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**(RE)BIRTH OF THE SELF: ORDINARY WOMEN'S
COMPLEX JOURNEYS INTO NEW MOTHERHOOD.**

A Feminist Poststructural Narrative Study

VOLUMES I AND II

A dissertation submitted by

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VOLUME I

ABSTRACT

This doctoral research explored Australian mothers' unique, engaging, and predominantly enjoyable transitions to early motherhood. Their expectations, beliefs, and experiences were investigated using narrative and thematic analyses underpinned by a feminist, poststructural methodology. The 10 participants in this study were white, middle-class, heterosexual, partnered, and able-bodied women living in south-east Queensland and expecting their first child. In-depth ante- and postnatal interviews were conducted at the 2nd trimester of pregnancy and 8 months post-birth respectively. These women experienced the early motherhood journey as an unsettled period which necessitated the utilisation of four, often contradictory, maternal identities. The four identities, or voices, were Ideal Mother; Challenged, Practical Self; Extended, Spiritual Self; and Independent Self. This research has shown that becoming a mother for contemporary Australian women is simultaneously joyful, thrilling, confronting, depressing, constraining, and empowering. Thus, the transition to motherhood was a complex and chaotic experience which confronted their sense of self. Moreover, it is clear that young women are often under prepared for the paradoxes and intensity of their journeys. My thesis is that *for these contemporary Australian women, becoming a mother necessitated drawing on four dominant, often contradictory voices or identities resulting in a complex transitional experience of individual and personal negotiation and integration.* The complexity of this life-transition defies simple explanation and solution. Regardless, the findings suggest that *all* the stories of mothering need to be told to make them equally real, valid, valuable, and normal. Thus can we find and develop new and useful models of modern motherhood to enable policy makers and health practitioners to provide more informed, particular, and empathetic support for new Australian mothers, as well as strengthen future mothers for and feel positive about their mothering careers.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I certify that the ideas, work, results, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

Signature of Candidate

Date

ENDORSEMENT

Signature of Supervisors

Date

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¹ The Association for Research into Mothering-Australia

² Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It's a very confusing time. And it's very daunting to think.... You can't turn back. It's just, it's forever.

Meg, AN³ interview

As I write my tentative title, what comes to mind are all the women I know, or have read about, who mother, are yet to be mothers, or who have chosen not to mother. I hear those who are positive about motherhood, for whom having a child was all they ever wanted: For whom the good days outweigh the bad, and for whom motherhood provides a great sense of joy and self-fulfilment. Then I think of those who may at times wish they had not become mothers, for whom motherhood has meant loss; loss of personal freedom, loss of career, loss of financial independence, and, for some, loss of self. I think also of the women straddling the two extremes: The women for whom motherhood is a continual balancing act between joy and sorrow. These women reflect the positive and negative arguments for motherhood. How can they be good mothers, care well for their child/ren, and enjoy motherhood whilst remaining true to their own selves by maintaining personal (soul-saving) ideologies, careers, hobbies, and independence? Finally, I think of those women for whom achieving motherhood is extremely difficult: Those for whom circumstance may mean remaining childless, and those who have decided mothering is not for them.

Although these women may view mothering and motherhood in very different ways, for them all an underlying theme is present. Becoming a mother is central to the development of their adult identity (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991; Rich, 1995). However, the move to motherhood is something not necessarily easily, or simply achieved: Many varied routes may be taken. As Patrice DiQuinzio suggests "...decisions about whether, when and how to mother continue to face almost all women" (1999). In fact, with the many freedoms won for women by the feminist movement, the choices regarding child bearing and rearing appear to be almost endless. Furthermore, it is not just women on the threshold of motherhood who are concerned with these choices. Although mothering is perceived as a

³ Antenatal

personal and individual affair which is conducted behind the privacy of closed doors, culture and society have a great deal of influence on how it is enacted.

Overview of Australian mothering today

In her forward to the discussion paper, *Striking the balance: Women, men work and family* (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005), Pru Goward wrote

Over the past forty years women have significantly increased their numbers in paid work, in education and in decision-making positions, and have gained greater reproductive freedom. Yet despite these changes in the public sphere of work and in reproductive choices, the lives of men and women at home, in the private sphere, remain relatively untouched. While the women's movement initially challenged women's greater responsibility for unpaid work in the home and called for men to be more involved in parenting and other unpaid work, this proved much harder than removing barriers to paid work and education. Women have continued to carry the greater responsibility for caring and other unpaid work, effectively working a double shift and living under increased time pressures. (p. ix)

This paper, a result of the community discussions during the paid maternity leave project (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2002a, 2002b), examines the barriers faced by Australian men and women in their efforts to combine paid work and family responsibilities.

These government-initiated, community discussions are a response to recent concerns about this country's ageing population, delayed parenthood and decreased fertility (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008a; 2008b). Moreover, some believe fertility will continue to decline unless issues of gender equity are addressed by the Australian government (McDonald, 2000). Efforts to redress fertility have included increased payments such as an annual baby bonus, family tax benefits (the new child endowment), and increases in child-care benefits. Additionally, the previous treasurer, Peter Costello, went so far as to recruit babies through his appeal that families should have three babies – one for mum one for dad, and one for the country (McKew, 2004). Critics say that this breeding creed (Summers, 2003) calls on a traditional, white-picket fence, even a 1950's, style of motherhood (Department of Health and Ageing, ACNFP, & NFPP, 2007), despite community consultations that suggest contemporary women (and men) want

different ways of mothering to be available to them (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005, 2007). These financial inducements speak of conservative pro-natalism and social engineering (Albrechtson, 2003; Anderson, 2007), paying lip-service to family friendly ideologies rather than concrete changes in attitude to the needs of women and mothers (Maushart, 2006; Summers, 2003). The focus has become families managing paid work and family commitments, rather than looking at policies which will engender structural, cultural and attitudinal change.

This government and public debate is influenced by maternal debate since the 1970's. Some suggest feminists are still arguing the same arguments but that Australia has moved on (Albrechtson, 2003). Others say this is for good reason – that for mothers, things have not moved much at all (Bryce, 2007; Cannold, 2005; Grace, Leahy, & Doughney, 2005; Maushart, 2006; McDonald, 2000; Phillips, 2007; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005; Williamson, 2005). Most of the scholarly debate since the 1970s has examined two overarching themes: that motherhood (a) oppresses women and denies them personal autonomy and individuality, but, conversely (b) it should be valorised through a revaluing of women's and mothers' unique attributes and contributions to society (DiQuinzio, 1999; Everingham, 1994; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix et al., 1991). While recent research has looked at more focused mothering topics, for example postnatal depression (Nicolson, 2001; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000; Williamson, 2005), or the effects of ART⁴ (Hammarberg, 2006), they continue to be underpinned by these polar notions. Moreover, many of these works utilised retrospective accounts of specific mothering experiences. Therefore, it is considered timely to conduct a longitudinal, narrative study that allows modern Australian women to describe their whole journeys to first-time motherhood in their own words *during* this significant life-transition.

Given the significance of the institution of motherhood to our society, and its continuing pivotal role in women's identities, as well as the recent public debates and government policies, it is relevant and timely to examine the expectations and actual experiences of modern Australian women, expressed in their own voices, in becoming mothers. If we, as a society, believe that mothering has the greatest impact on our country's future through the raising of our children, then surely we need to

⁴ Assisted reproductive techniques

ensure our contemporary mothers' desires and choices are understood, respected and supported.

Aim

The aim of this study therefore, is to listen to, interpret and report women's stories of their transitions to motherhood, so as to contribute to current knowledge on, and debate about, Australian women's lives. Thus, this research will inform practice, and government policy, in areas involving the health and well-being of mothers and their children.

Research Questions

1. What are the beliefs, expectations and experiences of motherhood portrayed by women during their transition to early motherhood?
2. How do these women incorporate the new mothering role into their sense of self?

Myself and this journey

In keeping with feminist research tenets discussed in depth in chapter 3, I felt it was important for me to provide a brief overview of my background and acknowledge some of my influences. This I have done within the context of Reflexivity in chapter 3. However, a short introduction is in order here.

I am a 42 year old white, Anglo Saxon, middle class, married woman who had her first (and probably only) child just after turning 37. By this time, I had two bachelor degrees to my name and had recently finished my honours in psychology. I was working as a research assistant for a nursing research centre when I fell pregnant. It was during that time that I first encountered qualitative research methods and methodology. Although, like many others, I felt I knew about the difficulties of becoming a mother, the reality was different and more challenging than I imagined. While on leave after my son's birth, I decided doctoral research would be a flexible job I could undertake during the early mothering years. In some ways this was very true. In others, I was completely mistaken. Therefore, this research commenced for mainly pragmatic reasons, although this changed the more I read and thought.

With regards to this research, I cannot in all honesty say this has been a continuously pleasurable journey. Rather it has mostly been an arduous time of

bloody-minded persistence, interspersed with a number of moments of satisfaction, some fleeting delights and flashes of ‘aha’. Nonetheless, interviewing new mothers was extremely enjoyable and rewarding, as was the collegiality of maternal scholars this project introduced me to. Moreover, as the voyage comes to its timely end, I feel that it has been a worthwhile project, replete with personal and research insights, and more importantly, for its contribution to Australian maternal research.

Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter has provided an overview of the Australian context of this study and the relevant maternal research to date, and introduced the research problem. It has identified the aim and research question for the study, and précised my research journey. The chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation.

Chapter Two, *Literature Review*, presents a review of the maternal literature underpinning the key concepts in this study. These are master narratives of biological determinism, intensive mothering, and valuing motherhood and challenges to these dominant narratives. Chapter Three, *Methodology: Hearing and reporting women’s words*, discusses the feminist, poststructural and narrative methodological principles behind the study. Chapter Four, *Method - An Evolution*, describes the research process including research design, participants, data collection and analyses, and research quality and ethics. The narrative analysis, in which the 10 mother’s own voices are heard, is presented under *Stories of Early Mothering* in the second volume of this dissertation. Chapter 5, *Four Clear Voices*, presents the thematic analysis of the data, and offers evidence for the thesis of this research. Chapter 6, *Joy and difficulty - Complex, journeys to motherhood*, examines the findings of this research in relation to previous theory and research, and in so doing discusses the development of a model for understanding resilient survivorship which incorporates relevant psychological theory and research findings about resilience, the literature on survivorship and feminist theories about women’s agency and sense of self. Finally, in Chapter 7, limitations, recommendations and implications are discussed, and conclusions drawn.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

. . . oh the expectation that some women have, that their job as a mother is to sacrifice everything about themselves and their personal life, in order to give their children what they need. And I don't agree with it, obviously, but at the same time . . . I suppose it's a spectrum – at one end you've got the martyr and at the other end you've got a selfish mother who gives nothing to her child.

Lucy, AN interview.

Introduction

This chapter examines literature predominantly relevant to new mothers' transitions to motherhood. It explores maternal and women-focused scholarship from the disciplines of nursing, psychology, sociology, and feminism, as well as considering the input of popular and social commentaries written for the public. The key theories investigated encompass historical and current ideologies of motherhood as well as real experiences of mothering.

Beginning with the cultural, political, and economic background to contemporary Australian mothering, this chapter discusses universal conceptions and debates about mothering such as biological determinism and intensive mothering. The challenges to these dominant narratives and the impact of individualism on mothering discourse are then examined. The concluding section reviews the more recent debate about the value and revaluing of motherhood. Lastly, this chapter closes with a summary of recent Australian maternal research and shows how this work extends upon those works and contributes to the current debate.

Socio-economic backdrop to modern Australian mothering

Social climate and public discourse

Motherhood and mothering do not occur within a vacuum. As Phoenix et al., (1991) state “most people have been mothered at some time” (p.1), and that experience, whether good or bad, usually generates strong feelings about mothering. Moreover, most people feel they have inalienable commentary rights with regard to mothering issues. The plethora of media commentary and articles in which mothers, or mothering, are the focus, support the notion that the whether, when, and how of mothering are of tremendous societal interest (AAP, 2007b; Doogue, 2007; Gilchrist,

2007; Nolan, 2007). Topics cover such issues as paid work choices, parenting choices, formal childcare, financial benefits, childlessness, marital and employment status, and the age of mothers, notwithstanding the recent obsession with celebrity mothers (Cohen, 2008; New Weekly, 2008; Woman's Day, 2008). Regardless of the topic, commentaries tend to portray mothers in one of two ways. The first expound an idealised notion of modern mothering, in which one is able to express an innate, feminine, nurturing, and caring self that is self-actualising, and the ultimate fulfilment for women (Arndt, 2007; Chant, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Donald, 2007; Jackman & Clark, 2003; Lunn, 2008; McLochlan, 2008; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2003). Juxtaposed with this are articles which suggest that mothering is extremely difficult, unsupported by Western society, entails a loss of self, and which opine mothers' ability to manage it all ("Bumpy ride for single parents: Welfare to Work reforms mean sweeping changes to system," 2007; Cornell University, 2005; Haran, 2003; Jackman, 2003; Masters, 2004; Phillips, 2007; Sexton & Fleming, 2007). The debate emphasises the significance of the institution of motherhood to our society, and its pivotal role in women's identities. It also highlights our society's beliefs that women's personal child-bearing and mothering choices are worthy of public, if not community, concern. Paradoxically however, it lays the bear primary responsibility for child rearing and the production of 'good' future citizens at the feet of women (i.e. mothers) (DiQuinzio, 1999; Lawler, 2000).

Societal concern with children and parenting is nowhere more clearly evidenced than through the publication of Australian national statistics at the beginning of this century which fuelled public concern about a population that was ageing, delaying parenthood, and having fewer children than ever before. Whilst births rose from a rate of 1.73 babies in 2001 to 1.81 in 2005 and at 31st December 2006 was the highest recorded since 1971, low fertility continues to be a significant issue (Australian Bureau of Statistics, October, 2006b; June, 2007; 2008a; 2008b). The median age of Australians in 2006 was 37 years, while in 2005 the median age of mothers rose to 30.7 years and fathers to 32.9 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, October, 2006a; 2007). Moreover, in 2006, 37% of women in the peak child bearing age of 30-34 years had not had any children, compared to 20% of 30-34 year olds in 1986, with the proportion of women remaining childless increasing (16% of 40-44 year-old women childless in 2006 compared to 10% in 1990) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, 2008b). The magnitude of the future socio-

economic impacts of an ageing population will be largely determined by long-term fertility.

Additionally, increasingly more families with children have mothers who go out to work. Irrespective of the father's employment status, mothers in 65.6% of all couple families with children under 15 years old, were in part- or full-time paid employment in 2006 (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2008a). Even when fathers were employed full-time, 53% of mothers still worked outside the home. Of lone mothers, 59% were in paid employment in 2006 (23% engaged in full-time paid work) (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2008a). Moreover, a large percentage of mothers with the youngest child under two years (38.7%) entered or returned to paid work after the birth, and commonly cited financial reasons as well as adult interaction and mental stimulation for doing so (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006a; July, 2006; Lupton & Schmied, 2002). Notwithstanding this, unlike childless employed women, mothers carry the greater burden of housework and childcare as well as caring for ageing parents (Craig, 2006; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005). Although some fathers undertake the full-time caring responsibilities, this percentage remains very small (3.4% of 1.7 million couple families with children under 14 years) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006b). These statistics provide a picture of modern Australian mothers who are delaying their first births until their 30s, combining paid employment and a greater responsibility for domestic and caring labour, and thus feeling time pressured (AAP, 2007b). The outcome has been a reduction in the total number of children women plan, or are able, to have, and this fertility decline could continue unless issues of gender equity are addressed (McDonald, 2000).

Government policies

These data have prompted changes in governmental concerns about the position of Australian families aimed at promoting reproduction generally and specifically encouraging women to have babies⁵. Moreover they have engaged in widespread community consultations about paid maternity leave provisions, the difficulties of balancing work and family, and childcare availability and quality (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2002b, 2005). The outcome has been an, as yet,

⁵ For example the call by Liberal Treasurer Peter Costello to have "one for Dad, one for Mum and one for the country" (McKew, 2004)

unimplemented recommendation of 14 weeks paid maternity leave, funded by the government up to the rate of the Federal Minimum Wage (\$522.12 per week) for those who have been in paid work for 40 of the previous 52 weeks, an increased Family Tax Benefit, Maternity Payment and child care rebate (Appendix G), and further community consultation (Australian Fair Pay Commission, 2007; Broderick, 2008; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2002a; 200b; 2005). Although supporting equity issues of mothers who go out to work, this does little to address the marginalisation of mothers who are not in paid employment prior to conception, nor those who work at home as full-time mothers. Social commentator and feminist Anne Summers, although supportive of paid maternity leave, suggests that we should attend to the hidden messages the current debate espouses. Rather than dealing with wider issues such as reconciling the differences between public and private domains, and appreciating women's needs in their full diversity, she suggests that many options offered to women are pushing them back into the home and full-time motherhood (Summers, 2003). She sees a subtle, but strong anti-woman rhetoric in which no-one talks about women, only about families, and women's status is to be found only from traditional roles as full-time wives and mothers (Light, 2003). Equality has been replaced by a new ideology she calls "the breeding creed". Her contentions are supported by others who say that policy and taxation changes encourage traditional family models in which women remain at home and men are the breadwinners (McDonald, 2000; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005). Once women have children their lives are curtailed both inside and outside the private sphere. Until government policies such as incentives to employers to promote father and mother friendly provisions, and better child care provisions and tax incentives are implemented, younger women will see the struggles of their older sisters and choose to limit childbearing (McDonald, 2000), although pronatalist policies may encourage teenage mothering (Anderson, 2007). Improvements such as these will create attitudinal shifts towards all mothers and to gender responsibilities for caring work (Te'o, 2003).

In summary, modern Australian mothering currently occurs within a socio-political climate of tensions between traditionalists, economic imperatives, and those who see a need for radical changes to our reproductive environment. Regardless of these tensions, there remains enormous cultural pressure for women to have children. Social climate and government policies are of course informed and transformed by many things. An important influence on modern Australian history has been

feminism and its examination of women's position. More recently, maternal scholars, health practitioners, and social commentators have contributed to the debate.

Conceptions and Experiences of Motherhood

For many second and third wave feminists, the institution of motherhood has, and still does, exemplify the fundamental tenets of feminist theory and has been much researched over the last two decades (Arendell, 2000; Faludi, 1991; Rich, 1995; Wolf, 2001). The manner in which society has viewed, and often still does view, motherhood, has been critical in terms of feminist concepts such as sex, equality, oppression, representation, and liberation (DiQuinzio, 1999). Moreover, interest has been renewed as economic, social, and political changes cause women to reflect on the position of contemporary mothers endeavouring to juggle the many demands made of them (AAP, 2007b; "Bumpy ride for single parents: Welfare to Work reforms mean sweeping changes to system," 2007; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Crittenden, 2001; "Feminist moms reject intensive mothering, York prof says," 2007; Hays, 1996; Legge, 2005; Manne, 2005; Maushart, 2006; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Porter, 2006; Summers, 2003).

