted by becoming a mother meaning that this life stage can actually be a pathway into creative work

rather than a barrier as it is usually positioned within the literature. Why, how and when women ended up engaging in writing varied – some started soon after the arrival of their first child, others not until after having a second child; some felt pushed out of the workforce, whereas others opted out of organisational employment. However, they all negotiated work/care in a way that indicated a preference for part-time creative work that could be flexibly organised around their children's needs and increase their availability as mothers for their children at home – a practice that is in accordance with traditional work/care regimes as well as intensive mothering demands. Nonetheless, despite withdrawing from organisational employment – voluntarily or involuntarily – attachment to a career/paid work remained important for the participants, a relationship that was fostered by external as well as internal(ised) expectations. Thus, by engaging in creative work at home, women were able to navigate both expectations associated with middle-class motherhood and participation in work. To make sense of their shift in career towards a home-centred lifestyle, the engagement in creative work provided participants with a narrative that framed this transition in a positive, empowering way rather than as a result of structural constraints.

How participants integrated creative work into their daily routines as mothers was also of importance because it highlighted the significance that participants attributed to writing in their everyday lives; it offered them a way to generate wellbeing, happiness and fulfilment. Writing was perceived as a means of navigating the intensity of everyday maternal labour, much of which the participants associated with boredom, monotony and tediousness. This specific role of (creative) work as an antidote to motherhood has not yet been discussed in other literatures focusing on self-employed, home-based mothers and suggests that creative work fulfils a very particular function, potentially setting it apart from other types of work. In an attempt to conceptualise the relationship between the participants and their writing, current concepts,

notably passionate work (McRobbie 2016) and aspirational labour (Duffy 2016), that seek to explain the positive effects associated with creative work, seem inapplicable in this context. Both of these concepts address creative work from a different, more structural perspective as well as with a different cohort of creatives in mind (not mothers or writers in particular) and so do not capture the everyday benefits that the participants of my study attribute to their creative work as writers.

McRobbie's argument that engagement in precarious 'passionate work' serves as a disguised labour reform can be applied to some extent to the findings of this thesis. Almost all participants in my study created their own work(like) opportunities after experiencing the incompatibility of their old professional roles with their new lives centred on intensive and everyday mothering responsibilities. Nevertheless, this critique fails to take into account and explain the *vital* function my study participants ascribe to creative work in their everyday lives, which cannot be fully rationalised as either a disciplinary tool of neoliberal labour reform or a complete devotion to the passionate work ideology. Rather than framing their writing as solely a passionate act – and they did at times relate to it in terms of passion – the accounts of participants highlighted the essential role that writing plays in their everyday lives and the tangible benefits it brings. This perception might be related to the fact that, in contrast to a cohort of young, unencumbered and childless women at the centre of McRobbie's research, the participants of my study are in a very different life stage. Although the writing work that they engage in is still precarious, they have the financial stability, primarily through the income of their male partners, and the social status through their role as mothers, to engage in creative work under less consequential circumstances. They are also at a point in their lives where they have already invested heavily in their careers but are no longer finding them completely fulfilling or accommodating of their needs as mothers. Thus, the motivation and expectations

associated with creative work differ between those of a cohort of middle-class mother-writers and those of young people who are at the beginning of their work life and careers (in fashion in McRobbie's case).

The second concept aspirational labour proposed by Brooke Erin Duffy (2016) is also insufficient to explain the immediate reward and sense of wellbeing that participants spoke of experiencing when writing. Rather than focusing on future goals, the emphasis in the accounts of my study participants was on the essential role of writing in their everyday lives. Whilst their writing might develop into a stable career or successful business in the future – a desire that was expressed by some participants – it was not the main focus or goal. In some cases, writing might not even be continued to the same extent, but it serves a specific function in the present – particularly enhancing wellbeing, providing an escape from everyday motherhood while facilitating its intensive form, as well as an opportunity for self-actualisation – that might be derived from a different source at a later stage in life. Through my analysis I propose the term *vital work* to conceptualise how the mother-writers in my study relate to their creative work, emphasising the central role participants attributed to writing in navigating their everyday life.