The tensions expressed in the previous section mirror much of the ideological debate about motherhood and mothering engaged in by feminists, sociologists, and psychologists, the three social science fields that have predominantly confronted and informed western society. Two overarching themes have been explored: that motherhood (a) oppresses women and denies them personal autonomy and individuality, and (b) it should be valorised through a revaluing of women's and mothers' unique attributes and contributions to society (DiQuinzio, 1999; Everingham, 1994; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix et al., 1991).

Although at opposite ends of an ideological continuum, the basic notions about mothering that underpin the arguments are the same. This of course gives rise to the extreme complexity of any discussion about mothering and motherhood. While one argues for example, that women are oppressed by the concept that mothering is a function of women's female nature, it is this very nature which offers many women their deepest joy and sense of personal achievement (DiQuinzio, 1999; McMahon, 1995). Accordingly, it is difficult to not fall into essentialism when theorising mothering (Miller, 2005). Furthermore, the paradoxes of modern

motherhood will not be easily resolved. However, this does not mean we should resile from candid discussions or attempts to rework what mothering means for contemporary women.

Biologically determined?

Mothering as natural, desired, and innate for all women is one of western society's entrenched and cherished beliefs (Bulbeck, 1997; Chodorow, 1978; DiQuinzio, 1999; Kitzinger, 1992; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix et al., 1991; Rich, 1995; Wolf, 2001; Woollett & Phoenix, 1996). Feminists from many disciplines have explored and questioned this biological argument for the superior fitness of women for motherhood over their fitness for other occupations or pursuits (Crittenden, 2001; Hrdy, 1999; Lazarre, 1997; Letherby, 1994; Maushart, 2006; Oakley, 1980; Porter, 2006; Ruddick, 1984; Woodward, 2003; Yeo, 2005). Many have argued that this notion has only arisen with industrialisation and urbanisation (Rich; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). These social changes resulted in a gendered division of labour as men went out to paid work and women stayed at home dependent on, and subordinated to, men. From this point on, childrearing was seen as a private pursuit, separate from the public domain. Consequently, women, and perforce mothers, were removed from the public sphere of decision making and from financial independence. Excluded from the collaborative world of work, mothering became a somewhat mystical endeavour, natural and desired only by women. Even today, 'mothering' is imbued with not just the biological fact of procreation and production, but with notions of care, responsibility, compassion, empathy, sacrifice. Conversely, 'fathering', although beginning to denote more, merely tends to mean begetting, and does not have the depth of connotation with regard to raising a child (Rich).

Everingham (1994) suggests that the apparently innate aspect of mothering is in fact skill borne from necessity, not an inherent feminine predisposition. Mothers, being predominantly responsible for childrearing in their early period of care, are constantly exposed to the infant's needs, and, in the same way a concert pianist's early years of music practice may make their mature skill appear inborn, makes women appear intuitively prepared for mothering. Furthermore, it has been suggested that historic gendered labour divisions resulted in girls and young women learning how to mother through their experiences of extended families, and being

predominantly enclosed within a female domain (Bulbeck, 1997; McMahon, 1995). Although gains made by the feminist movement have meant that modern women and girls are now able to participate freely in the world of education and careers, corresponding gains have not been seen with regard to men's participation in child rearing and domestic work - traditional labour divisions continue to dominate (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006b; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005). More mothers than fathers are involved in full-time parenting and mothers in paid employment (full- and part-time) remain largely responsible for childrearing and household tasks (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, 2002; November, 2003; Craig, 2006; Phoenix et al., 1991). Therefore, parenting has remained the province of mothers throughout history and the few natural, instinctive notions of motherhood are talked about repeatedly, as well as appearing in the animal and primate world. In this way the historical reality of women's responsibility for mothering has been lost and replaced purely by nature (Barthes, 1993), and the apparently natural aptitude of women for mothering has become an eternal and justifiable fact (Barthes; Hrdy, 1999; Maushart, 2006; Woodward, 1997).

However, despite this critique, beliefs in instinctive, natural mothering remain robust. Many of the mothers in recent research utilise this narrative when talking about their pregnancy, birth, or responses to their baby (Le Blanc, 2002; Lupton, 2000; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; McMahon, 1995; Noble, 2000). And there is evidence that there are biological components to mothering behaviours (Hrdy, 1999). Hormonal and other physiological changes resulting from pregnancy and child birth prepare mothers for birth and breastfeeding. Additionally, some of these alterations refine mothers' aural and olfactory abilities so that they respond more quickly to their crying baby than fathers or other women, and predispose them to pleasurable feelings during breastfeeding (Hrdy). Many women talk of the instinctual care they give their child, and of the overwhelming love they feel that would enable them to do anything to protect their baby (Le Blanc, 1999; Wall, 2001). However, the question remains, are these feelings natural, or are they prompted by social desirability or socialisation? Certainly, this love and instinct permeate popular media and pronatalist texts (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Chant, 2008; Hafen, 2000; Jackman & Clark, 2003; Lunn, 2008; Manne, 2005; Marshall, 1991; Muehlenberg, 2001), and reinforce what some consider to be a powerful myth of mothering (Hays, 1996; Hollway & Orbach, 1997; Maushart, 2006; Miller, 2000a; Woodward, 1997).

If one does subscribe to the notion that mothering is innate and desired by all women, then it follows that childless women must be considered unnatural and abnormal (Woollett, 1991). This is irrespective of the fact that many women are unable to have children due to medical or financial reasons (for example, the cost of IVF treatment for infertility), or an inability to find suitable or willing partners (Cannold, 2005; Hewlett, 2002). Even those who mother other women's children are considered to be not quite legitimate (Downe, 2004; Letherby, 1994). Woollett's (1991) investigation into the meanings of motherhood ingeniously looked at the accounts of English childless women and those with reproductive problems. She felt that because these women were often asked to explain or justify their reproductive desires, they would be more cognisant of societal ideas about motherhood. Their comments clearly identified the notions that motherhood is mandatory (in other words, normal, and desired) for women in stable heterosexual relationships, and that adulthood is only achieved for women by becoming a mother (through 'growing up' or becoming a 'true woman'). Conversely, childlessness was a negative state and childless women were either aberrant or irresponsible and immature. These sentiments are recognised in other studies (Campbell, 2003; Cannold, 2005; Hammarberg, 2006; Letherby, 1994; McMahon, 1995). One mother commented that, without children, "I would have been a little bit more self-centered. I would have pampered myself a lot" (McMahon, p.174). Another mother said that "children help you to be better person" (p. 172) and that not having a child would mean not contributing properly to the community and just being along for a joy ride. Emotionless and superficial was the way another of McMahon's participants would have described herself if she had not had children. Of course, as mothers of preschoolers, McMahon's participants had had a few years to construct their mother-selves and narratives that supported their mothering choices. In this way would personal dissonance have been minimised and correspondence with cultural ideals maximised.

Mothering as ultimate fulfilment. Closely linked to the view of motherhood as innate and natural, is the notion that motherhood is the ultimate in self fulfilment and achievement (Le Blanc, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix et al., 1991; Rich, 1995; Woollett, 1991). Much of the argument appears to be a result of the dichotomies discussed above. If women, family, home, the natural, and the body are thought of as linked and belonging to one sphere, then it follows that women's ultimate sense of

achievement should be found in that sphere, rather than in the male sphere of mind, work (career) or public. That mothers generally do subscribe to this belief is clearly evidenced by mothers' thoughts on their experiences of motherhood and childlessness (Hammarberg, 2006; McMahon), and comments by childless women and those with reproductive problems (Woollett).

Many of the participants in McMahon's (1995) study mentioned that motherhood was the best thing they had ever done. For example "I didn't think anything could be as wonderful as this. It's the best thing that ever happened to me in my life" (p.163). Talking about childlessness, many said that without their child, or children, they would feel empty and incomplete. For example, one mother says, "[If I had remained childless I would feel] lonely, unfulfilled" (p.173) while another woman with reproductive problems who had adopted a child said, "...There is this feeling that having a baby is something to be proud of, and that you've not achieved it" (Woollett, 1991, p.54). Furthermore, there was a feeling that having a child was the utmost thing one could do for personal growth as one mother succinctly commented, "...I see life as a quest for self-actualisation and all of that. And I don't think anything does it like having a child" (p.142). These mothers' views are ably supported and promoted in many popular works, media commentaries, and pronatalist tracts, in which the joys of mothering are interpreted as motherhood being the ultimate, desired goal of all women (ABC, 2003; Buchholz & Follme, 2000; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Gilchrist, 2007; Hewlett, 2002; Jackman, 2003; Lunn, 2008; McLochlan, 2008; Opinion, 2003; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2003).

Intensive, child-centred, 'good' mothering

A modern phenomenon of mothering has been intensive mothering in which the child is the central focus of the mother-child relationship (Hays, 1996). Like notions of mothering being instinctive, and women being biologically prepared to care for children, many maternal scholars suggest intensive mothering is socially constructed (Crittenden, 2001; Hrdy, 1999; Maushart, 2006; Wall, 2001; Woodward, 1997; Woollett & Phoenix, 1996). Post-World War II affluence that required only one income earner families saw many women remaining at home post-birth. Moreover, developments in child psychology and the accessibility of parenting manuals, and the credence placed on expert knowledges legitimated these well-educated women devoting far greater time and energy to child-rearing than their

predecessors (Ex & Janssens, 2000; Hays, 1996; Lazarre, 1997)}. From this also developed the Euro American view of childhood as being a period in which the self is formed, and that the child was the foundation of the future adult and good citizenry (Lawler, 2000). From this are ‘mother’ and ‘motherhood’ constituted as the object in relation to the centrality of the subject child and childhood. Therefore, children’s needs and wants are of paramount importance, to which mothers are required to proactively, and reactively, respond. Furthermore, the child’s self is nurtured, or stymied, through her or his environment (here read mother, as it is usually she that responds to her child). Consequently, mothers are seen as primarily responsible for developing children’s selves and future communities. Good mothers are responsible for good children while bad mothering results in bad children.

Latter day intensive mothering has developed further, with mothers feeling the need to focus on developing not only healthy and morally acceptable humans, but also looking to the intellectual, emotional, and unique aspects of their children (DiQuinzio, 1999; Everingham, 1994). As well, reduced numbers of offspring have made greater focus on each child possible. This has spawned industries devoted to the fulfilment of the individual child with services such as music and gymnastics for toddlers, numerous toys designed to educate and stimulate, social groups like Playgroup; kid’s meals; child-specific arts and museum spaces and exhibitions; children’s movies; designer clothing and décor for babies and toddlers, and specialty stores to sell many of these products. Moreover, the globalisation of media has inculcated a belief that the world is unsafe, encouraging mothers to be protective of, and fearful for, their children. (Throsby, 2006; Wenzel, 2008). Consequently, intensive mothering is rewarded because it taps into notions of good mothering being that which keeps a child safe and healthy.

This belief of good mothering as needing to always be physically, emotionally, and intellectually available is consistently expressed by mothers in various studies (Brown, Lumley, Small, & Astbury, 1994; Ex & Janssens, 2000; Lupton, 2000; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Wearing, 1984). As a consequence of their study with Australian women, Brown et al. (1994) suggest the “list of attributes women associated with being a good mother is a somewhat daunting job description” (p.141). The most commonly mentioned qualities of ‘good’ mothering were being caring and loving, patient, self-sacrificing, spending time with children, and fostering

children's emotional development. Additionally, the 'good' mother should be calm and relaxed, actively communicate, be understanding and sensitive, while providing basic physical needs as well as appropriate discipline. Brown and her colleagues found that most of the mothers were very clear about what 'good' mothering was describing, as one woman put it, "A superwoman!" (p.151). However, although most of these participants said they were doing a reasonable job of mothering, they were doubtful as to whether they constituted 'good' mothers. Mothers in other studies also articulated similar sentiments. They talked about the child's needs and that a good mother is sensitive, empathetic, and responsive to their children and their needs. Many understood that the 'good' mother was an ideal, but still expressed feelings of guilt at not being able to continually and consistently put their child before themselves, or their own needs (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Carolan, 2004a; Le Blanc, 2002; Manne, 2005; Oakley, 1980; Wearing, 1984).

Even though perceived by many as an unrealistic ideal, 'good' mothering has evolved into being that which 'normal' mothers engage in (Woollett & Phoenix, 1996). Although western society wishes to nurture individuality and uniqueness, it concurrently requires that children fit the norm. Given their position of absolute responsibility for children's needs and development, it follows that mothers are also viewed as an homogenous group with the same characteristics and needs (Lawler, 2000). The logical conclusion is that those children, and therefore their mothers, who do not fit the norms, and engage in 'good' mothering are viewed as unusual and deviant (Lawler, 2000; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Woollett & Phoenix, 1996). Phoenix and Woollett maintain that this is no more clearly evidenced than in psychological research and developmental texts, and, consequently, in child care manuals. Mothers are constructed as sensitive nurturers who, according to professional researchers, are concerned only with the child and the child's behaviour. Of concern is that much of this research has been done with first time, white, middle-class, (stay-at-home?) mothers and children, which arguably leads to developmental psychology producing limited views of mothers and mothering styles.

Much of the literature discussed above results from data obtained during the 80s and early 90s and as such is now at least a decade out of date. Moreover, although several studies examine women's thoughts on mothering and privilege mothers' voices (Brown et al., 1994; Chodorow, 1978; Everingham, 1994; Kitinger,

1992; Lawler, 2000; Marshall, 1991; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix et al., 1991; Rich, 1995; Ruddick, 1984; Wearing, 1984; Woollett, 1991), much of this English and Canadian research is based on retrospective accounts of prior expectations. Thus there are few studies that have captured women's before and after accounts of their advent to motherhood to gain an appreciation of how their views may alter or remain unchanged.

Challenges to dominant narratives

Adrienne Rich's poignantly captured the resentment and anger some mothers have felt about the dominance of the child to the exclusion of their self when she wrote:

I remember a cycle. It began when I had picked up a book or began trying to write a letter, or even found myself on the telephone with someone toward whom my voice betrayed eagerness, a rush of sympathetic energy. The child (or children) might be absorbed in busyness, in his own dreamworld; but as soon as he felt me gliding into a world which did not include him, he would come to pull at my hand, ask for help, punch at the typewriter keys. And I would feel his wants at such a moment as fraudulent, as an attempt moreover to defraud me of living even for fifteen minutes as myself. My anger would rise; I would feel the futility of any attempt to salvage myself, and also the inequality between us: my needs always balanced against those of a child, and always losing. (1995, p.23)

Many have written of the difficulties and ambivalence they and other women experienced on becoming mothers (Brown et al., 1994; Crittenden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Parker, 1997; Rich, 1995; Wolf, 2001). These range from stories of tiredness, sleep deprivation, and learning of new tasks to fundamental changes such as loss of self, relationships, equality, employment, body image, and self, while others are engaged in a constant struggle to maintain these significant aspects of their self (Cornell University, 2005; Craig, 2006; DiQuinzio, 1999; Horin, 2005; Langford, 2002; Nicolson, 2001; Phillips, 2007; Summers, 2003). Some are even brave enough to say they hate it or their babies (Lupton, 2000; Parfitt, 2007). Feelings of sadness, frustration, anger, and resentment are commonly reported (Blumenthal, 1999; Brown et al., 1994; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Le Blanc,

2002; Miller, 2000b; Sexton & Fleming, 2007; Williamson, 2005). Even those for whom motherhood is so desired as to endure the rigours of assisted reproduction have reported feeling lonely, fatigued, and lacking in confidence (Hammarberg, 2006). Moreover, reflections about one's own mother have also revealed images and actions that are counter to prescribed ideals (Andrews, 2002; Edelman, 2006; Ex & Janssens, 2000). These real experiences of mothering suggest that it is not as straightforward, natural, or self-fulfilling as master narratives of mothering would have us believe.

Hrdy (1999) contends that although natural mothering involves some biological, physiological, and emotional responses we laud, she suggests that it is also far more ruthless. She writes about primates and human mothers who do not, or have not been self-sacrificing nor nurturing, citing examples of mothers who were not the primary carers, have sacrificed their child for personal safety or that of other family members, or participated in the killing of their child. She suggests that natural mothering is far more realistic because it involves cost/benefit ratios. A mother's main goal is to ensure the successful growth and future procreation of their offspring, and so a sickly baby may be ignored or exposed in order to benefit other children.

Mothers who take their own needs into account, for example following career paths which cannot incorporate intensive mothering duties (Gilchrist, 2007; Opinion, 2003) are vilified, and often report feeling selfish or torn. Those who are single, too young, too old, physically or mentally unwell, ill-educated, poor, or not white may be treated as 'bad', unmotherly, deviant, or abnormal (Jackman & Clark, 2003; Kearney, 2007). Moreover, when children or adults are perpetrators of violent crime, it is often to the mother, or the quality of her mothering, that the media and experts look (Coward, 1997). Parenting (read mothering) manuals rarely incorporate the needs of those mothers and children who fall outside of the white, middle class, married, heterosexual, healthy normative group (Marshall, 1991). Others point to instances of abuse or infanticide as examples of maternal ambivalence that society is often unable to acknowledge (Coward, 1997; Featherstone, 1997; Parker, 1997). These mothers are often portrayed as unnatural, defective, or evil with little thought being given to the circumstances or the social environment that may have led them to that point (Boyle, 2007; Coward, 1997). The recent instances of newborn babies

being abandoned caused expressions of disbelief at the unmotherliness of the mothers responsible although some were sympathetic to the mothers' possible plights (AAP, 2007a, 2008; Markham, Veness, & Mossman, 2007). However, despite many behaviours and research that indicate maternal ambivalence to be a reasonably widespread and common phenomenon, the ideals of good mothering are extremely durable. This often leads to feelings of guilt and frustration as mothers try to live up to the ideal while ignoring and suppressing mothering that does not conform.

For some women moreover, an inability to manage feelings of ambivalence results in postnatal depression or psychosis (Brown et al., 1994; Mauthner, 1995; Nicolson, 1999; Nolan, 2007; Parker, 1997; Placksin, 2000; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000; Williamson, 2005). Indeed, it has been suggested that negative responses to the advent to motherhood are more normal than not (Nicolson, 1998, 1999). Having to manage new tasks, routines and lifestyles, amid exhaustion and the needs of an unpredictable baby understandably may result in symptoms of depression such as sadness, low self-esteem, hopelessness, or anger. Additionally, becoming a mother involves losses of freedom, money, work identity, intimate relationships, friendships, and self (Nicolson, 2001; Nolan, 2007; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000; Williamson). Mothers are not allowed time to grieve these losses nor are they recognised. Many women feel compelled to feign happy motherhood and try to live up to cultural ideals (Carolan, 2004b; Williamson). Because of the dominance of this ideal, new mothers are often constrained from expressing negative emotions and experiences (Maushart, 2006; Tardy, 2000) except in acceptable fora such as mothering groups in which supportive relationships are expected (Gilleatt, Ferroni, & Moore, 2000; Hendriks, 1998).

Some would argue that the primary motivation of the studies reviewed above was on spotlighting the negative and undesirable aspects of mothering to the exclusion of other aspects. Conducted during the financially buoyant 1980s and 1990s, many of them were certainly undertaken to balance essentialist and pronatalist writings of the 1960s and 1970s. As such, they may well have encouraged participants to only draw and speak on their adverse experiences, while constraining, or ignoring enjoyable or satisfying experiences. Moreover, the studies would have been influenced by the tensions of the era. While 1950s and 60s notions of the wholesomeness of full-time mothering still dominated, feminist admonitions that

women could, and should, combine paid work and mothering, and that full-time mothering resulted from patriarchal domination were also widely debated. Additionally, some of them were conducted when disciplines such as sociology, psychology and anthropology were being criticised for being based only on androcentric values and norms (Letherby, 2003; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilkinson, 2001). Hence these studies, although rigorously conducted, were focused on illuminating these tensions. Regardless, as the more recent research indicates, the difficulties of mothering, and assaults to the self, continue to exist. Moreover, the continued expectations of ‘good’ mothers to be child-centred and put their own needs aside, confronts and supports contemporary mothers’ assimilation of late 20th century and early 21st century notions of individualism and a balanced self.

Ideology of the Individual. DiQuinzio (1999) suggests that the argument for the innateness of mothering, and hence the oppression of mothers, has resulted from the ideology of individualism existent in the United States, and, I would suggest, in much of the Western world. For a complete explanation of this ideology interested readers are referred to her book, *The impossibility of motherhood: Feminism, individualism, and the problem of mothering*. In essence however, she posits that individualism endorses the Cartesian binary of mind and body, extending this to dichotomies such as natural versus social, the private and the public, and lastly, male and female. The public sphere is that in which social issues are decided through use of the mind, whereas natural, bodily needs are expressed in the private sphere. It follows that concepts such as freedom, autonomy, and choice are intrinsic to the mind/public arena. This division determines that issues related to the body, being natural, are inaccessible to human agency, and cannot, nor should not, be changed. Essential motherhood and individualism together allow for mothering to be seen as “inevitable, instinctual, and properly contained in ... the private sphere” (p.10), and is therefore eternally justifiable as such (Barthes, 1993). Given these binaries are gendered, with the mind, freedom, autonomy, choice, and the public being linked to ‘male’, while the body, natural, and the private are linked with ‘female’, this privileges the male over the female. Further, this suggests that mothers and agency (individualism) are separate poles; that mothers cannot be equal human subjects of agency and entitlement.

These concepts are echoed by several other authors (Le Blanc, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Oakley, 1992; Phoenix et al., 1991; Wearing, 1984; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Oakley refers to dichotomies in which women, intuition, private, family (home), nature, and body are grouped together as opposed to the respective men, intellect, public, work, culture, and mind. She proposes that these gender-based polarities support and ensure the continuation of patriarchal dominance. That this theory resonates for the British mothers in her study is clearly expressed by their retrospective comments about antenatal and childbirth experiences. Several of the women articulated feelings of dissatisfaction with the impersonal nature of medical care they received, talking about being 'processed' for antenatal check ups, being treated like 'nobodies', or 'cattle'. Additionally, they talked about the lack of understanding by medical personnel (mostly male doctors) of personal lives, their individual needs and concerns, and the impact these had on their pregnancy. The lack of interest in the mother's needs carried over into the birth experiences in which mothers' knowledges, apprehensions and, sometimes remonstrances, about the health of themselves or their children were ignored or dismissed as hysteria or pure bloody-mindedness. As one mature Australian mother (previously a PhD student) put it, "I am so sick of the medical profession treating me as though I am an hysterical, ignorant mother. I know there is something wrong with my baby but they will not take me seriously. Why do they have to treat me as though I no longer have a brain in my head?" (Le Blanc, 2002, p. 55).

The distinction is also seen in how contemporary society views paid employment and unpaid house and caring work as separate and independent activities. Women's biological capacity to mother has been used to relegate them to a sphere supposedly outside of society and reason (McMahon, 1995). In her study of experiences of pre-school motherhood, middle- and working-class Canadian mothers expressed the conflicts and difficulties of combining or integrating their private mothering selves with working lives and public expectations. Many of the mothers understood that private and public lives did not mix, with the middle-class mothers saying they had delayed motherhood so as to solidify educational and career aspirations. They perceived that it would have been difficult to adequately pursue these interests while mothering. However, all of McMahon's mothers were employed full-time, and so these views do not incorporate the views of part-time or casually employed mothers nor at-home mothers. However, the unacceptability of

allowing one's mother role to impinge upon one's career role was evidenced by an Australian mother and doctor from Le Blanc's study (1999) who said, ". . . if they must have babies they should never let it affect their career (or inconvenience their male colleagues), and it is oh, so unprofessional to discuss anything to do with babies during coffee-break at work . . . you're supposed to talk about cars, cricket and how to make lots of money" (p. 310). As another mother succinctly put it, "We expect our women to have babies yet we do not allow our women to participate in mainstream activities" (LeBlanc, p. 70).

Moreover, women with workplace ambitions have been seen as unwomanly, unnatural and often anti-feminist especially if they have adopted androcentric ways (Cannold, 2005). Lupton and Schmied's research (2002) showed that for their first-time Australian mothers, ambivalence and guilt accompanied strong identification with an independent mother image, indicating the strength of 'good' mother and intensive mothering discourses. However, these mothers also saw a return to paid work as self-actualising, and that stay-at-home mothering was of limited selfhood. They suggest that the good mother equalling the stay-at-home mother idea has begun to weaken. Notwithstanding this, these mothers justified their return to work as an antidote to being an unhappy, frustrated at-home mother who would be detrimental to the child, suggesting that it is still difficult to legitimise return to paid work for individual needs alone.

Paradoxically, modern Australian girls and childless women are provided the same educational and career opportunities as their male counterparts (Craig, 2006; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005) suggesting to them that they are of equal worth in the public world. Additionally, feminism and individualism have also encouraged women to believe that their uniqueness, and personal needs and wants are equally important to those of men's and children's, and thus should be fostered. Certainly, many modern mothers try to maintain their pre-baby careers and interests, not least because for them paid work is important in terms of self identity and feelings of worth (Lupton & Schmied, 2002). However, once women become mothers it appears that heterosexual family groupings revert to a traditional breadwinner model and women must continue to be largely responsible for housework and child rearing work (Cornell University, 2005; Horin, 2005; Le Blanc, 2002; Lunn, 2008; McDonald, 2000; Miller, 2000a; Moriarty, 2000). Efforts to combine mothering and

paid work commitments resulted in images of mothers as super mums who manage both family and individual needs (ABC, 2003; Haran, 2003; Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Lunn, 2008; Maushart, 2006). The phenomenon of the second shift that this super mum expectation has created has resulted in many mothers feeling exhaustion, resentment, and guilt that they are unable to fulfil the strictures of the natural, nurturing, relaxed mother as well as the reasoning, competent, ambitious, tough professional (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Gilchrist, 2007; Hays, 1996; Masters, 2004; Nolan, 2007; Phillips, 2007; Sexton & Fleming, 2007).

DiQuinzio (1999) further states that the dualist notions imply that women who act with agency and entitlement by making choices about reproduction and childrearing, and who are not, or do not wish to be, mothers, are inadequate, selfish bad, and deviant. These images are often presented in the popularist press (Arndt, 2007; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Zubrzycki, 2001). Individualism thereby oppresses women on two fronts. It ensures that mothers are excluded from the exercise of independent self-determination by virtue of their proper function (i.e. mothering), and casts doubt on those women who exercise autonomy by questioning their womanliness (Cannold, 2005; Donald, 2007; Wolf, 2001).

Although they do not correspond to joyous and self-fulfilling motherhood, the sometimes negative experiences of mothering are legitimate and genuine. Many suggest that these voices of motherhood are silenced and hidden but should not be (Brown et al., 1994; Bryce, 2007; Carolan, 2004b; Maushart, 2006; Nicolson, 1999; Placksin, 2000). More recently, however, scholars have been debating the dualist attitudes informing much of the research of the previous century. As yet however, there has been little research in which all the aspects of the mothering individual, not just paid work and family, are considered significant and pertinent. Moreover, although studies suggest mothers' voices continue to be silenced, many of these look only at specific instances (e.g. during birth or medical contexts), focus only on negative aspects, and often do not fully explore the complexity of the silencing phenomenon (Brown et al., 1994; Byrne, 2002; Carolan, 2004b; Hendriks, 1998; Miller, 2000b; Noble, 1999; Tardy, 2000; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000). Thus, some researchers suggest that rather than continuing to highlight the adverse aspects of motherhood, we should look to positive and transformative aspects and thus find ways of revaluing motherhood.

Valuing motherhood

It is feelings such as those above that have encouraged radical feminists to valorise women's difference and feminine qualities as an antidote to the andocentric values they believe currently dominate Western society. This concept was initiated by the suffragettes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who used it to support their demands for social reform, invoking womanly virtues as the answer to lowered moral standards (McMahon, 1995). Some maternal scholars have since reinstated this idea, suggesting that women and their work should be validated rather than engaging in discourses about motherhood being oppressive, difficult, and unsupported which only legitimise patriarchal culture and ways of being. A few commentaries suggest that the difficulties of motherhood are myths promoted by feminists out of their own self-interested agendas (Duffy, 2002), while some popular works, although endorsing many of the current inequities and problems with regard to mothering work, question the rationalisation and results of formal childcare (Arndt, 2007; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Manne, 2005). Maternalists feel that women's strength comes from the attributes ascribed to mothering - caring, nurturing, compassionate, empathetic, intuitive, sensitive, and collaborative – and that focussing on these will transform our material world into a less individualistic, more community-directed place where commonalities and concord amongst diversity and difference can be located (Jordan, 2000; Manne; McMahon; Miller, 2007; O'Mara, 1999; Rich, 1995; Ruddick, 1980, 1984). These thoughts are clearly expressed by one mother who said, “Why do women want to go back to work? Someone has to do the nurturing. I find it a fault in womanhood that everyone wants to get away from motherhood so much, because it is natural for us to do it. I feel there is a lack of responsibility in trying to get away from it” (Le Blanc, 1999, p. 121).

Snitow (1992) suggests that much feminist revalorisation of maternity has fallen into the trap of pro-natalism, which is now echoed by many professional and social commentaries (ABC, 2003; Albrechtson, 2003; Biddulph, 1998; Collings, 2005; Donald, 2007). There are many mothering, parenting, and church organisations which opine the decline of the family and champion a return to old-fashioned values of marriage, sexual fidelity, women's innate tendency to nurture,

and a mother's selflessness where the needs of the child are paramount (Hafen, 2000; Kersten, 2001; Zubrzycki, 2001).

DiQuinzio (1999) has suggested that at the same time that motherhood crystallises many feminist concepts such as sex and sexuality, equality, freedom, and oppression, it also challenges and presses for these concepts to be reworked. Some maternal scholars have done just that. They propose that the complexity of thought and effort required of mothers with regard to the holistic growth of a child requires recognition and reward (Porter, 2008; Ruddick, 1990). Mothering work is mostly unacknowledged, undervalued and underestimated because in terms of androcentric principles it has no value as an economic activity, but most mothers, and many scholars agree that mothering is work which should be included (Grace, 2002). Mothers not only engage in preservatory actions that attend to the health and safety of the child, they must look to intellectual and moral development, as well as ensuring they are a socially acceptable individual (Ruddick, 1990). Moreover, mothers are asked to operate within a multitude of public and private contexts, which are often contradictory. The notion that mothering is something done while flipping through a magazine over coffee is as far from the truth as one can get. From her research which looked at the transformative power of the mother-child relationship in the 1950s, and in recognition of Ruddick's theories, Porter has coined the term motherwork in an effort to acknowledge and legitimise the fact that mothering is hard work that requires those engaged in it to utilise specific skills. Furthermore, in line with Ruddick's belief that the work of raising children is something that can be done by men and women alike, motherwork refers to a skill set not gender. The recent government interest in family issues attests that mothering as work is becoming a more mainstream belief, although some suggest that social policy still does not recognise that motherwork constitutes economic activity (Grace et al., 2005; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005).

Notwithstanding this, many mothers and scholars agree that motherhood holds much joy for women, and that it can be a spiritual and transformative experience (Crittenden, 2001; Dowrick, 1991; Hays, 1996; Howard, 2003; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Maushart, 2006; McMahon, 1995; Porter, 2008; Ruddick, 1990; Thomas, 2001). The joy and wonder that many mothers (and fathers) experience at the birth and during the development of their child(ren) can result in an

opening up of the self to the spiritual side of humanity as well as a an overwhelming and all encompassing love for someone besides the self (Le Blanc, 1999). Moreover, much motherwork requires women to constantly assess, confront, reflect upon personal and societal mores or values (McMahon, 1995; Porter, 2006; Ruddick, 1990). These endeavours may cause mothers to alter their life view and goals, and hence change their view of their self and relationships.

Research into the value, and transformative nature, of motherhood has only been undertaken by a few, perhaps because it is easy to slide into essentialism. Furthermore, most of the work either theorises transformative mothering based on anecdotal and personal accounts, or offers retrospective narratives obtained some years after initial mothering (Porter, 2006; Ruddick, 1990; Thomas, 2001). Although some formal research has been undertaken on the conflict between transformative and adverse mothering experiences (Le Blanc, 2002; McMahon, 1995), very few have used narrative methods to examine contradictory experiences with first-time mothers through their transitions. Miller's (2000) more recent English longitudinal work gives a detailed exposition of the narrative construction of her participants' journeys to new motherhood. While it considers culturally defined master narratives, it does not interrogate transformative aspects of mothering. Therefore, it is considered imperative that this significant aspect of motherhood be further recognised, discussed and studied.

As stated earlier, much of the extant literature is English or North American, although this is changing. Recent research by Grace (2002) about the exploitation and value of the labour of young mothers and Australia's social policies; Hammarberg's (2006) examination of the experiences of early mothering after assisted conception; LeBlanc's (2002) research of mothers' experience of conflict at intrapersonal, interpersonal and intrasocial levels; Porter's (2006) study of the transformative power of the mother-child relationship in the 1950s; and Williamson's (2005) research into the experiences of postnatal depression have attempted to redeem the paucity of recent Australian research into contemporary mothering. However, these works either have very specific foci or utilise retrospective accounts of mothering experiences. It is difficult to source current research in which Australian mothers' voices *during* their transition to first-time

motherhood are recorded and unequivocally given pride of place, and which encompass the full multiplicity of their experiences. Therefore, extending on these specifically focused works, it is considered timely to conduct a longitudinal study using narrative techniques that allow modern Australian women to describe their journeys to motherhood in their own words and thus examine this significant life-transition. What are their expectations and actual experiences? How do modern mothers incorporate the diverse beliefs and models of motherhood that are available to them when they become mothers? How does this impact on their health and well-being? Answering these questions will contribute to the current knowledge and debate about mothering and support health and other practitioners to appreciate and support mothering journeys regardless of their choices.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that modern mothers are caught between multiple models of mothering, with idealisation of it at one end of the continuum and oppression at the other. On the one hand women receive messages that mothering is a natural, innate, desirous, self-fulfilling experience, which should be valued and honoured. Conversely, messages exist that motherhood often causes unhappiness, depression, subjugation, losses and denial of individual selves. The advent to motherhood has been spoken of as a time of extreme disruption and challenge to self-identity (Bailey, 1999; Blumenthal, 1999; Lupton, 2000; Miller, 2000a; Speier, 2004). Moreover, as highlighted by the media, how modern Australian women mother is of great interest to many Australians (AAP, 2007b; ABC, 2003; Arndt, 2007; Haran, 2003; Jackman & Clark, 2003). Given recent Australian debate about reduced fertility, an ageing population, paid maternity leave provisions, and work-family balance (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2002a, 2007), it is considered timely to contribute to the current knowledge and debate about mothering and thus support health and other practitioners, as well as policy makers.

The next chapter explores the philosophical, theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study. As becoming a mother entails negotiating a period of major disruption, this feminist, poststructural and narrative research acknowledges the fluidity and multiplicity of women's lives and that the 'truth' of those lives is best expressed by women in their own words.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY: HEARING AND REPORTING WOMEN'S WORDS

. . . they didn't really listen, I felt. I wasn't listened to.

Alison, PN⁶ interview

Introduction

Feminist philosophy underpins this dissertation. Grounded within a poststructural framework, this feminist philosophy acknowledges the fluidity and multiplicity of women's lives, and rejects simple binary explanations such as absolute assumptions that patriarchal societies influence women in the same ways. Instead, my feminist philosophy recognises the manifold realities within a woman's life as well as across women's lives, and acknowledges the influences of factors such as race, class, and sexuality. The narrative methodology and method adopted within this study supports the notion of multiplicity, and acknowledges that the 'truth' of women's lives is best expressed by women in their own words. At the same time, the narrative methodology resonates with feminist research epistemology which acknowledges the influence of the researcher in the construction of truth. Furthermore, this paradigm provides scope for challenging social, political, and personal boundaries where the possibility of effecting change exists. Therefore, a feminist, poststructural, narrative approach is appropriate for this study because women becoming mothers negotiate a period of major change in which significant personal and environmental contexts are disrupted. This paradigm allows women space to voice and reflect upon their stories, and their potential complexities.

It is not my aim in this chapter to provide a complete history of feminism and poststructural thought because others have already cogently done so (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Glass, 2000; Harding, 1991; Lather, 1991; Letherby, 2003; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Rather, because I see them underpinning this dissertation, I intend to present an outline of feminist history and feminist research principles as *I* understand them, and which will necessarily be incomplete and even ambiguous in places. This reflects the complexity and, at times, contradictions within feminist methodological discussions. Additionally, some of the implications and problems associated with the

⁶ Postnatal

implementation of feminist principles will be examined, given that feminist research is viewed as theory and practice intertwined (i.e. praxis). Furthermore, because feminist poststructuralism is considered a particular brand of feminism (Roberts & Taylor, 2002), poststructuralism will be discussed only to the extent that it extends the feminist research methodology explained here. Indeed, the overlap of many of the basic principles makes it difficult to determine which came first. I believe, with others (see Flax, Butler, Hekman, Waugh as cited in Letherby, 2003), that feminism has been/is inherently postmodern with its focus on individualised experience and multiple truths. It is possible that these ideas informed postmodernism and poststructuralism, while the conceptual language of philosophers regarding epistemology provided names for feminist ideas (Stanley & Wise, 1990) thus enabling different feminist disciplines to share knowledge. As Sandra Harding suggests, feminism has been “both a product and a cause of the changes” (1987a, p. 187). Consequently, this chapter provides an outline of feminist history and research principles, along with some of the implications associated with their implementation, and then explicates their relevance and value to this study on new motherhood.