Looking at the temporal and spatial navigations these mother-writers had to engage in to find the time and space to write, I found that both had to be approached and organised strategically. Creative work performed at home is thus not more compatible with motherhood *per se* – compared to creative work situated outside the house/within organisations – but it can be managed with a flexibility that is not always possible in organisational contexts. To write, participants created what I call, *care-free spaces* within, and outside, the home that allowed them to temporarily escape motherhood and domesticity mentally and, preferably for most, physically. This is a care-free space, a physical, emotional and mental space that the mother-

writers are able to claim as their own for a period of time and that does not intersect with their mothering and domestic work. This desire for a 'room of their own' links spatial and temporal issues of creative work/care navigations to identity – the third aspect of the negotiation work performed by mother-writers and the focus of Chapter 7.

The strong quest temporarily to not be a mother can be related to the fact that almost all participants in my study had their children when they were in their thirties and so after they already had a well-established 'project of the self' that included a professional identity. Becoming mothers at this time meant that they had to negotiate their old selves alongside their new selves within the space of the home, which they did through asserting themselves as a writer. The majority of the participants classified their writer identity as equally important as their maternal selves, further emphasising their strong investment in a professional, non-maternal and creative identity. Establishing an identity as a writer served a number of purposes. For instance, it provided participants with a socially valued identity as a creative person and, thus, a recognition that often lacks in respect to their mothering role. It also offered the opportunity to stay linked to the labour market, an intention that was visible in participant's emphasis of writing as a profession rather than a hobby. Furthermore, constructing a creative, non-maternal self was also seen by study participants as a way of building an identity that lasts beyond caring for dependent children. The writer identity thus made it possible for the mother-writers of my study to continue, expand and reimagine their individuated self.

The desire to 'be more than a mother' was a key theme that emerged in the data in relation to identity and exploring this theme was the focus of Chapter 7. The prevalence of this discourse was something of a surprising finding, given that most of the literature on mother-creatives and mumpreneurs highlights intensive mothering as being the main reason women give to explain

their engagement in home-based forms of self-employment (see, for instance, Foley 2015). Prioritising their own needs, however, challenges this assumption and highlights the salience of the self-actualisation discourse among contemporary middle-class mothers. However, given that participants themselves associated their ability temporarily to not be a mother with the ability of being a 'better' – more present, balanced, and fulfilled – mother, suggests that rather than challenging intensive mothering, engaging in creative work can actually enable and reinforce it.

These findings suggest that writing, as a form of creative work, is particularly apt for adhering to dominant discourses associated with contemporary middle-class motherhood and work. It fulfils expectations to be an intensive but, simultaneously, self-actualised mother, who engages in work that is meaningful, passionate, and creative. The mother-writer is thus a product of contemporary discourses, representing a subject position that is particularly appealing to middle-class women after they have children.

8.2 Contributions, Limitations and Future Research

By exploring the lived experiences of mother-writers, this thesis provides new insights into an under-researched, unfashionable cohort of creatives – mothers, who organise their creative practice around their caring responsibilities. There has been limited research on mother-creatives to date, and little is known about how, and why, they engage in creative work in the context of motherhood. My thesis has addressed this research gap showing that the engagement in creative work, specifically writing, serves a variety of purposes for new mothers but mainly it allows them to adhere to influential cultural discourses and expectations associated with work, creativity and motherhood. Examining the lived experience of mother-writers has foregrounded

the importance of understanding creative work through the life stages of its practitioners. The way mother-writers relate to their creative practice and the meaning they attribute to it, can only be fully understood in relationship to their context as mothers as well as the discourses and expectations that they have to navigate. Consequently, concepts created with stereotypical creatives in mind – young, unencumbered and, generally, male – are often not applicable to mother-creatives.

Rather than being the end or continuation of a creative career, this thesis has demonstrated that for many mother-writers motherhood was actually an entry point into creative work – mainly due to its ability to ease work/care tensions. The transition to motherhood and the way it restructures the lives of middle-class women thus is central in understanding this phenomenon. While the decision to engage in home-based creative work after having children is generally associated with an ability to facilitate intensive mothering, my thesis questions the usefulness of this framework. More prevalent within the narratives of my participants was the desire to be 'more than a mother' and to engage in self-actualisation alongside primary caring responsibilities, emphasising what has been identified as split or dual identities (O'Brien Hallstein & O'Reilly 2012; Bueskens 2018) among modern mothers – a tension between a maternal and a non-maternal self. Expanding on Petra Buesken's (2018) work on dual identities which focused on mothers who periodically left their home to seek out child-free spaces for self-actualising purposes, I also found that women navigate both modes of self within the home by creating care-free spaces, mentally as well as physically. The strong investment in the non-maternal self suggests a shift may have occurred among middle-class mothers away from prioritising children's needs above their own – a central premise of intensive motherhood – towards balancing their own needs with those of their children.