Mystory and theory of feminist poststructural research

Feminism is one of the most significant social and political resistance movements of the twentieth century. As well as practical, women’s resistance has been political, social, intellectual, and academic (Letherby, 2003). Arising in the 1800s, the first wave was concerned with the social inequality of women within the family and other institutions that restricted women’s potentials (Glass, 2000). The early suffragettes endeavoured to obtain women’s enfranchisement and right to vote. Social and political activism such as the anti-Vietnam war and black rights campaigns of the late 1960s and 1970s promoted a second revolutionary wave of feminist thought and action. It was at this time that ‘the personal is political’ was demonstrated. Many important feminist works were written and published at this time, such as, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1965), *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir, 1993, 1949), *The Female Eunuch* (Greer, 1970), and *Sexual Politics* (Millett, 1977). Concerned with enlightenment about women’s inferior position (i.e. consciousness-raising) and sexual liberation, this activism focused on topics such as work choices, equal pay, education, abortion, rape, domestic violence, and women’s role in the home. These were especially relevant to mothers, who, by virtue of

essentialist notions of biological destiny, had been relegated quite thoroughly to a private and mostly undervalued world of the home and child care. Multiple theories and stances on the causes of women's oppression resulted, with several core categories of feminism evolving. Liberal feminists sought equality with men within existing social structures such as work and education, while radical feminists totally rejected the dominant androcentric system wishing to establish a woman-defined social structure and culture. Marxist/socialist feminism said that capitalism and women's family roles were responsible for their oppression and lack of access to resources. Lesbian feminists agreed with both radical and Marxist feminism, but were focused on their sexual orientation within those contexts (Glass, 2000; Letherby, 2003). Despite motherhood being a primary birth site for much feminist activism, however, mothering and motherhood issues were often ignored (albeit unconsciously) within the debates as being too difficult to reconcile with much of the emerging feminist thought and goals of that period (DiQuinzio, 1999).

During this period, feminist concerns and practical activism led to academic concern with epistemology and how the production of knowledge had been dominated by men (Letherby, 2003). Feminists were keen to regain some of the power over the process and results of research, as well as using research to empower participants. Consequently, feminist research developed as a critique of, and antidote to, existing androcentric methodologies. Defined as research that focused on women, by women, for women (Stanley & Wise, 1990), it was, and still is, committed to changing women's lives for the better.

Initially, feminist scholars challenged the way in which scientific research was undertaken. They argued that traditional science, due to its exclusion of female participants and perspectives, was not only biased, but bad science. These scholars emphasised the need to include female viewpoints through clear representations of who was being researched, as well as regard for assumptions, design, methods, analysis, and interpretation. They criticised the fact that much of science and scientific knowledge had been predicated and normed on only 50% of the population's understanding of the world. However, the notion of an objective, neutral researcher searching for a universal truth existing independently of the knower was not questioned (Letherby, 2003).

Other feminist scholars critiqued the existing research regime further. Agreeing that traditional masculine based science was bad science, feminist standpoint epistemological scholars further contended that the personal is political. They argued that experience should prompt research and wished for a connected and holistic attitude to knowledge production rather than an analytical approach (Millen, 1997). Strong objectivity was seen as possible only through proper scrutiny of all aspects of the research process (Harding, 1987b, 1991) and which involves, not only reflecting on the external processes, but a reflexive knowledge of the self and one's effect on the research endeavour. Therefore, the *process* of knowledge production, and its significance in terms of the *product*, became increasingly more central to feminist research (Stanley, 1990). Moreover, women's difference, in terms of women's disadvantages and inequalities as compared to men's, was also important for proper scrutiny. Issues of who holds the power in research situations became paramount. Some believed that only oppressed groups, by virtue of their struggles, could have accurate knowledge as they were able to view both their own and the dominant experience (Harding, 1991). Thus, for many, feminist research became, and remains, not just a way of seeing and knowing, but an ontological event or a way of being in the world (Stanley, 1990).

At a time when feminists were starting to question whose truth was being represented, other philosophers were also challenging unitary concepts of knowledge. Postmodern theorists believe that there is no single, objective reality, or truth, since individuals experience the world uniquely and that 'truths' often rest on historical and cultural constructs (Barthes, 1993; Humphries, 1997). Drawing on some of these ideas, the third wave or contemporary feminist thinking that emerged in the 1980s and the 1990s questioned the grand theory or meta-narrative of feminism which generalised women's experience and the essentialist categories of 'man' and 'woman', disputing, for example, that all women are equally oppressed. Emerging thinkers pointed out that second wave feminism had largely been a western, white, middle-class, heterosexual movement which, despite its good intentions, had not considered any disparity in experience that may be caused by class, ethnicity, sexual identity, and so on (Harding, 1987b; Letherby, 2003). Consequently, the third wave feminists, although still concerned with patriarchy and its effects on women, realised that 'women' were not an homogenous group, and that difference between women could be greater than that between the genders and that

those diverse experiences needed clearer expression. For example, Moslem women may have more in common with Moslem men in the struggle against racism than with white Australian women. As well, researchers particularly need to consider the interactions between class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Humphries, 1997; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Concerns about 'whose knowledge' are pertinent for maternal researchers. Historically, and recently, mothers' narratives and ways of knowing have been excluded as legitimate knowledge. Some have argued this has rendered mothers powerless within the public sphere. However, others say this notion is misplaced, and that mothers can, and do, become empowered by the birth and nurture of their child.

These ideas gave rise to two more feminisms; postmodern and poststructural feminism. It is hard to differentiate between these two as the distinctions seem to be artificial rather than substantial, and the terms postmodern and poststructural are often used interchangeably (Glass, 2000; Letherby, 2003; Roberts & Taylor, 2002; Rogers-Clark, 2002). My understanding is that postmodernism is a cultural movement while poststructuralism is the academic expression of that (C. Rogers-Clark, personal communication, October 31, 2007). The underlying premise for both is one of deconstruction: Women's experiences can only be understood by considering both the unique individual and the context of each experience. Concerned mainly with how language and discourse create reality, poststructuralism considers the world a series of stories and texts, which maintain or challenge power relations and oppressive situations and institutions (Hawkesworth, 1989 as cited in (Olesen, 2000). By turning to language, and a deconstruction of categories such as 'woman', we are able to examine women's participation in the numerous discourses of daily life (Roberts & Taylor, 2002; Rogers-Clark, 2002). Moreover, as individuals are socially located, by investigating their accounts we can discover, and challenge, materiality of everyday lives as well as the social contexts and structures they operate within (Stanley & Wise, 1990). Matters of multiple truths and diversity, as well the way language constructs particular categories, are especially relevant for mothers, all of whom have unique stories that may or may not correspond to dominant constructions of mother and motherhood.

Of course this view of knowledge and research has led critics of postmodernism to suggest that relativist subjectivity leads nowhere, as no one truth

takes precedence. Additionally, these ideas have caused tension within feminism itself, the detail of which can be read elsewhere (Glass, 2000; Harding, 1986; Letherby, 2003). Briefly, feminists have been concerned that if all meanings and theories are equally valid or invalid, and that ‘woman’ is a social construct, how can feminists maintain a theory of subordination and feminine unity (Glass; Letherby, 2003; Harding, 1987b; 1991) suggests that this is a positive advance as it prevents one feminism setting itself up as *the* feminism. Along with Letherby (2003) I view these critiques as strengths, and an indication of richness, because they stop us (researchers and audiences) holding on to “any definite ideas about women” (p. 53). Moreover, the embrace of diversity does not mean that we cannot also look for commonalities between and within groups. For example, although poor, Asian, lesbian, disabled or white women may experience motherhood in materially different ways, it is possible (without falling into essentialism) that they may all experience similar moments of absorbing care and love for their child(ren) (Miller, 2007). Like bell hooks (1983 as cited in Harding 1987b; and 1984 as cited in Letherby 2003) I feel the focus on shared experiences should make way for solidarity. This allows unique women and mothers to unite without any insistence on identical situationality. Thus, many truths can exist harmoniously, without the need for an umbrella of one universal truth or experience of womanhood, or motherhood.

Postmodern feminist thought does not supplant earlier categories of feminists. Rather, it has altered and extended prior feminist thinking. The new directions emphasise the diverse ideologies and show the breadth and depth of feminist thought as well as underscoring the fact that one size does not necessarily fit all. Some suggest that it is more appropriate to speak in terms of *feminisms* rather than feminism (Glass, 2000; Harding, 1987a; Rogers-Clark, 2002). Despite this, feminist researchers ascribe to some common methodological research principles.

Three principles of feminist poststructural research

Although multiplicity of ideologies has transmuted into an appreciation that there is no distinctly feminist methodology or method (Stanley, 1990), there are three universal methodological underpinnings of postmodern feminist scholarship (Glass, 2000; Harding, 1987b). Foremost is the importance of women: valuing them by placing them, and their perspectives, at the heart of any research project. Because women and their voice(s) have been suppressed and oppressed by traditional

research, feminist poststructural research considers participants' words as the best way of examining women's conditions, and the structural or cultural contexts that empower or constrain them. Secondly, feminist studies should explicitly detail the research processes and locate the researcher within the project. Thirdly, research is done with the ultimate goal of bringing about social change, along with empowering and transforming the participants and researcher(s). These are extremely pertinent to maternal research, as, until the 1980s, motherhood was little researched, and mothers' voices have been ignored or side-lined, leading to only modest social change.

These three principles of feminist research are laudable. However, as with much feminist theory, they are complex and multifaceted, with links between them that are far from linear. Additionally, more recent feminist researchers have encountered implementation difficulties, and suggest that rigorous adherence can be problematic, and counter to feminist precepts (Birch, Miller, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2002; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Letherby, 2003; Millen, 1997; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Nevertheless, although this section is unable to fully capture that complexity, the chief message must be that good feminist research is an intricate interaction between the research phenomenon, theory and the personal.

Valuing women - *With* women not *on* women

Not so long ago, a full-time mother said to me, "I don't offer my thoughts or opinions anymore because most people discount them, and me, because I don't have a full-time paid job, and also, I now doubt myself anyway," (A. Dighton, personal communication, early 2004)

Most modern researchers would agree that historically, academics or experts (mostly male) have held much of the power in research situations. Although usually hidden by notions of objectivity and the 'science' of the method and results, it is, more often than not, their voice that dominates the research. Because they frame the questions, collect, interpret, and disseminate the data (Olesen, 2000; Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001), researchers hold this power in a research relationship. Feminist researchers believe this is problematic because denying the voice of particular individuals or groups ensures that research and social science gain imperfect understandings and misrepresentations of how the world is, and also positions those voices as 'other' or outside the norm (Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001). Implicit in a

traditional paradigm is an attitude that suggests only certain voices are ‘right’ and only certain voices have anything of value to offer research and the community’s knowledge base. Hence, mothers and motherhood have only been considered suitable research subjects since the 1980s, and even then, most of the voices studied have been western, white, and middle-class. However, even today, these are often the easiest voices to access.

Feminists have long been emphatic about not following those research paradigms in which depersonalised ‘subjects’ are those to whom research is done by experts who take away and use information gained for academic purposes. Socio-economic membership, skin-colour, gender, health, bodiedness, and sexuality can all play a part in power differentials which render the researcher as all-knowing and all-powerful. Additionally, the researcher’s position as ‘the expert’ is further enhanced by education, status, university affiliation, and research experience. As women’s knowledge has been excluded from world knowledge for so long, feminist researchers desire to redress the imbalance. Therefore, feminist research hopes that by fostering relationships of respect, trust, and honesty, some of the structural differences between researcher and participant can be breached or mitigated (Oakley, 1992). By doing this it is hoped that women are able to move past socially desirable responses and share stories, in their own voice(s), thereby providing richer and more truthful data. In this way, women’s knowledge and ways of being in the world are valued and validated.

Carol Gilligan (1982) first highlighted the importance of paying attention to voice when she argued that women’s and girls’ voices were missing from traditional psychological theories of moral development. Gilligan recognised also, as did Harding and many others, that each individual possesses a distinct, multilayered voice with the layers being dependent on relational contexts (Blumenthal, 1999; Harding, 1987b; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Riessman, 1993). By identifying and interpreting the voices, we are able to investigate not only the person and their experiences, but cultural and structural influences. Additionally, it was realised that not only should one attend to the many spoken voices(s), but also to the quieter, vulnerable ones, or those that had been silenced (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). This understanding encouraged feminist researchers to try to hear, and represent, *all* voices. The need to get past the ‘right’ story is something many maternal researchers

have documented, as mothers have historically been constrained by 'proper' mothering attitudes and narratives which have muted or silenced their voices (Brown et al., 1994; Carolan, 2004b; Downe, 2004; Johnston & Swanson, 2003).

Initially, feminist researchers felt that just their womanhood would automatically engender an intimate and reciprocal atmosphere in research encounters with women (Oakley, 1992). Instead of a researcher-subject relationship, some feminists advocated the fostering of a friendship-style relationship to enable women's real truth to emerge. It caused them to rethink their approach to data gathering so that instead of testing preconceived ideas, conversational interviews became the preferred model. Additionally, feminist researchers explored qualitative methods such as participant validation of narratives and the interpretation of data, and the presentation of findings in creative and experimental ways.

However, feminist challenges to the notion of universalised 'woman', recognition of the multiplicity of voices, the postmodern belief that it is impossible to find the one immutable truth 'out there', and greater understandings of the researcher-participant relationship made feminist researchers question these concepts (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Glass, 2000; Harding, 1991; Humphries & Truman, 1996; Letherby, 2003; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Miller, 2005; Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; H. Roberts, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Having the same gender as the participants does not necessarily assure access to women's lives and knowledges (Olesen, 2000). They questioned whether middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, female researchers could expect a complete baring of the soul just because they are fellow women. Would a poor, immigrant woman be inclined to disclose her real thoughts and feelings, especially if they challenged dominant narratives? More recently, it has been realised that participants are far more active in research than previously allowed for.

This has led to a questioning of the notion of an all-knowing and all-powerful researcher and participants as passive providers of information. Is research just done to them, or are they active and influential contributors to the research endeavour? For example, participant demographics may well determine how a sensitive researcher approaches an interaction; participants are able to choose what information and how they wish to disclose it; and they may well dispute the researcher's input or stance during interactions (Carolan, 2003; Letherby, 2003;

Ribbens, 1989). Moreover, in an age of talk shows and, more recently, reality TV, modern women are far more savvy about what truth they are prepared to reveal, and are also more able to view interviews as a performance of a particular self. Therefore, a research experience is not necessarily an exploitative event, nor is it inevitable that a researcher's analysis and interpretation will change the participant's own meaning of the experience (Millen, 1997).

Despite many feminist endeavours to reduce or eliminate inequality, Millen (1997) maintains that equality in research is really an illusory concept. For a start, the researcher is usually the instigator of any investigation and usually has the interest, resources, and skills to do so. Moreover, the researcher generally has a greater and broader knowledge of the issues. Is it rational to expect that a participant, who is not engaged in social research, will have full awareness and knowledge to explain their lives and the structures they live within? I would also suggest that it is somewhat arrogant to expect that participants will exhibit the same level of enthusiasm for our research as we do (Miller & Bell, 2002).

The paradigm of social research is a familiar one for western society. Expectations generally are that one completes a survey, or participates in an experiment or an interview for an allotted time, and then leaves it to the researcher. Even if one invites participants to comment on a constructed narrative, or the interpretations made, it is unusual for them to challenge it, apart from cosmetic changes such as the omission of swear words, or a desire for more grammatical language (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). It may be that the expected or possible level of involvement has not been made clear to them. I suspect also that many would be disinclined to participate if too much was expected of them. Although amenable and interested, they have their own demanding lives. Apart from grappling with sleep deprivation and the learning of novel skills, new mothers are likely to be particularly focused on their new baby. Additionally, they may feel they do not have the expertise to do so. Whether they do or not, and whether this should change, I believe are moot points. I imagine that most modern people *don't* want research to be done *with* them. Rather they want it to be done *on* and *for* them. This, I believe, is more a comment on western ways of being and thinking, than on individual researcher's methods. Thus, the participant is complicit in their powerlessness within the research process, but in so being they make researchers responsible for the ultimate

production of knowledge. Despite admirable feminist endeavours to date to faithfully (re)present voices and invite greater truths, the structures and cultures we investigate contribute to, and maintain, these unequal power relations. Mothers are especially susceptible to this mind-set. For example, the medicalisation of pregnancy and childbirth, and the plethora of parenting experts have resulted in mothers, and their knowledge, being treated with disdain (McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005). Finally, although participants and interviewer may equally construct an interview, and participants validate the data, it is the researcher who writes up and has final control of the text (Olesen, 2000). Appreciation of these issues has tempered my desires to 'empower' via this research process, but does not lessen my aspirations to work within feminist research principles. To mitigate these power issues I asked the participants to check the narratives I constructed to ensure they correctly represented who they were and what they had told me (see Analysis - a Quest for Understanding , p. 64).

Respect for voice(s) has led to the relevance, and significance, of story. Feminist poststructuralists are concerned with what language and narrative can tell us about women's existing social conditions, and the individual's acceptance of them with a view to improvement and empowerment. Additionally, feminist recognition of the diversity of women's lives and voices has meant an appreciation for the diversity of stories, and the many truths, which may abound (Olesen, 2000). However, psychological research has long been suspicious of how dependable stories, and the findings from them, can be (Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001). They ask how reliable memory is, and posit that people will construct a story to suit their own agenda and make themselves appear in a positive light (Lather, 1993; Letherby, 2003). Feminist poststructuralists agree this is often true, but point out that *any* story is a construction at a particular time and place, in a particular setting, for a particular reason and represents the truth of that moment (Frank, 2002; Miller, 2000a; Somers, 1994). Additionally, they recognise that women may speak with a multiplicity of voices in any one conversation (Carolan, 2004b; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Therefore, while recognising all stories have value, the researcher needs to consider not just the story, but as much of the context as is available to them (Harding, 1986). However, despite these understandings, researching stories remains problematic and modern researchers need to confront many issues. If we interview several women with different stories,

whose is the best or most truthful? Are all experiences equally valid? How do we decide? Some stories may appear more correct because we are able to identify with them, or they fit with our values and beliefs, or they support the focus of our research. Do we only pursue those voices in later interviews? These are the ‘good’ stories. The ones that say, for example, poverty, blackness, family violence, motherhood, are difficult and that things need to change. Should we, how do we, include the ‘bad’ stories; those that support dominant narratives which we are trying to challenge (Fine et al., 2000)? Moreover, it is always more tempting to report the exotic rather than the mundane. These draw us, and no doubt, are what readers prefer to read. However, exciting stories, although they may challenge or resist the way things are, may also contribute to (negative) constructions of otherness. In the case of new motherhood, it is common for multiple and often contradictory voices to recount experiences (Blumenthal, 1999; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Which one(s) should we pursue during an interview? How does one represent them all? Is one more dominant, and, if so, what makes it so? One commonly dominant maternal voice has been that of biological motherhood. Should this be considered a mere spouting of prevailing essentialist dogma, and, if so, how should it be dealt with? These are a few of the challenges that face feminist poststructuralist researchers while endeavouring to value and validate women’s and mothers’ diverse experiences. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretative processes I endeavoured to hear and represent *all* the stories and voices truthfully and respectfully, regardless of how legitimate or not I believed them to be. The methods undertaken to ensure this are outlined in the following chapter.

The above discussion highlights some of the ways existing research mores may constrain both participants and researchers and which may interfere with full appreciation of women’s stories. Although exhorted by feminist ideologies to present all voices (truths, stories) as faithfully and honestly as possible, researchers can also be caught by the somewhat hidden influence of prospective audiences and the purposes for which the research is to be, or may be, used. Moreover, all audiences may influence the voices that are heard as well as shape the way research is presented. For example, feminist audiences, despite ideals to the contrary, will not be favourable to findings that support essentialist notions of motherhood. However, if one is to respect the voices which support the status quo, however mistakenly, should they not receive equally, unadulterated treatment? Researchers, therefore, are

always researching and writing for their perceived audience(s) and will endeavour to present research in a way that is acceptable to the strongest claim on the research. As much scholarly writing is done for publication in scientific or academic contexts, there is a particular language that is customary. Although it has become tolerable to (re)present stories in ways other than with scientific language, such as performance or interspersions of raw text, reflection, and interpretation, for many disciplines, being taken seriously is generally gained through conventional writing which leaves little room for individuality. Therefore, writing simply, in the first person, using language that is understandable to most people, especially those one is writing about, may be viewed as untheoretical nor sufficiently academic (Standing, 1998). Moreover, most people, and especially academics, do not wish to look facile or foolish in the eyes of their colleagues, and so the desire to impress is always present. In addition to these concealed influences, there are always the pragmatic requirements of funding bodies and other stakeholders that determine the research paradigm. Researchers rarely operate in a vacuum, and despite laudable desires to (re)present women's experiences with a minimum of interference, they generally have to walk a tightrope to do so. Therefore, researchers and audiences alike should always bear in mind that any research is a co-construction of various overt and covert influences. In an effort to clearly identify what has shaped my research, I have provided as clear an exposition of the theoretical underpinnings and actual processes (see following Method chapter) as space permits.

Doing the Research - ethical concerns and positioning the researcher

Many feminist researchers believe that the process of knowledge production is an integral part of the end product, and that it is critical those processes are detailed with the same integrity as the method, findings and interpretation (Harding, 1987b; Letherby, 2003). Because feminist research often evolves during a project (similar to qualitative research), instead of choosing a methodological set of instructions, feminist researchers should approach research in the way one approaches the cooking of a particular dish. Consider which available recipes may suit the topic and participants, try one out and modify as needed using other ingredients, test the result, pass on successful and unsuccessful combinations of those ingredients and method(s) (Stanley, 1990). Therefore, write up of the results, aside from allowing replicability, should include, if possible, all the problems encountered,

leads taken or ignored, and decisions made. By providing a transparent account of the research journey, the knowledge provided is more complete, available and connected with context and relationships. Two integral aspects of the research process are the ethical dilemmas one may face and locating the researcher within the research.

Ethical concerns. A crucial part of the research journey is the ethical issues considered and encountered throughout a project (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002). I believe many of the basic tenets of feminist research are an expression of personal, moral, and ethical viewpoints. However, although ethical issues such as power, empowerment, and epistemology underlie feminist research concerns, responses, and techniques designed to mitigate these can cause their own ethical dilemmas (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002; Mauthner et al., 2002). The significance of the relationship between researcher and the researched provides fertile ground for ethical concerns to arise. Committed as they are to reducing power and fostering respect, trust, honesty, and participation during research, feminist researchers need to examine the ethical impact of rapport building, informed consent, and responsibility.

The feminist ideal of an equal researcher-participant relationship in which rapport leads to mutual disclosures is one site of issue. In an effort to enable a participant to talk at ease, researchers have been encouraged to reduce any social distance by being an empathetic interviewer (Oakley, 1981). They hope to get ‘good’ data by positioning oneself as a friendly acquaintance or friend, and persuading participants to disclose intimate and ‘genuine’ information or beliefs (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). However, fostering a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in an interview, so that boundaries are reduced, does raise some ethical problems. ‘Doing rapport’ has become just another tool in modern social researchers’ toolkits (Duncombe & Jessop). In so doing, it can be used with little introspection to obtain stories that participants may have preferred to not disclose. The power of data collection has shifted back to the researcher by using those methods which are meant to alleviate it. It has become a means to an end. As Duncombe and Jessop suggest, spontaneous, genuine rapport has become faked friendship.

Furthermore, researchers may feel they are abnegating their feminist research responsibilities by engaging in covert investigation or outright deception (exploitation?) in the guise of good research. This can be especially evident when

appearing empathetic to participants whom one dislikes, or when using conversation techniques of support (e.g. mmms, nods etc) for views one opposes. This may create internal dissonance for the researcher, and cause them unease, while wrongly implying that one agrees with the participant's view. Where is one's research integrity in terms of being present and overt about one's self? Moreover, it may be that development of good rapport and a 'friendship' cause a participant to reveal painful issues that are unable to be resolved within the research process or cause the participant later embarrassment. Furthermore, researchers may have difficulties exiting from the false friendship that has been developed, or feel that ongoing responsibilities exist to participants, and so the boundaries of the research relationship become blurred for all (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Letherby, 2003). Furthermore, real relationships and friendships may develop that lead to the researcher never really exiting that research domain (Powell, 1999). The ethical problems in terms of data, analysis, and relationships this may cause are rarely discussed. Of course this will not always be the case, as many modern participants are more sophisticated and wary (i.e. powerful), and will be able to resist invitations to disclose very intimate details and also understand the limitations of a research relationship. Moreover, the notion of whether good rapport really admits us to the participants' worlds remains questionable. Connecting with participants and putting them at ease, especially those who are nervous or dubious of the value of their experiences, is a valuable skill that needs to be used with discretion.

Rapport also has a part to play in participant's informed consent. Most social researchers are aware of, and comply with, issues such as obtaining informed consent, protecting participants from harm, not engaging in deception unless integral to research design, and ensuring privacy through confidentiality and/or anonymity. These are usually addressed at the beginning of a research project, and once approved by an ethics committee, the matter is more or less dealt with. However, some feel that consent should be renegotiated throughout the research process (Miller & Bell, 2002). Because of feminist research's often inductive, developing nature, it is naïve to expect that participants can be fully informed except in anything other than a general sense. For example, the focus of the research may shift, or terms negotiated at the beginning of a project may no longer be practical or relevant (Olesen, 2000). Furthermore, given the power that rapport-building may give a researcher, participants cannot be cognisant ahead of time of revelations they may

make, but with hindsight wish to erase. The researcher-participant power differential is complex: Participants may feel obligated to provide written consent because they expressed interest, they may continue when they do not wish to because they have 'signed up', and researchers may inadvertently coerce those who drop out through expressions of disappointment. Motherhood research is especially vulnerable to these issues. The demands of a new baby may be such that the participant feels they are unable to continue with post-birth interviews. Or they may do so because they are unwilling to admit they can't cope. Moreover, isolation or lack of recognition of their worth may foster a willingness and level of disclosure that would not ordinarily be offered.

These ethical dilemmas highlight the significance of the researcher in the research. They require researchers to be sensitive to the dynamics of research relationships, cognisant of the ethical dilemmas they may confront, and the evolving nature of their research which may require change and renegotiation of terms and consent. This necessitates one's return to the feminist tenets of honesty and transparency. Supportive colleagues, or superiors that one can use as counsellors or devil's advocates, are essential instruments in this process. In order to respect my participants and their wishes, I endeavoured to be sensitive to both spoken and unspoken wishes. The additional processes I undertook to ensure these standards were met are discussed in the following chapter. Moreover, a researcher needs to be self-aware and reflexive so as to be able to locate themselves within the research and deal sincerely with participants.

The researcher in the research – location and reflexivity. Crucial aspects of the best feminist research are the location of the researcher within the research framework and a reflexive knowledge of the self and one's effect on the research endeavour (Harding, 1987b). These characteristics are based on the premise that not one of us comes to any research as a blank slate. Personal biases, history, and culture - for example, a person's identity as a lesbian feminist, a home-based mother, a positivist researcher, or a disabled person - will all impact on research, even when it is informed by knowledge and experience (Carolan, 2003). These positions influence what research we choose, how we do it, who we do it with, how, and what we report and who we report it to. Therefore, they should be candidly acknowledged and revealed to the self, participants, and readers of the work (Fonow & Cook, 1991;

Glass, 2000; Harding, 1987b; Letherby, 2003; Miller, 2005; Stanley, 1990). As Liz Stanley said, “written accounts of feminist research should locate the feminist researcher firmly within the activities of her research as an essential feature of what is ‘feminist’ about it.” (1990, p. 12). The ideals of reflexivity and positioning also stress feminist researcher’s concern with knowledge(s). Whose knowledge does the research portray, where, how, for whom, by whom, from whom was it obtained (Olesen, 2000)? Furthermore, it underscores the feminist values of the importance of collaboration and of researcher-participant relationships. By honestly positioning the self, feminist researchers hope to equalise the power imbalance between researcher and participant.

Providing a brief introduction of the self at the outset of an interaction and participating in the interaction are common ways of doing this. However, these can be problematic. A specific example of this is the familiarity and comfort people have for the interview as a research tool (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Kvale, 1996). One implicit rule, no doubt drawn from the objective, scientific paradigm, is that the interviewee is central and that the interviewer’s personality, beliefs, and biases are irrelevant, or at least muted. Therefore, participants may not be willing to hear about the researcher apart from the most basic of details. Unless done well, an introduction may seem artificial and part of the formality like the signing of informed consent forms. Additionally, many questions exist. What information, and to what extent, does one disclose about the self? What language and terms does one use? Regardless of how careful one is, misunderstandings or alternate connotations may arise. For example, the negative connotations of ‘feminist’ within modern Australian psyches, and modern young women’s hostility in naming themselves thus, suggest that identification as a feminist may result in alienation, or wariness during research with younger women (Millen, 1997). Consequently, one may feel obliged to withhold, or underplay some personal details so as to not muddy the research interaction. Moreover, researcher participation, or interjection during an interview may be considered an imposition on another’s story (Ribbens, 1989). Another aspect of self-disclosure is locating oneself for readers of the final work. Although one does reveal some aspects of the self within strictly scientific write-ups, intentional disclosure may have varied results. It may produce negative reactions which then impact upon the readers’ ability to ‘hear’ the research, or may cast doubt on the scholarship of the writer and the results. However, I believe that straightforwardness

in terms of details of the self and the study are estimable. Identification as a novice mother and researcher, as well as an unresolved feminist, would provide participants more than one way of relating and enable readers to discover both the strengths and the flaws of the research.

Location of the self, however, is not just a simple introduction at the beginning, or 'being present' during the work. Fine et al. (2000) suggest it is an ongoing and active process and that researchers should continually ask themselves questions "as they move through the recursive 'stages' of social analysis" (p. 126). To locate the self, one needs to engage in reflexivity throughout all the stages of the project. Reflexivity is defined as the consciousness of the self in relation to the researched and the resultant work (Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001). Researchers should recognise the personal and professional issues they bring to each study. These issues may occur and reoccur at different times throughout the research. Interactions with participants, stakeholders, and funding bodies, data analyses, interpretation, consideration of the reviewers, publishers and readers, are all sites through which researchers may influence or be influenced. Many have spoken about the difficulties that their dual roles have caused them. Some speak of clashes between researcher and practice requirements, others of their need to disentangle student, mother, and academic identities (Carolan, 2003; Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Powell, 1999; Ribbens, 1989; Standing, 1998). Others speak of their need to separate personal responses from valid research conclusions about participants and the data (Letherby, 2003; Rogers-Clark, 2002). And of course there are many discussions about the impact a researcher will have on the data from interviews (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Ribbens, 1989; Rubin, 2005; Wilkinson, 1999). The prior discussions of the dilemmas of building rapport also require reflection and inclusion in research accounts. However, awareness of these strengthens the research. Detailing them in written accounts make the research more credible because the researcher's position(s) are obvious and accountable (Harding, 1987b; Olesen, 2000; Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001).

Reflexivity and positioning the self are important resources. However, they must also be tempered with caution so that participants' voices are not silenced by a descent into an overly absorbed self, or representations of the researcher (Fine et al.,

2000; Olesen, 2000). Moreover, reflexivity requires a level of introspection that can be uncomfortable, or confronting, and which may constrain the research process itself (see for examples Carolan, 2003; Letherby, 2003; Millen, 1997; Powell, 1999). Also, it is not possible to 'know' all one's biases and influences: Some will be deeply hidden to us (Mauthner et al., 2002; Olesen, 2000; Ribbens, 1989; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). A diary to record dilemmas of the research process and various personal responses can be invaluable as are colleagues, supportive supervisors and friends. Despite continuing dilemmas of the researcher in the research, acknowledging the self and one's effect on the research is a meritorious and, I believe, an integral component of feminist research.

I would, therefore, like to introduce myself and situate myself in two relevant ways: As a newish mother and as a fledgling researcher. Midway through interviewing, it became evident that topics raised by the participants were 'hotspots' for my own mothering. My supervisor and I, therefore decided, that it would be useful for her to interview me about my own mothering experience. Allowing me to recognise my thoughts and beliefs about motherhood meant that my biographical intrusion into the analysis was moderated. Additionally, close work with the texts made me think deeply about research processes. Some practical results of this are detailed under A Continuation of the Me in this Research - Reflexivity, p. 72. The following, therefore, outlines beliefs from my own interview, my intellectual thoughts on mothering, and my developing thoughts on scholarly research.

Myself as a new mother. I am the second, and last, child of a white, middle-class, nuclear family. My German-born, self-employed father respected independent and competent women, but still expected my mother to shoulder all the domestic chores. This, my Australian-born mother did, but was additionally engaged in community organisations and semi-skilled paid work. Both my parents valued honesty and integrity rather than position or wealth, and were respected for their egalitarian attitudes. The isolation, multicultural makeup, and frontier-like atmosphere of 1970s Darwin, reinforced these values. My brother and I received good private secondary and tertiary educations, when tertiary study was still fee-free.

My decision at age 36 to have a child was due to a confluence of circumstances. My undistinguished banking career had stagnated and later ended, and tertiary study in my mid-thirties suggested a change. My biological clock was

ticking, but I had never really had a picture of myself as a mother. However, external pressures were strong. As one of six siblings, Lindsay wanted his own children. The deaths of my parents by the time I was 36 meant that life priorities had become extremely relevant. My brother wasn't partnered, so I was the only one left to reproduce and carry on our family name. Maybe I would regret not having a child? Also, I was living in a rural community where family was important and the joyfulness surrounding births was compelling. Thus I debated, should or shouldn't I?

Moreover, the model of mothering I was working from was that of my mother's. Having inherited her cooking skills and empathy for others, and enjoying sewing and gardening, I could see how well my talents were suited to the mother role. Yet my love of self-time, lack of patience, need for control, and frustration with my own and other's failings did not seem to mesh with the requirements of good mothering. Furthermore, as an adolescent and young adult during the 80s and 90s I had read feminist literature and been inspired by women achieving on the world stage. I did not see how it was possible to combine the tasks of mothering and a powerful, professional career.

Conception occurred easily and quickly. My pregnancy was without incident and my son's birth was reasonably 'normal'. Like so many, the early months post-birth passed in a haze of exhaustion from disrupted sleep and concern about weight gain. My husband went back to work, leaving me the major task of rearing a baby I had no idea about. I had to rely on friends and midwives for help and advice which made me feel inadequate and incompetent. Additionally, Ethan was a 'high maintenance' baby who would cry if left and needed to be on me constantly. When mixing with other new mothers, I was the only one who spoke of struggles and unhappiness. I felt out of step with their happiness and child-centred mothering values. I could 'do' nappies and feeding, but I found it difficult to really engage with him. At times, I wished I'd not had him. Conversely, I was overwhelmed and astounded by his beauty. I loved touching his beautiful skin. I struggled because I didn't want to spoil his innocence and beauty. Consequently, I often felt I shouldn't have had him because I wasn't a good enough mother. I may well have been suffering from low level postnatal depression. Or, as I now feel, and as Melanie Mauthner (1995) posits, I may only have been experiencing a very normal, but

unspoken, negative side of motherhood. Looking back I realise that being with a baby was a skill that I needed to learn. I did not know how, or could not allow myself, to stop and enjoy him nor motherhood.

When Ethan was 18 months old I decided to do a PhD. I, somewhat naively I now realise, felt it would solve the problem of combining work and mothering. As a stipend recipient I would have money coming in, and it would be a job which allowed me flexibility with mothering while furthering my career. Moreover, still breastfeeding, and finding mothering a difficult and unfulfilling job, I felt I needed more. But, adding paid work meant I was juggling an extra ball. I found it a daily struggle balancing all our needs. I constantly had to drop things because I had to collect him, or get dinner, or organise our life in some way. Often I just didn't want to do it. I felt I was failing myself, my feminist ideals, my son, my husband, and colleagues daily in many infinitesimal ways. But, I had not voiced these ambivalent feelings and nor could I, as the issues and their intensity were not clear to me.

I was hesitant about researching motherhood because I felt there were more significant women's issues to research. I saw my struggles as a personal failing rather than based in structural inequities. However, reading maternal literature reawakened my feminist consciousness because here were women talking about the things I had been feeling and who believed it was an area worth studying and being active upon. Nonetheless, although I identified with the literature, it was not until I started my interviewing that the very personal intruded. Listening to participants talk about their mothers forced me to grapple with the fact that my mother wasn't here to see Ethan, nor was she here to support me. When some of the women spoke negatively about their mothers, or about their mothers' help, I felt angry and bereft. This and other challenges caused me much angst as I reflected on my own and Australia's history of mothering. These issues are discussed under A Continuation of the Me in this Research - Reflexivity, p. 72. Thankfully, my self-awareness and discussions with my supervisor helped me to see them for what they were. In many ways, I can see this research has been pivotal for my own mothering and perhaps the topic found me.

Although at the time of writing life has become easier on the mothering front due to the virtue of time, I feel that mothering and mothers are, and have always been, materially overlooked and their varied needs underrepresented, despite rhetoric

to the contrary. I have a predominantly negative view of mothering – mostly drudgery, inequality, and self-reproach interspersed with occasional episodes of delight and joy about which there is little real societal value or recognition. Nonetheless, my learning has been exponential during this study. Not only have I matured as a mother, but my progress as a researcher has been one of excitement, angst and growing confidence.