Every research study requires the researcher to make decisions around its scope, methodology and explanatory framework, resulting in strengths as well as its limitations. This study was an in-depth, small-scale qualitative inquiry into the lived-experiences of mother-writers. Rather than aiming to produce generalisable results and to be representative, my thesis sought to generate a comprehensive understanding of a specific, under-researched group of creatives. The extensive coding process suggested by Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2014) allowed for a very thorough examination of the data, the richness of which was enhanced by the fact that my participants represented a relatively homogenous group – they all identified as writers, were tertiary educated and cared for at least one under school aged child, predominately at home. To explore the lived experiences of mother-writers in detail, data was collected through two rounds of interviews with all but one of the 13 participants. While I am aware that narratives provided in interviews are informed by biases and subjective 'truths' (Riessman 2008), I was primarily interested in the ways in which participants interpret their lives. Thus, rather than aiming to uncover objective, historical 'truths' – which from a poststructural perspective are always socially constructed and thus a reference to power – I was concerned with how participants construct their reality and 'narrative of the self' as it provides insights into the discourses that shape the way individuals refer to, and make sense, of their lived experiences. As I discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, interviews are particularly apt in generating those insights as they provide an opportunity for participants to create a coherent story about themselves and the way they want to be seen.

Given the small scale of my study, any potential implications for policy and practice resulting from this research have to be very modest. Rather than viewing my research as a single entity, I perceive it as being part of a broader body of academic research that is interested in the growing trend of women engaging in creative work from home including after they have

children. It is this broader discourse that could have potential implications for policy, as it contributes to a better understanding of an often-overlooked group of the creative workforce – home-based mother-writers with small children. I view two aspects of my research as particularly relevant for policy and practice. First, the vital role participants attributed to their creative practice in the management of their everyday lives – and motherhood in particular – is significant, as it makes a case for increasing efforts to retain female creatives in the industry once they have children. Second, that working from home was not preferred by many study participants highlights that if self-employment of mothers is actively promoted by governments, then they should also offer adequate – meaning flexible and affordable – opportunities for women to work outside the house.

While the focus of this thesis is specific to mother-writers, I see its analysis and findings as having wider relevance in terms of gender relations and broader structures of social inequality. My findings are in line with other studies that indicate organisational work structures and childcare policies fail to accommodate the needs of mothers, increasingly pushing them to create their own work opportunities at home, often under precarious circumstances. This trend further reinforces traditional, unequal gender roles where women are the default primary carers and are forced to make career concessions which reduce their income as a consequence. Home-based creative work, such as writing, might seem particularly apt to meet dominant work and mothering expectations but whether this is in the best interest of women, including the long-term implications of this work pattern, is unclear at this stage.

Findings of this thesis point to a number of areas requiring further research. For instance, the extent of the mother-creative phenomenon is unknown as there is an absence of statistical data that can provide insights into the number of women who engage in non-organisational, micro-

entrepreneurial creative work at the same time as caring for young children. However, low barriers of access to online markets and platforms, such as Etsy and social media, have been associated with an increase in the number of women who engage in creative, home-based work when they have children (Luckman 2015b; Russum 2019). Consequently, it is assumed that the number of mother-creatives is growing particularly given research showing that women with young children are more likely to be self-employed (Baxter 2013). To better understand the scale of this phenomenon, quantitative data is required that provides insights into the size of this cohort, including demographic details such as education, age, relationship status, number of children and location. What is also currently missing from the literature on mother-creatives – as well as mumpreneurs more broadly – is longitudinal data of their work arrangements and career choices once their children are more independent. Because the focus of my study was on the ways in which women navigate work/care tensions during early motherhood, whether the creative practice or entrepreneurial activity of participants will continue in the future is uncertain. To understand whether this work arrangement is a temporary solution or a long-term career strategy, is important to better account for the implications and sustainability of this trend.

It is also not well understood which creative practices women engage in during early motherhood besides crafting and (now) writing. It can be assumed that all creative practices that can be monetised in a non-organisational setting – either through direct income streams (including by selling via online marketplaces) or passive incomes (such as scholarships) – provide similar opportunities for mothers, but which practices specifically is unclear. In addition, more research is needed into whether the mother-creative phenomenon is primarily a growing trend within neoliberal societies which generally provide less structural support for mothers/parents, such as paid maternity leave and affordable childcare, or whether it is not

specifically linked to geo-political contexts. While one qualitative study looked at mother-creatives in Finland (Ikonen 2020) – a country with relatively high levels of social security and childcare benefits – the extent of this occurrence is not clear. Comparative quantitative data on women engaged in creative, home-based work is needed to understand bigger correlations between national contexts and creative micro-entrepreneurism/self-employment.