My methodological journey and myself as researcher. My research career began when I started my undergraduate psychology degree. However, it occurs to me I have always been a natural investigator, liking to understand how and why things and people work. During my degree, I came to understand that ‘real’ research was objective, replicable, and valid, and that the true scientist and researcher should be neutral so as to correctly discover the scientific ‘facts’ of a social phenomenon. Taught only quantitative research methods and very little methodology, I felt that there was something missing. What this was became clearer to me when we were shown how to ‘clean’ data, which often meant deleting the ‘outliers’ and replacing missing data with averages. This offended me for two reasons. Firstly, I felt that at this point the decisions of the researcher were influencing the data, despite having reasonable scientific grounds for doing so. Additionally, having some affinity for those who take the road less travelled, I questioned why the outliers, whose responses were as real as the norms, were being sidelined for the sake of science. This issue remained unresolved throughout my honours years, with me becoming increasingly cynical that more experienced and wiser researchers than me, often (it seemed) worked around the prescribed rules. I became more certain that numbers were not necessarily devoid of subjectivity.

Subsequent work as a research assistant exposed me to qualitative research methods which appealed to me precisely because they seemed to be everything that quantitative research was not. Because these methods consider the individual and also acknowledge the biases, history, and culture of the researcher, I was determined that my PhD project would utilise qualitative research methods.

Early into this project, I gradually realised (to my supervisor’s profound relief!) that I had conflated the terms method and methodology. Once this penny had dropped, I read about methodology and epistemology with greater understanding and growing satisfaction. Given my natural philosophical tendencies, it became evident

that this was what had previously been missing. For me, as for Letherby (2003), the relationship between the process and the product is “vital and exciting” (p. 3). Additionally, the impossibility of total separation between research and researcher was also acknowledged. During this time, and also to my chagrin, it became clear to me that not only had I been equating qualitative methods with feminist methodology, but that these were evaluated as ‘good’ whilst quantitative methods and ‘masculine’ methodology were seen by me as ‘bad’.

Once these tangles were unravelled, it was obvious that feminist methodology was the approach of choice for me. Strongly believing the personal is the political, I was keen to engage in feminist action research. However, my inherent love of texts, stories, and peoples’ lives led my supervisors to suggest both a feminist poststructuralist methodology and a narrative method. At this point I chose both narrative and thematic analyses, not really appreciating what they entailed. My later engagement with this project’s texts prompted repeated returns to methodological issues and their pertinence to methods. The greatest issues I had were working out my ‘place’ in the research and the ‘how to’ of the methods. How could I uphold the feminist tenets of research and yet produce work that would satisfy markers and the academe? I also struggled, and still do, with a researcher’s greatest asset and greatest bane, perfectionism. However, as with motherhood, this study has been a crystallising journey in terms of how I wish to be as a researcher. It was with great delight that I recognised that narrative methodology and methods were ‘my thing’. After several years of not identifying as a researcher, I had found my metier. Additionally, the topic of this study has reiterated for me the importance and necessity of continuing research into issues relevant to women. Although I still class myself as a novice researcher, my diligence with regard to methodology and method during this study, mean that I have a good foundation to build upon.

I am not the first to face the difficulties of multiple roles during research (Carolan, 2003; Letherby, 2003; Miller, 2005; Powell, 1999). Outlining one’s research and personal beliefs are an important aspect of any research. However, not only does the researcher effect the research, but it may, and some say should (Glass, 2000), transform the researcher. My mothering and my attitude to other mothers, my understanding of research complexity, and the worth of this research have been

strengthened by the research journey. Moreover, like Susan Maushart (2006), I believe that the freshness of my own early mothering experiences has provided a distinctive vitality and richness that researching from a more experienced mothering perspective could not have done.

Recognition of a need for social change

The final principle of feminist scholarship concerns the reason(s) feminists undertake research. Just as early feminist research was unequivocally designed around consciousness-raising, and bringing about political and social change, modern feminist research still desires to examine, reveal and make a difference to women's lives (Gillies & Aldred, 2002). Moreover, the notion of consciousness-raising has been reworked to include the empowerment and transformation of the participants and researcher(s). The need for social change is especially germane to this research given that maternal researchers and mothers alike feel that particular aspects of contemporary western motherhood are still not fully appreciated or portrayed, nor that mothers have a strong voice. Consequently, researchers should always consider the intentions behind the research, the possible and intended use(s) of the research, one's responsibility to all stakeholders, and the quandaries of empowerment.

As intentions, the intended use(s) of the research, and the responsibilities to stakeholders are interconnected, they will be discussed concurrently. As Fine et al (2000) urge, "reflections on our responsibilities as social researchers must punctuate all texts we produce" (p. 128), and so one has to imagine how the results may be used, misread, or misappropriated. Moreover, who is exposed or made vulnerable? Can data or findings be used constructively to help the group that the participants represent? Does it reproduce, or can it be used to cement existing oppressive views of women, or worse, to further marginalise and stigmatise women or other minority groups? I think here of the issue of postnatal depression (PND). When it was first posited and then proved, I am sure women and mothers were grateful to have a reason for their unhappy, difficult, and often frightening mothering experiences. However, like all diagnoses, one can extrapolate that a belief will develop (and has) that problems of this nature are a pathology that rests with the individual, rather than say, through structural inadequacies (Maushart, 2006; Mauthner, 1995). I posit that concerns with the intended uses of the research are really based in what Mauthner et. al., (2002) and Ribbens and Edwards (1998) call an ethics of care and responsibility.

Researchers need to act responsibly and accountably to ensure harm is not caused from any part of the research process. Not only do researchers have a significant obligation to participants, obligations exist to the many stakeholders who may read and use their work (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002).

One common intention of research is to empower and transform participants and their lives. However appealing this may seem, it is the researcher's judgement, or assumption, that change is needed. Participants, although happy to share and examine their experiences, may not be interested in, or wish to, change. And can they, or we, fully appreciate the consequences? Politicisation of participants may well make other personal situations uncomfortable, dangerous or untenable. They may be *disempowered* through an undermining of previous efforts which allowed them to cope with or exist in their present situation (Humphries, 1997; Millen, 1997). One must ask, does everyone want to be empowered and are researchers' grounds for doing so valid, or just another instance of a patronising, dominant group imposing their beliefs? For example, many members of the deaf community enjoy the identity that signing and deafness give them, and reject hearing peoples' assertions that deaf children should be fitted with implants to make them more normal. So too, many contemporary Australian mothers have rejected the super mum ideal, and are actively choosing stay-at-home mothering because they see it as valuable work which is best done by them (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Hewlett, 2002). Therefore, regardless of how keen researchers may be to transform participants' realities, they need to consider whose needs are being met.

Others suggest that feminist research is inherently political, and that ethical issues cannot be separated from political aims and intentions (Gillies & Aldred, 2002). Because feminist research is about representing women, challenging and reforming existing knowledge structures, and empowerment of individuals, it should be recognised as an essentially political act. Therefore, researchers need to bear this in mind so as to develop ethically responsible work. They need to be clear why they are doing the work, and think reflexively, not only about the processes, but into the future to carefully consider the immediate and extended implications.

Three feminist poststructural research principles underpin my approach to this research. Similar to researchers before me, I believe it is imperative to place

women centrally in research and to represent their experiences as faithfully as possible. Additionally, the significance of the role of the researcher to the research cannot be underplayed. Furthermore, recognising and considering one's intentions and the possible uses of the research, enables researchers to conduct research in ethical, responsible, and accountable ways. As mothers form a subset of women, these three principles effortlessly apply to this research. In order to enrich my feminist poststructuralist approach, I also utilised a narrative research approach.

Narrative research perspectives

Narrative methodology is based on the belief that human's knowledge of reality comes not only from our understanding of the world of facts and science, but from our human interactions (Bruner, 1991). Additionally, because each person is subjectively positioned in the world, each has their own view of reality. To make sense of varying realities, and to exist with others, we use narrative to make sense of, and organise our world (Bruner; Frank, 2002). However, people are not passive relators of the world around them. The use of stories, excuses, myths, argument, and rumination represent and constitute reality (Bruner). Moreover, language and stories are not transparent media with singular meanings (Riessman, 1993). Because we generally use narrative to relay who we are and explain events and experience to others, we use them creatively and with assumptions and interpretation to continually co-construct ourselves and our realities with the listener(s) (Bruner, 1987; Riessman, 1993). Therefore, narratives impart information about the personal, social, cultural, and political aspects of our world. Listening actively and interpreting narrative data (spoken and other textual formats) can provide a rich source of truths and revelations about the world (Riessman).

A narrative approach is especially useful for feminist research in that it allows women to share their unique knowledge through storytelling (Rogers-Clark, 2002). It allows women to speak the truth of their lives in their own way using their own words. Enabling women to tell their stories allows meanings to emerge, and so validates the worth of the telling and the living of the participants' worlds (Frank, 2002). Telling stories is also especially useful to make sense of complex life transitions, trauma, or sorrow (Frank, 1995; Riessman, 1993). This methodology is particularly relevant, therefore, when considering the complex journey into early motherhood, and the often common and undervalued experiences of contemporary

mothering. As it allows for expression of the personal, the challenging and a reworking of identity, narrative methodology is viewed as highly appropriate (Bruner, 1987; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Miller, 2005; Somers, 1994).

This approach strengthens the feminist poststructuralism discussed above as it also appreciates that multiple truths (subjectivities) exist. Proponents of narrative methodology contend, similarly to feminist poststructuralist ideals, that its value rests in these subjectivities because it allows scrutiny of both the unique individual and the social and political context (Riessman, 1993). Moreover, narrative methodology is inherently collaborative given its understanding that the interaction of researcher and participants is as much a part of the research as the experience or story of the participant (Olesen, 2000).

Conclusion

Feminist poststructural methodologies are appropriate for this study because it permits the multiplicities of mothers' experiences of their transition to motherhood to be heard. Placing the participants' experiences centrally, allows these particular mothers' experiences to be valued and validated, and forefronts women's issues generally. Furthermore, by incorporating participants' narratives, individual voices can be heard in their own way, with minimal imposition of my voice.

These methodologies avoid essentialism by consideration of the social context the experiences have come from, and the researcher-participant interaction. Approaching the participants openly, by acknowledging my newish mother and new researcher statuses, will mitigate my position as the expert and engender a space in which learning and growth will be available to all. Furthermore, the constant emphasis on reflexivity, and ethical and responsible knowing, will not allow instances and perceptions of oppression and marginalisation to be the dominant paradigm from which the research is approached. Consequently, diverse and complex stories of motherhood can emerge.

Finally, this methodology was chosen because it is done *for* mothers in an effort to provide answers and to cause change. It is acknowledged that some of the answers may not be palatable, and that the initial intention (to bring about change for mothers) is unlikely to be realised. However, taking the experiences of these mothers, and making them central, will not only validate these new mothers'

experiences and lives, but may well have a rippling out effect on immediate relationships and for the wider Australian community.

The following chapter, Method, extends this one by explaining the qualitative methods used to undertake the research. In line with the feminist poststructural, narrative underpinnings explicated here, it details a complete and transparent description of the processes and the techniques that allow the participants' new mothering journeys to be gathered, heard, and understood. Thus, the analyses and findings that follow can be appreciated.

CHAPTER 4: METHOD - AN EVOLUTION

I think I've grown a lot, actually yes, and I have actually learnt a lot, yeah. A lot of my ideas have changed.

Amy, PN interview

Introduction

Just as my philosophical approach to the production of knowledge is considered integral to the 'findings' of this research, so too are the procedures and tools used to 'do' the research (Stanley, 1990). The techniques chosen for this research were based on the desire to marry feminist and poststructuralist research principles and the pragmatic requirements of a PhD. In this chapter I aim to provide a detailed and transparent picture of how this research was done. Like Letherby (2003), I think the 'recipe' we use, and the way we use it, is as interesting as the 'finished dish'.

With a focus on depth rather than numbers, qualitative research methods tend to evolve with the research process. Therefore, although I generally followed the methods outlined by a few researchers (Emden, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Roberts & Taylor, 2002; Rogers-Clark, 2002), they were adapted somewhat to suit the needs of the project as it, and I, progressed. Additionally, given that most qualitative researchers are unable to clearly detail the entirety of their research, I found it necessary to incorporate processes gained from my reading in feminist methodology and conversations with other like-minded researchers. Consequently, this chapter outlines the steps in this project, and the processes involved in the commission of those steps. The aim is to provide the reader with an unambiguous understanding of this investigation, and thereby a more complete appreciation of the findings.

Design

This inquiry is a longitudinal, collective case study. This design provides recurrent opportunities to grasp the complexity of women's life experiences as they negotiate their journeys as new mothers. The advantage of a case study is that it allows a detailed examination of the 'system' as it sits within its broader contexts (Rogers-Clark, 2002). I have already discussed the significance of context in this inquiry. The case study method is considered appropriate when the context is

important (Yin, 1994). A collective case study means that a number of cases are studied (Cresswell, 1998).

Using this design allows for both individual and shared experiences to be included and examined. It is recommended that this is achieved by thorough consideration of each case (in this instance each woman's story) before common themes and patterns are sought across all the stories, because looking for commonalities too early can lead to superficial results (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). Thus, the approach taken in this research was to study each woman's ante- and postnatal stories rigorously before any explicit attempt at comparison was made. Consequently the unique accounts of women's early mothering experiences were heard, understood, and presented in this dissertation. I then interpreted these stories to elicit the major themes for each woman, as well as the commonalities and differences across the stories.

Gathering Participants

Epistemological and pragmatic concerns guided the recruitment of participants. At the outset of this research, I had lengthy discussions with my supervisor about whether I would focus on a particular 'type' of mother, for example; a particular age group, mothers of disabled children, or a minority ethnic group? Cognisant of feminist debates regarding the diversity or homogeneity of women's experiences (Harding, 1987b; Letherby, 2003; Miller, 2005; Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Stanley & Wise, 1993), and aware of the importance of context (Lincoln, 1985), I was pragmatically concerned with how I would realistically be able to recruit a representative group of women given the constraints I faced in living in a regional setting with a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population.

Additionally, I was concerned that concentrating on a group of women who had 'special' characteristics, such as belonging to a specific cultural group, or being of a particular age-group which differentiated them significantly from the 'average' Australian mother, would shift the focus to their special issues: That it would be those differences which made their experience of early mothering remarkable (Lincoln, 1985), not the transition to motherhood per se. I felt it was important to explore the early mothering experiences of women who belonged to the mainstream of Australian society, with their concomitant access to resources such as education,

economic security, and social services. If, as the literature suggests, *their* transition to motherhood was problematic, how must it be for other less recognised or disadvantaged mothers? Of course, this is not to presume one can generalise their experiences to other groups, nor that white, middle class, heterosexual women form a homogenous group. Rather, their plurality of experiences would suggest avenues of research with other, unique, groups of mothers.

For these reasons, I decided to let the randomness of informal snowballing techniques determine the characteristics of the mothers I spoke with. The following minimal inclusion and exclusion criteria were the only selection parameters I set:

Inclusion criteria

Mothers-to-be who

- Were expecting their first child and in the 2nd trimester of their pregnancy at the time of first interview;
- Were willing to participate in ante- and postnatal in-depth interviews about becoming a mother;
- Resided in south-east Queensland.

Exclusion criteria

Mothers-to-be who

- Do not speak English;
- Have mothered other children (e.g. through adoption or blended families).

Initially, I expected that I would need to approach community organisations such as Childbirth Education and Country Women's Association to recruit participants. However, speaking about my research to friends and colleagues resulted in the names of seven prospective participants quite quickly. Recruitment of four additional women from another region in south-east Queensland occurred 12 months later through similar methods, as well as via an information poster displayed at an organisation that one woman visited. One participant elected not to continue prior to the postnatal interview, citing lack of time. The socio-economic and cultural profile of the final 10 participants was similar to mine, that is white, middle-class, with all having achieved trade or tertiary qualifications. The youngest participant was 23 at the time of first interview and the oldest was 39. The others' ages ranged between the late 20s to mid 30s. At time of first interview, all were living in stable

heterosexual relationships, were in paid employment, and did not mention any physical, or mental, disability.

Once potential participants were identified, I asked the informant to provide my contact details to the women, thereby giving them the choice to contact me to ensure they were agreeable about participating. Some participants were happy, even preferred the informant to provide me with their contact details, so that I could make the contact. Initial contact was by phone (and in one case email) in which I gave a brief outline of the study (including the need for tape recording of the conversation), and also advised them of the completely voluntary nature of their involvement.

After the participant had agreed to be part of the study, and we had arranged a time and place for the initial interview, I sent them an information sheet which included my contact details and a consent form (Appendix A). Although recruitment was relatively problem-free, it took somewhat longer than anticipated, with several false starts mainly due to the busyness of everyday lives. Additionally, given my desire to interview women during their 2nd trimester and the necessary time constraints this imposed, contact was being made with other prospective participants while the first interviews were being undertaken. Recruitment therefore occurred over the space of several months.

The pragmatic concerns outlined above, and the exhaustion of recruitment possibilities, meant that my original goal of data saturation became problematic. Moreover, similar to Rogers-Clark's (Rogers-Clark, 2002) research experience, I questioned the possibility of actually achieving data saturation, as every mother's story provided a unique view of the transition to motherhood. As it transpired however, although each story was unique, there were many common elements to both antenatal expectations and postnatal experiences. Although further interviewing of other new mothers might well have uncovered additional aspects, I consider that the universal elements would have remained. For this reason, I believe data saturation occurred.

Gathering Data

Timing

The timing of data collection was chosen for several reasons. The second trimester is considered the better antenatal time as the newness of being pregnant has generally abated, and the impending birth process is still removed enough for women

to focus on other concerns. Moreover, anecdotally it appears to be a time when women feel at their physical best. Postnatally, data was collected when the babies were seven to eight months old. Some researchers have suggested that a 'halo' effect may be present after the birth of a healthy baby in which women are less critical of the care they receive immediately after birth (Bennett, 1985 and Erb, Hill & Houston, 1983 as cited in (Brown et al., 1994), with this effect wearing off in the latter half of the first year. I also believed that this halo effect would extend to mothers' thoughts on motherhood, and that awareness of the realities of mothering would only start to appear in the second half of the first year. Additionally, personal experience and experiences of others (Le Blanc, 1999) suggest that the first months after the birth are exclusively absorbed by the newness of the experience and the needs of the new baby: There is little time or head space for rumination on the self.

Interviews between Budding Expert and Mothers

Open-ended, unstructured, in-depth interviews were used to explore women's antenatal expectations of motherhood and themselves as mothers, as well as their postnatal 'real' experience of becoming a mother. This form of data collection allows empathetic participatory listening as well as the validation of the experiences and thoughts imparted by co-researchers. Sympathetic to a feminist poststructuralist paradigm, interviews put relationships at centre stage and emphasise knowledge generation through social interaction (Rabinowitz & Martin, 2001). By interviewing women once antenatally and once postnatally, it was anticipated that a snapshot view of women's transition to motherhood would be obtained.

Apart from one interview at the participant's office and one in my own home, most of the women invited me to interview them in their home. In an effort to produce a relaxed atmosphere, I arrived for the antenatal interview dressed casually and comfortably, spending some initial time chatting about non-threatening topics such as the weather, their garden, or home. Generally, I was offered tea or coffee and often morning tea. During these exchanges, I tried to build some rapport by offering personal details of my life, my hobbies, being a mum and wife.

Once I felt the ice had been broken, I initiated the antenatal interview process by reviewing the previously mailed Information and Consent Form (Appendix A) with the participant, particularly emphasising the voluntary nature of her participation, especially her freedom to refuse any questions, to stop at any time

during the interview, or during the research process. I also rechecked her agreement to the interview being tape-recorded, after which the participant signed the form. At this time also, to ensure participants' confidentiality (see also Ethics, p. 84), I asked the participant to choose an alias by which they would be referred to on tape and in text.

As I wanted the interview to feel like a conversation between partners in the research process (Rubin, 2005), I started the interaction by telling the participant about myself as a person, some of my history, my interests, and about some of my experiences of being a new mother. I was careful to keep this discussion at a level where it could not influence my participants, especially in relation to my own mothering experiences. For example, I did not reveal how difficult I had found mothering, but talked generally about the challenges and joys I had experienced. This strategy was designed to allow my participant to relax and feel they could speak candidly about their mothering expectations and experiences. I then outlined my project by explaining that I was keen to find out what modern women really thought about becoming and being a new mother, and that these thoughts would help those in caring professions to support expectant and new mothers. Additionally, I said that because this was her story, there were no right or wrong answers or thoughts, and that she should feel free to say whatever she felt. I then invited the participant to start by telling me a bit about herself, and how pregnant she was. Sometimes this was enough to start the interview. On other occasions I would prompt the participant by saying, "So tell me, how has your pregnancy been?"

In line with the unstructured interview style, this was the only standard question I asked, although I did refer to an aide memoire (Appendix C) (Holloway, 2002) of topic questions to ensure my research interests were covered. This allowed participants the freedom to direct the content of the interview by raising in their own words the topics that were important to them, and allowed me to listen carefully without losing sight of the focus of the interview. Interestingly, many of the participants spoke to the topics in my aide memoire independently of me.

Given my desire for the interview to be conversational, I participated more fully in the interview than the traditional interview would allow for. If it seemed appropriate, I would engage with the participants' comments. Apart from demonstrating empathy, I especially wanted to validate any unconventional thoughts

or experiences, or those that might be thought to contradict common beliefs. Furthermore, if a comment or word used in passing piqued my interest, I would ask participants to clarify that point. This style of interviewing fits well with feminist and postmodern research ideologies in which inviting intimacy through self-disclosure (Oakley, 1992) and maintaining a conversation, are important in encouraging openness and allowing women's 'voices' to emerge (Gilligan, 1982). However, I was also cognisant of the fact that I did not want to impose my own beliefs and expectations and 'take over' the interview. I, therefore, tried to take the part of a quiet, but involved conversational partner in the manner of responsive or active interviewing (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Rubin, 2005).

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that I made decisions "about which issues to follow up and which to ignore, and choosing where to probe" (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 124). The impact of personal biography, and the extent to which the researcher should be, or is, present in the research was addressed earlier in chapter three. As I discuss below (see Personal mothering issues, p.72), I also recognise that on occasion my evolving mother-biography caused me to pursue certain topics more strongly than others and to react less or more favourably to a participant.

Notwithstanding this, as Fontana and Frey (2000) state, "interviews are interactional encounters" (p.647) which shape the knowledge gained, and which involve two players. With interviews having become one of the most used modern research techniques, we are all familiar with their nature and the roles people should play (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Certainly my participants all seemed well aware of the implicit rules of the interaction (Kvale, 1996) waiting for questions to be asked, editing themselves, and clarifying what I was looking for: "*Does that answer your question a little bit?*" (Alison, AN interview). Undeniably, my questions provided a certain interview framework. However, I did not at any time believe my participants were anything other than thoughtful, intelligent, and often very articulate partners in my endeavour. They were certainly not passive producers of answers. If I incorrectly reflected a thought back to them they would politely correct me, as is evident from the following:

LR: So, with that in mind, I guess, in your mind then, it seems to me that you're thinking as a mother in a way, that you're already a mother in your mind. Is that how you feel?

Meg: To a degree. I'm probably a little bit, I'm apprehensive...

(AN Interview)

Additionally, in spite of my preconceived theoretical framework that new motherhood is difficult and not always a positive experience, the participants frequently rejected this paradigm by either contradicting me, or maintaining their enjoyment and happiness with their advent to motherhood. So, despite the possible power differential that may exist between researcher and participant (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005), I feel my participants participated equally in the construction and telling of their stories.

Although the postnatal interviews were conducted in a similar manner to the antenatal ones, they differed in several critical ways. Prior to these conversations, the participant had received their antenatal narratives for member checking (see (Re)presenting the Voices and Individual Stories – Narrative Analysis, p. 64), and as a reminder of their prior thoughts. This was done by post or email, which meant that some mothers responded with email remarks like Aphrodite's, "...Don't some things change after the birth!!!" With those mothers, I started the interview by asking them to explain what their comment meant. With others I would précis the main points of their antenatal interview and then ask, "So, how have things been," or "Is being a mum what you expected?" I also developed aide memoires based on each mother's antenatal interviews, with some universal questions (Appendix D). Prior to commencing these interviews, I reviewed the contents of the Information and Consent Form (Appendix B), emphasising the voluntary nature of their participation, and their ability to stop the process at any time.

Apart from these differences to the antenatal interviews, most of the mums had their babies present throughout the interview, with chat about them often easing the way into the formal discussion. However, the babies' tolerance of the interview process determined the length and nature of our discussion, generating a more disjointed product. Interruptions often meant the mother was distracted by the needs of their child, sometimes losing their train of thought. In my efforts to allow them to concentrate, my playing with, or soothing, the baby meant that I also became

distracted on occasion. Therefore, my aide memoires played a greater role in these interviews.

It should also be noted that there was a somewhat evolutionary nature to the interviews. Because both sets of interviews were conducted over the space of several months, during which time some narratives were being produced, the themes I pursued and approaches I took were modified for later interviews. For example, early participants mentioned antenatally that becoming a mother was daunting and this was used in later interviews to prompt reflection by participants, or as a trigger for me of high-salience subjects to be followed up. Conversely, in the postnatal interviews it was the omission of certain topics that caught my attention. For example, few of the initial participants talked about the birth experience. Therefore, although interviews may be seen as pure data collection, in effect they are part of the ongoing data analysis which occurs from the moment a topic and participants are selected (Mauthner, 1995; Riessman, 1993).

Analysis - a Quest for Understanding

Although qualitative writings on narrative analysis are not hard to find, they are often long on methodology and short on specific details on the 'how to' (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Riessman, 1993). Furthermore, if details are given, it is apparent that researchers differ considerably in their approaches. For this study, I took a two-step approach: (a) the production of easily-read narratives condensed from the interview texts and (b) analysis of the interview texts for themes. This satisfied my desire to clearly (re)present all my participants' voices and stories in a holistic way which would allow readers some 'knowing' of the participants, as well as to 'analyse' their mothering experiences on a deeper level by discovering the contextual influences.

(Re)presenting the Voices and Individual Stories – Narrative Analysis

Given that there is no single method of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993), I decided to adopt the process of core story creation and emplotment suggested by Emden (1998) to produce the narratives. Because I employed transcription services however, my initial step was to compare the transcript to its recording. Appreciating that transcribers may make their own decisions as to what is to be included (Riessman, 1993), I was keen to ensure that I was working with a true representation

of the interview, and so I read for errors and omissions, ensuring that interruptions, pauses, laughter, and sighs were included. Additionally, this first reading (or in many cases, 1st and 2nd readings) helped me revisit my sense of the participant and gave me an initial feel for their narrative. After this, I then followed Emden's steps to reduce the full length texts to shorter core stories by:

1. Reading and rereading interview texts over several weeks to grasp content.
2. Deleting interviewer questions and comments.
3. Deleting all words that are irrelevant to the key ideas.
4. Reading the remaining text for sense.
5. Repeating steps 3 and 4 until satisfied all key ideas are retained, rechecking against the full text as often as necessary.
6. Identifying fragments of themes (subplots) from the key ideas and moving these together to form a sensible core story, or series of core stories.
7. Obtaining confirmation of the 'truth', or not, of the core story from co-researchers by asking them whether their story 'rings true' and inviting deletion or correction – member-checking.

Although these steps seem clear enough (or I naively assumed they would be) the proof of the recipe comes with the doing. I soon came to realise the existence of a myriad of decisions that need to be made during the doing, which, although seemingly inconsequential, will affect the final outcome. For example, I wished to maintain the presence and flavour of the individual speaker, by remaining as close to the spoken text as possible, but with awareness that the repetition of certain colloquial language devices would add to the clumsiness of the finished product and may well embarrass the participant. I decided to retain many grammatical inconsistencies such as ums, and you knows, as in the following excerpt, because these utterances provided a sense of thought process, emphasis, or were requests for validation/confirmation that are lost from sanitised written text.

...You know, strangers sort of ask you when you're due, and "ah, congratulations, good luck with the baby" and you sort of think, 'oh thanks' you know. Um, yeah, no, it's a nice feeling, you know, you get lots of attention (laughter) . . .

Jasmine, AN interview

The tension between final readability (including the pragmatics such as length) and retention of the essence and truth of the original data was constant throughout the narrative productions. For instance, Embden's (1998) instruction to delete interviewer utterances did not work when coherency and retention of important ideas was the focus. Moreover, did the notion of not cleaning the data too much refer to retaining all the repeated words or phrases throughout an interview? As I read and reread transcripts it became clear to me that repetition (either through repeat of the same phrase, or the same idea throughout the interview or paragraph) was an indicator of important ideas (Riessman, 1993). For example, it was clear that the concept of mothering as instinctual was pivotal for Jasmine, with her use of 'natural', 'instinct' or 'human' 14 times during our antenatal conversation. Many of these decisions were made during steps 3 to 6, as I decided what the key ideas of a sentence, or group of sentences were, and identified and arranged the fragments of themes to form the core story, or series of core stories. Arrangement and rearrangement of paragraphs highlighted which ideas or words needed retention, or were superfluous to the core story.

Choosing the key ideas to present in the story is the central step of core story creation and, I believe, is pivotal in terms of underlying feminist research principles. The very heart of these principles - the concern with telling women's stories in their own words, with honesty and respect - is operationalised in practice during this part of the analysis (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). At this point, the ideas we choose will shape the final structure of the story and determine how it, and indirectly the person, is represented. The crux of the matter comes down to: *Which* ideas do we deem important and irrelevant? *Whose* ideas are we choosing?

After wrestling my way through approximately half the antenatal narratives, I came to the gradual realisation that the key ideas I was selecting, and the resultant themes, related more to the previously read literature on mothering and my personal biases, rather than the meaning of the storyteller (see also New researcher issues, p.

72). Once I grasped this, I decided that the best way to shift my focus would be to relisten to the recordings (similar to Catherine Riessman's (1993) close and repeated listenings), paying attention to specific tonal differences comparative to the bulk of the talk. During this, I highlighted instances of change in pitch (excited, intense or forceful speech), volume, and speed (quicker and/or less hesitant speech) which I felt indicated the speaker's clear engagement with, or emphasis of, that idea (Riessman, 1993). This worked well for me, and on many instances the focus or intent of the story shifted. Sometimes this was only a small change, however I felt that any shift was worthwhile in terms of producing more honest stories and improving rigour. This process also provided some validation of key ideas I had chosen previously. The ideas chosen through this process, as well as others I thought were too obvious to be ignored, formed the basis for the structure of the final narratives.

Embden's (1998) approach implies (possibly unintentionally) that each step is taken in a linear fashion, once the previous step is complete. However, as has been inferred above, this was not my experience. Although I looked for key ideas as a specific step, I found that it was the identification and arrangement of the fragments of these themes (step 6 above), which confirmed or questioned these choices. Often it would seem that similar concepts and phrasings, although physically separate, were the same thing. However, once the paragraphs or sections of speech were moved together, it became clear that they were not related, or were tangential. At this time also, it became clear to me that moving sentences, paragraphs, or sections of speech around meant that the chronology of how the ideas were developed and discussed was being lost. A feeling of wrongness about this grew with the number of narratives I processed. It sprang, no doubt, from the fact that the often confused and contradictory nature of the narratives, and hence paradoxical thoughts about motherhood, was being sanitised, as well as from my instinctive responses to the voices or divided selves often present when women talk about themselves (Blumenthal, 1999; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). This conflictual aspect of motherhood discussions has been documented by others (Blumenthal, 1999; Le Blanc, 2002; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Miller, 2005; Woodward, 2003) and is elaborated below (see Thematic Analysis). Moreover, some feminist methodological literature stated, "...narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning..." (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). Suffice to say, simultaneously with my decision to *listen* more carefully to

what the participants were saying, I resolved to maintain the chronology with which key ideas and themes were presented, without compromising the clarity of issues, nor readability.

Once I was satisfied with the iterative process described above (and had overcome my anxiety about whether I had done it ‘the right way’) the story was sent to each participant for member checking. This process of asking participants for confirmation of the ‘truth’, or not, of their story allows participants to verify the representativeness of their story and cooperate further in its production. The antenatal stories were mailed or emailed with a covering letter (Appendix D) prior to their postnatal interview with the postnatal narratives being sent after they were completed. The covering letter advised them of the general process undertaken, constraints that final length of story imposed, as well as the fact they were free to alter, delete, or amend in any way. Gratifyingly, all participants were happy with their stories, even if they felt their ideas had changed or were embarrassed about some of their early (naïve) thoughts. Some even wished to keep full copies of the stories as a piece of their baby’s history.

The decision making journey discussed above, which involved much reflection, revision, agonising, and back-tracking, reveals somewhat the “messy, confusing and uncertain” (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 122) nature of dealing with narratives, and of the evolutionary nature of qualitative research as a whole. Furthermore, in choosing to follow some ideas and not others, I realise that for each story I have chosen one of many possible interpretations of the data (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Sokolovsky, 1996). Moreover, regardless of my level of self awareness, I appreciate that the stories will reflect my personal biography, because aside from the impossibility of bracketing ourselves fully as we work, it is difficult to know all the ways we experience the world (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Miller, 2005; Olesen, 2000; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Rogers-Clark, 2002). Notwithstanding this caveat, I believe the stories presented in volume two of this dissertation, have been produced with thoughtfulness, honesty, and rigour.

Commonality and Distinctiveness - Thematic Analysis

For this project, thematic analysis was approached from the simple starting point of locating and organising the raw data in terms of common and recurring patterns across all the discourses (Kaufman, 1992). Complementary to narrative

production, thematic analysis maintains the prominence of the mothers' voices while my voice takes precedence. Moreover, this analysis shifts the investigation from the individual to the group. The manual procedure used to determine the themes was similar to that explicated by Roberts and Taylor (2002), and employed a colour-coding method. It is summarised in the following steps:

1. Read all interview texts to identify common essences.
2. Make lists by grouping apparently similar or related words/phrases on large sheets of paper.
3. Choose a provisional word or phrase to capture the ideas in each group and nominate a colour for each.
4. Within each interview, highlight words or sections of text that appear to represent the provisional descriptor.
5. Reread and compare against clean texts for verification.
6. Compare individual interviews for convergence.
7. Repeat step 2, but refine grouping of similar words/phrases so that related sub-themes are suggested.
8. Review themes again by cutting and pasting highlighted sections of the texts into thematic word tables.
9. Peruse tables for agreement/divergence.
10. Finalise themes when unable to move like ideas without losing the individual essence of the themes/sub-themes.
11. Determine meaningful names for themes and identify 2-3 representative quotes or 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973).

Given that there was a gap between collecting and working with the ante- and postnatal data, the process above was conducted in three related stages. Initially, the ante- and postnatal interviews were analysed as consecutive subsets of data using steps 1 to 7, with separate groupings of words and phrases for each data set. Because of this, the preliminary analyses of the antenatal data did inform the examination of the postnatal data. However, the subsequent examination of the postnatal interviews clarified, consolidated, and extended the earlier analysis. Therefore, this initial analysis was a two-way flow of information. This was a somewhat messy process with several large sheets of paper with word lists, arrows, and lines scribbled upon them. At the end of this stage, the ante- and postnatal groupings were evaluated and then merged. Scrutiny of the data in this way illuminated differences between the

data, and movement within provisional themes. For example, the theme Life Progression/Personal Growth was initially thought of in terms of the natural progression of life because of the antenatal focus on extended family and community. However, readings of the postnatal data illuminated a more personal aspect to this theme. From talk such as Jasmine's, "*I feel like I've grown and learning more about myself and my reactions and responses to my child,*" it became quite clear that this theme was not only about broadened connections with others, but also about the growth of mother in terms of self. Lastly, the merged themes were treated using steps 8 to 11. As with the narrative analysis process, this process was not as 'clean' as the above suggests, with overlap between the stages and steps, involving reflection and backtracking.

In many ways, this analysis commenced during the construction of the stories. Many of the techniques used in production of the narratives such as textual quantity and repetition were relevant to this analysis and will not be reiterated here. Moreover, repeated readings of the data played a large part in distinguishing major themes across the interviews as well as enabling interpretation of the veiled meanings. Therefore, although my reading of maternal literature did, for example, heighten my responsiveness to an ideal mothering discourse, the themes were predominantly drawn inductively from the raw data.

Explicit themes (Roberts & Taylor, 2002) were recognised by locating specific words with a particular meaning. For example, words such as 'good mother' and 'bad mother', 'natural', and 'instinctive', were used frequently and universally, indicating that the notion of the ideal mother was a strong influence for these new mothers. Some participants used these terms with complete accord, while others questioned them. Often, there was a sense the participants were constructing an idea by drawing on a cultural narrative with which they concurred, but were uncertain of. For example, talking about being a mother Amy said, "*Yeah. I don't know what it is but it just seems to come naturally*". However, irrespective of the manner in which these terms were used, they all indicated engagement with the dominant narrative of the ideal mother.

Aside from explicit themes, it was also necessary to respond interpretively to the text by looking for covert meanings and nuances in the text. This was especially pertinent when evaluating large amounts of text that seemed unrelated to the focus of

this study, or when deciding between instances of text appeared to fit into one or more groupings, depending on which aspect of the group was foregrounded. For example, it became apparent that there was a lot of discourse about the fathers' helpfulness and role in sharing the child work and other chores. However, the more I read and manipulated these sections of text, I became conscious that they were firmly connected to desire for equality. Talk about the fathers' contribution was often related to the mother finding time for the self. Thus, I took this talk as being a manifestation of the concern these participants felt about losing their individuality and the desire to preserve the self. Therefore, the decision to assign a particular example to one or other theme was not merely a matter of matching by way of content, but was based on a best fit notion after rigorous scrutiny of the text and the surrounding discourse, as well as on the milieu of the whole interview.