A final further enquiry that I want to propose is related to the vital role that my participants ascribed to their engagement in creative work in their everyday lives. While referring to work in terms of passion is a trend that is not just related to creative work (James 2017; Cech 2020), it would be interesting to know whether those self-employed mothers who are engaged in non-creative work also perceive it as vital and as enhancing to their wellbeing as participants in my study. Insights into the relationship to their work would clarify whether the ability to generate wellbeing and fulfilment are properties specifically linked to the nature of creative work or whether they reflect broader discourses associated with how modern work subjects are expected to relate to experience their work.

This thesis has contributed novel insights into the experiences and expectations of a growing but not well-understood cohort of creative workers – women who flexibly arrange their writing around their childcare responsibilities, primarily from home and in a self-employed capacity. Engaging in creative work after having children enabled my study participants, mother-writers, to comply with dominant cultural expectations associated with both work *and* motherhood. Writing allowed them to engage in meaningful, fulfilling work which has social legitimacy, adhere to dominant norms of intensive mothering, as well as to invest in their own self-actualisation. Those findings indicate that through writing, some women are able to generate fulfilment, pleasure and wellbeing despite the structural constraints they experience as mothers.

Writing is their way of alleviating the burden of having to navigate caregiving and work. Rather than emphasising a desire to be present and available for their children, the women in my study foregrounded their decision to engage in writing as an investment in their selves. This desire is a reference to a contemporary subjectivity, according to which women want to mother in a way that still leaves space and time for their own self-actualisation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedules

First Interview

1. Tell me about yourself, what you do and what your current work/life situation is.

2. How did you become a writer?

3. How does a normal work-day look like?

4. What role does creative work play in your life? Has this role changed since becoming a mother?

5. Is there a difference for you between creative work and other types of work?

6. How has work changed for you since becoming a mother?

7. What are the advantages of working from home?

8. What are the challenges of working from home?

9. What are the reasons for working while raising children?

10. What were the reasons for you to become freelance/self-employed?

11. What emotions do you associate with being freelance/self-employed?

12. Who is the most helpful in ensuring you to work as a mother? (persons and organisations)

13. What is your relationship to your work? (e.g., enjoyment, resentment)

14. Which aspects of your life do you see as integral parts of your identity?

15. What would an ideal work–family–life relationship look like for you?

16. What would your ideal workplace look like?

17. What are your thoughts on gender inequality and creative work? Have you encountered discrimination based on your gender as a writer?

18. After having these experiences, what advice would you give other writer mothers (or freelancers working from home with small children) on how to navigate motherhood and creative work?

19. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand your situation better?

Second Interview

1. Would you like to add anything to what we discussed or did not discuss in the last interview?

2. Has anything changed in your life situation since we spoke last time?

3. How has COVID-19 impacted your work and family life?

4. What can you tell me about your identity and how it changed when becoming a mother?

5. Which roles/identities are most important to you?

6. Do you identify with any of the following terms: writer mother/mother writer, writing mother, mothering writer. And if yes/no, why?

7. Can you reflect on what motherhood means to you and how it sits alongside your other roles/identities (i.e., writer, wife, etc.)

8. In the first round of interviews, the desire to be "more than a mother" emerged as a key theme. Can you elaborate on what that means to you?

9. If you get time to do something for yourself, what do you do?

10. Another finding from the first round of interviews was that many women left their jobs/career after having children. Can you elaborate on this transition from your perspective?

11. Where do you see yourself in 5–10 years?

12. Do you identify as a feminist?

13. What are your thoughts on feminism, mothering, and working from home?

14. Do you consider yourself as the primary caregiver?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Participant Biographies

Removed for the purposes of deidentification.

Appendix C: Coding Examples

1. Line-By-Line Coding	
Amy	
So it's not just about you, it's about the reader. And to have that connection, even though it's not face-to-face, to me that makes me feel connected to the world. And it's an essential part of me and that's the thing I have to keep up when I have children because it's so easy to get lost in the children.	Writing is not just about you but about the reader Having a connection Feeling connected to the world Seeing writing as an essential part of herself Having to keep this up when having children Finding it easy to get lost in the children
Safia	
Let's see. It's very much an outlet for frustrations, unexpressed dreams, desires unfulfilled dreams and desires and it's kind of always been that way since I was a child. As a mom, I'd say – it's also a way to simply give me something that's mine. It feels like my life and my time belong to someone else, mostly. And it is a way to alleviate boredom I guess, because it can get quite repetitive being a mother of a very small child, you always do the same things over and over again. It is challenging - but it is not challenging necessarily in an intellectual way or in a stimulating way, it's more kind of "I am going to need all of my emotional resources to kind of stay in the equilibrium to stay (laughs) within my principles to be with the situation, with a special needs child and one that has processing issues as well, so throws a lot of tantrums, that can be quiet the case.	Seeing creative work as an outlet for frustrations, dreams, desires Using writing as an outlet since being a child Having something that is just hers\ Feeling like her life and her time belong to someone else Alleviating boredom Being a mother can be quite monotonous/repetitive Mothering is emotional challenging but not intellectually stimulating Needing all her emotional resources for mothering Staying in equilibrium Staying within her principles Having a special needs child that has processing issues Having to deal with tantrums

2. Focused Coding	
(Theme: Time)	
Sarah	**Vanessa**
Slipping time	Having time on maternity leave
Partner freeing up time to write	Timing of writing
Waiting for the child to sleep	Writing when son was sleeping
Mapping out writing sessions	Finding a good routine
Making the most of the time available	Changing time available when second child came along
Expecting time pressure	**Being on different schedules**
Avoiding stress in the future	Adjusting sleep to childcare
Being productive and efficient despite time constraint	Partner working weird hours
Explaining her novel	**Trying to fit the family schedules together**
Writing stage	**Getting a stretch of time to write**
Thinking about writing	Being a night-owl
Sleeping time is writing time	Being on different/conflicting schedules
Experiencing nap time as precious	Trying to sleep
Navigating unstable writing times	Getting night-owl son to sleep
Needing the time	Hoping that the son "passes out"
Relying on child to get the time to write	Having to work on wake/sleep rhythm
Time when writing is not feasible (evenings)	**Needing to become a morning person/worker**
Reflecting on future	Carving out time to write
Using the time that you get	Not wanting to sacrifice time if writing is not successful
	Needing uninterrupted time to be productive (2)
	working in short intervals
	Navigating unpredictable time is hard
	Feeling like creative work is personal time
	Working towards something that might pay off
	Quarantining time for oneself
	Grabbing the moment
	Stealing time away in a justified way
	Quarantining time for oneself (2)
	Trying to get work done in that time
	Needing uninterrupted writing time

3. Focused Codes

Identity
Having an identity crisis
Becoming a mother and a writer
Shifting Values
Being more than a mum
Experiencing Life Changing Events
Not identifying as a writer (yet)
Identifying as a writer
Establishing writing as a profession
Feeling destined to be a writer/creative

Time
Sleeping Time = Writing Time
Slipping Time
Needing uninterrupted time
Adjusting time: Morning/day person versus night owl
Not/Having time to write
Writing around schedules of family members
Finding the perfect balance

Motherhood
Always wanting to be a mother
Not wanting to put children into day care
Breastfeeding
Wanting to be there for the kids
Wanting to be present
Needing a break
Modelling a life for their children
Finding mothering monotonous
Not feeling mentally stimulated by mothering

Relationship to Writing
Writing is essential for mental wellbeing
Feeling better when writing
Waiting to write
Staying relevant is tough
Wanting to connect to others through writing
Not needing much motivation to write

Space
Needing childcare to get work done at home
Housework is intruding at home
Being flexible/adaptable
Creating child-free spaces
Working outside of home
Working in a café
Changing preferences
Finding a suitable workspace

Work
Being made redundant
Being offered untenable position
Prioritising motherhood over work
Wanting to work more flexibly
Wanting work to fit life
Wanting to work close to the home

Money
Being in a privileged situation
Not doing it for the money
Getting paid = getting validation
Making financial sacrifices to write
Seeing value in non-paid work

4. Categories

The Everyday

Feeling better when writing

Writing as selfcare

Enjoying to write

Not/Having the time to write

Negotiating Motherhood & Creative Work/ Writing

Transition to Motherhood

Becoming a writer and a mother

Starting to write

Having the time and space to write

Navigating work/care tensions

Making sense of changes

Identity

Being more than a mother

Classifying mother/ writer identity

Establishing a creative self

Navigating external expectations to be more than a mother