The process outlined above describes the nuts and bolts of the method I used to reveal the themes. Similar to the narrative analysis, I also struggled for some time with the fact that many of the word groupings were contradictory. For example, one early grouping of words I named Career as it concerned paid work and professional issues, which seemed unrelated to the grouping I called Natural Mothering. Were these independent themes of early mothering experiences I mused, or was Career completely irrelevant to the transition? Once again, I worried I had gone about the analysis the wrong way and needed to start again, using some other classification technique. However, working with the ante- and postnatal interviews at different times, and copying text into thematic tables, confirmed my provisional groupings and reassured me that the groupings were present in the data. Furthermore, my recurrent handling of the texts led me to realise that contradiction lay at the very heart of the early mothering experience for these 10 participants. Consequently, the sub-themes and themes I had uncovered were representative of the voices or selves that these new mothers had found salient, and between which they were endeavouring to find balance.

This thematic analysis complemented the narrative analysis by taking an across group focus rather than within group. As such it looked for common expectations, beliefs, and experiences. Through this analysis I was able to further investigate the significant personal and contextual themes for these new mothers, as well as any changes across the early mothering period. This examination was not

without its difficulties as there were many decision-making points encountered within the 'doing' of the analysis which needed time out and reflection. Furthermore, I recognise, as with the story productions, that my personal (known and unknown) biases will be reflected in the themes, especially as the nature of this analysis means my voice is clearest. However, I believe this two-fold approach strengthened my investigation, and ensured a greater depth to the project. Furthermore, along with discussions with my supervisor and other maternal scholars, this outline of my methods, attest to the scrupulous and open nature of this analysis. An additional part of the transparency and rigour requirements is that one is reflexive and open about themselves and their research. Began in chapter three, it continues here.

A Continuation of the Me in this Research - Reflexivity

As discussed in the methodology chapter, reflexivity is an integral part of feminist research, and informs the data collection process as well as data analysis and interpretation (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Glass, 2000; Holloway, 2002; Letherby, 2003; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Rubin, 2005). Throughout the interview and narrating processes I journalled or debriefed with my supervisor to clarify issues and challenges I had as a beginning, feminist researcher and as a new mother. This section expands on the earlier introduction of myself (see p. 46) by providing specific instances of difficulties and how these were recognised and dealt with.

New researcher issues

Generally, my concerns related to either the interview process, or my skills of analysis. As I have discussed earlier, I was uncertain about how to get the balance right between feminist ideals of interviewer positioning, interviewer self-disclosure and involvement (see chapter 3), and my desire to let the participants direct the conversations. These concerns were a theme throughout the interviews, even though my self-assurance grew as time progressed. For example, after my first interview I wrote,

I am concerned that positioning myself as a feminist may be too disclosive/confrontational/restraining for some co-researchers. But how do I be open about who I am? Also, how much of me should come into these interviews? I feel that women work best when something is conversational.... So I feel I need to be 'in' the moment and engage as I would with anyone. But

I don't want to dominate or be the expert. I am not really sure how to manage this.

And by the fourth interview I was much happier, writing,

Much better interview....Kris' remarks about letting myself go and focussing on interviewee made a lot of difference. I was able to still probe but was not driven by my knowledge... I feel much happier about the whole interview thing and feel I still got some v. good stuff.

However, although practice gave me more confidence, I did still feel that my interviewing technique could be improved. I worried that I was merely getting surface level information and not any 'real' confidences and that there had been 'leads' I had missed. I finally realised that as an interviewer I need time and space to process the content of interviews immediately after and between them.

Similar challenges arose during the narrative work. Although aware of how to do the nuts and bolts of the narrative, I was anxious to 'get it right'. I wanted to make sure that the resultant stories were true to the participants. I was concerned that my knowledge of the literature did not impose itself onto the meaning, and that I did not 'hear' things that were not really there. This is clear from the following:

It has just occurred to me that the way I have been organising the narratives has been based on different themes... maybe [I] should have used subplots like pregnancy, parenting, family, relationships and so on which would have then shown the concept of mothering is natural in all of those subplots. God god god this is a nightmare. I have broken out in a cold sweat with the thought that I may have done it wrongly, and ignored their voice etc. AND the thought I may have to do them all again.

And,

But surely I have been led by the stories? I feel as though I am changing my mind constantly about how to do this.

This uncertainty gave way to the realisation that my earlier intentions had not been dishonest or 'wrong', rather that the process of moving from an interview transcript to narrative is difficult and multifaceted. This process of reflection

eventually led to a refining of how I listened to the data. This enhancement of the narrative process is discussed under (Re)presenting the Voices and Individual Stories – Narrative Analysis, p. 64 above. The positive feelings this resolution engendered are apparent in the following entry:

So now I feel energised to go on with the narratives even tho I worry that these will be somehow different to the earlier ones because I have thought of things along the way.

It was at this point that I felt I had achieved a greater understanding of the research process I was engaged in, and was able to proceed with a renewed sense of equilibrium. Additionally, and more importantly, the research process and the introspection it necessarily entails, led to improved awareness of my strengths and weaknesses as a researcher.

Personal mothering issues

The journaling I did around my personal mothering concerns arose as a result of the postnatal interviews. Mostly this was caused by the inconsistency between my own disenchantment with, and negative outlook on, motherhood and most of my participants' overall happiness with their experience. The lack of fit between their experiences and mine affected me on a profound level. After my first postnatal interview I wrote,

this lady so bloody happy in her little nest. Confronted me on several levels. Firstly, was there something wrong with me that I didn't think it was all wonderful, fun, blah, blah when I had [my son] first.

Journaling helped me work through my strong reactions, as a week later I remarked,

Finally feel able to discuss my feelings as a result of the 2 postnatal interviews I conducted last week....part of it comes down to the guilt and frustrations I feel about being a mum and the feelings/uncertainties I have about my choices.

My awareness of these challenges enabled me to step back in later interviews and not respond so personally to their situations. In fact, after my fourth postnatal interview I commented,

Interview went like a dream....not at all threatened by the ease etc [participant] shows at mothering....Most relaxed I've felt re the interviews so far.

and a later statement indicates I had found some equanimity: “*So I have realised that I have been too close to this research*”.

Aside from the feelings of uncertainty and guilt over my mothering choices, I recognised that I was tuning in closely to my participants' discussions about their own mothers. I felt very irritated with one participant who seemed dismissive of her mother and who did not seem to realise the valuable part her mother could play in her transition to motherhood, as the following indicates.

Also I realise from the last interview that issues to do with mothers of mothers are very salient for me...in the last interview there was conflict between participant & her mother, although she wanted her mother to be involved. I feel she should be more accepting of mum's help and that mum should be more helpful.

It was not until I recognised and reflected on my strong reactions of anger and envy, as well as my subtle encouragements for all the women to rely on their mum, that I grasped the complexity of my response. Not only was I re-experiencing feelings of loss I had felt at my own mother's absence after my son's birth, I was re-experiencing the loss I felt over her death, and examining our mother-daughter relationship. Furthermore, it constantly forced me to analyse myself as a mother, and my mothering of my son. This realisation led to a hiatus in my work during which I had to grapple with issues I thought I had previously resolved, or was not even aware of. These effects of mother loss are not unusual (Edelman, 2006). The outcome of my introspection, and discussions with my supervisor, was a decision to record my own interview regarding my thoughts and beliefs on motherhood. This information is included in the prior chapter under *Myself as a new mother., p.46*.

I was aware that where life experiences are congruent with the research topic, personal experiences can intrude. However, I was taken somewhat unawares by the intensity of that affect. By putting the project down and dealing with these personal implications (Rubin, 2005), I was able to respond to the data with an improved awareness of personal biases. The reflections above highlight not only my research

and mothering journey, and the evolutionary nature of qualitative research, but provide evidence for the quality of this research.

Good or Bad Research?

Validity, internal and external, and reliability have long been the benchmarks of positivist and generally quantitative research. These measures of the quality of research have been used extremely effectively in that domain. However, how translatable they are for postmodern, textual research has been debated for the past 20 years. To my mind the validity of any research (to use positivist terminology) is concerned with a central question. Paraphrasing Lincoln and Guba (1994), “How do we know when we have specific social enquiries that are faithful enough to some human construction that we may feel safe in acting on them, or, more important, that members of the community in which the research is conducted (and beyond) may act on them?” (p. 180). Or, more concisely, how do I (and others) know if it is good research? This question (perhaps fittingly so, given postmodernist sensibilities) has thwarted, and still does, simple and finite resolution. Although most postmodern, qualitative researchers concur that traditional standards of good research are unsuitable for qualitative research, there is disagreement about whether these can be reworked, or should be abandoned and new ways of thinking adopted (Emden & Sandelowski, 1998).

Emden & Sandelowski (1998) suggests that there have been four responses with regard to this conundrum about reliability and validity. These criteria have been championed, translated, exiled, redeemed, and surpassed. Championing refers to adherence to these criteria with the understanding that differences exist for postmodern research. Some have translated positivist assumptions into standards that are more relevant to postpositivist research. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, were the first to really grapple with what validity and reliability could mean for the newer research methodologies. They coined the term ‘trustworthy’ research to indicate work that was rigorous and authentic. It has four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which correspond to internal and external validity (causal inference and generalisability), reliability (replicability of findings) and objectivity (neutrality of researcher) respectively. However, their criteria differ considerably because the assumptions of qualitative research differ to traditional, quantitative ones. Since there is no single, tangible reality to be found,

and contexts are integral to the research phenomena, credibility is concerned with how accurately the researcher has represented the multiple constructions of truth, while transferability is limited to the degree of similarity the context of one study may have to others of interest. Dependability is broader than reliability as it requires a researcher to detail both the methods used and all other factors that may, or may not, have impacted on them, and, therefore, allow others to imitate the research. This detailing of the research process also allows for the confirmability of the findings, the interpretations, and recommendations, showing that they are coherent, plausible, and defensible (Frankel & Devers, 2000; Johnson, 1997; Lincoln, 1985). Given the integral nature of qualitative work, Lincoln and Guba state that unlike the positivist criteria, their goodness standards can only *persuade* the audience as to research quality. This adaptation of positivist conceptions of the goodness of research continues to influence current postmodern researchers.

Some have suggested that validity is a useable criterion to measure good research but that reliability is not, while others argue that reliability and validity are inappropriate altogether. Qualitative and quantitative paradigms generally have very different philosophical and methodological foundations; therefore criteria to assess them will be necessarily divergent. Traditional notions of one objective truth are reconceptualised in light of a postmodern view of subjective, but defensible knowledge. Because poststructural, qualitative research is sensitive to humanity and a multiplicity of meanings and truths, there exist complexities and nuances which cannot be grasped by the traditional validity and reliability criteria (Emden & Sandelowski, 1998). With the increasing uses of postmodern and participatory research philosophies, and a turn to text, others have extended the interest in the relationality of postmodern qualitative research. Therefore, the representativeness of text, empowerment, uses, and usefulness of the knowledge gained, as well as the relational nature of the researcher, the researched and their community, audience(s), and the ethics of research all need to find a place in considerations of research quality (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Lather, 1993; Lincoln, 1995).

As evidenced by the above discussion, postmodern, qualitative enquiries do not contain a homogenous set of traditions. It is therefore difficult to define a set of criteria with which to assess research quality. Like methodological choices and methods, the quality of the work needs to be particular to the project and, therefore,

each will have a different mix of criteria and each criteria will be differentially significant (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Lincoln, 1995). For me, all the conceptualisations of goodness have merit and appeal. My starting point with regard to the goodness, or otherwise, of this research is based in feminist poststructuralist ideas of the value and representation of women and their lives. Moreover, like challenges to the universalised notion of 'women', it is my belief that all mothers have a unique story to share; that there is no universal 'mothering' story.

Furthermore, I also ascribe to the notion that validity can be interpreted as the quality of craftsmanship in a research project (Kvale, 1995). This resonates strongly with me as during my upbringing I was taught that all endeavours should be approached with the idea that quality of process will bring about quality of product. Consequently, quality of research is as much about the means used to get to the end as the end itself. This sits very comfortably with feminist poststructuralism, echoing the methodological concerns with both the doing and the product. It encompasses respect for participants throughout the research, the appropriateness and ethics of the research, the possible uses of the findings, as well as considering the transparency of the research, and the researcher's input to the process. Many of these feminist poststructural criteria can also be utilised to appraise the findings and outcomes of a study. Furthermore, there exists an appreciation that criteria of goodness may well develop with the research process in the same way that qualitative and feminist methods are used, adapted, or discarded: They should be considered fluid and emergent rather than fixed and immutable (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Lincoln, 1995). Because of this, the quality of research is interwoven with all the steps of a research project, and is not just an end product. Moreover, quality encompasses a notion of flow and complementation. That is, *all* the steps in a production process and all the pieces of the product combine to give a sense of rightness.

Many have questioned the adherence by postmodernists to the positivist notion of needing criteria through which to judge their work (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1994), and although I am uneasy with adopting translations of the traditional paradigm myself, I am not sure that operating in a completely new (and perforce antithetical) paradigm is the answer. It seems to me that many postmodern researchers, regardless of terms used, consider the rigour of their own and others' work by using the basic assumptions of accuracy, plausibility, and

defensibility, as well as Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria of trustworthy research. Given my quantitative background, I also am drawn to their four criteria, but, at the same time, am uncomfortable with the connection to positivist notions of validity. Additionally, their later concerns with relational and ethical aspects of research, as well as notions of understanding, crystallisation, and disruption as quality assessment criteria, also attract me (Emden & Sandelowski, 1998; Lather, 1993; Lincoln, 1995).

My approach to the evaluation of the goodness of this research therefore, is to consider the process and the product of the study. I am interested not only in how accurate, plausible, defensible, and useful, the research has been, but that it was done in a morally and ethically sound manner. The following provides a framework in which to consider these: (a) Theorising – assessment of the premises used to direct and design the study; (b) Doing and Reporting – evaluation of how well the research process and write-up have reflected the methodological underpinnings of the project, and contributed to the product, (c) Product –the quality of the final product; and, (d) lastly, Ethics - given the inherent moral aspects of feminist poststructural research, examination of the overall ethical goodness of the project. The criteria I have chosen to appraise these four aspects have been adopted and adapted from many qualitative papers (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002; Emden & Sandelowski, 1998, 1999; Fossey et al., 2002; Frankel & Devers, 2000; Lather, 1993; Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). However, many are equally representative of feminist poststructural theoretical requirements. Instead of restricting myself to any one goodness approach, I, therefore, draw on individual aspects which fit the needs of this research. I use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability loosely, but in the same sense as Lincoln and Guba and because it simplifies understanding. The framework and criteria used to ensure the quality of this project are described below.

Theorising

The assessment of the quality of this project starts with consideration of how suitable my methodological approach is with regard to the research issue, as well as the methods used (Fossey et al., 2002; Rogers-Clark, 2002). Chapters 1 and 2 outline the present context of Australian modern mothering as well as the development and foci of western maternal research. They provide the foundation for

an understanding of the many issues that face new mothers in Australia and, along with my own, and friends', recent experiences of new motherhood, provoked the research question. The feminist poststructuralist and narrative methodologies and the ways in which they intersect, support, and enable research into women's journeys of early mothering were described at length in the previous chapter. Suffice to say, these methodologies were chosen because I considered it imperative to conduct this study as research *with* not *on* women; in which the participants were enabled to 'speak' their knowledge and stories in their own ways, in which the participants and their words were respected, and in which the aim was not only to gain information, but to validate these and other women's experiences.

There were several ways in which the experiences of these women could have been discovered and interpreted. However, the methods described in the current chapter were the best fit for feminist methodological requirements and pragmatic needs. In-depth interviews with a small number of women allowed the mothers to use their own voices to speak their truths about their early mothering experiences. Narrative analysis enabled the mothers' diverse stories to be heard on their own terms with minimal researcher interference, while thematic analysis made it possible to reveal cultural and contextual influences. Additionally, these methods and theoretical premises revealed and acknowledged my input into the process. Moreover, they enabled the accomplishment of this research. Furthermore, the maternal literature in chapter two and feminist poststructural methodology both informed the interpretations made in chapters 5 and 6.

Maternal literature suggests that there are many challenges still facing modern mothers. As feminist poststructural methodology encourages dissemination of the results of research and using it to effect social change in a responsible and accountable manner, it is evident that this topic and chosen methodology complement the achievement of common goals.

Doing, Reporting and the Product

As the process and the product are inextricably linked in qualitative feminist work, the doing, reporting, and the product are considered simultaneously in this section, with the criteria used to assess them, relevant for all. Here we are concerned with the Lincoln and Guba's four criteria as well as their later, and feminist, concerns with voice, reciprocity, positionality and so on (1985, 1995). The means I have used

to consider these are transparency of process, the self in research, member-checking, peer debriefing, voice and reciprocity, data engagement, and plausible reasoning. The arguments for many of these were detailed in this and the previous chapter and so will not be repeated here. What is outlined is their bearing on issues of goodness of research.

Transparency. It is apparent from the detail provided in the current and prior chapters that I am sincere in my attempts to provide a clear account of this research project (Fossey et al., 2002; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Understanding that the assessment of any research mainly comes through what is transmitted in the written account of it, I have endeavoured to provide a logical and easily read account of the entirety of the research processes. Academic and lay languages were used in an effort to enable both academic and other audiences an appreciation of the study. Through this also, the manner in which I arrived at my findings and interpretations is clearly explicated. Not only should this provide a basis for confirmability and credibility of the research, it also allows for dependability. Moreover, it meets Richardson's and Schwandt's respective desires for crystallisation and understanding (as cited in Embden, 1999 and Lincoln & Guba, 1994) as well as the methodological needs of feminist poststructuralist work.

The self. This thesis also gives a candid description of the manner in which my self has impacted on the research. I have provided accounts of myself as a mother and new researcher in this and the previous chapter, to enable readers to position both the text and the researcher. I have also reported on the reflexivity or critical subjectivity I engaged in throughout the research journey (see A Continuation of the Me in this Research - Reflexivity, p. 72), which included journaling about the study in general, the interview interactions in particular, and my responses to both. In doing so, readers are able to consider the findings and interpretations. Furthermore, in efforts of transparency and positionality, I endeavoured to present myself, and the research, candidly to the participants. I gave each participant a précis of my background and leanings, but for many reasons, including not wishing to impose myself nor lead the narrative, I kept this brief and neutral. Moreover, during the interviews I often felt unable to comment when participants made remarks I disagreed with. I recognise therefore, that I did not fully adhere to the feminist and qualitative principles of positioning the self and reciprocity (Lather, 1993; Lincoln, 1995). However, I have

outlined my reasoning for this earlier in chapter 3, and furthermore, the aim of this study was to obtain participants' views, not engage in debate. These endeavours further support the confirmability and dependability of this project, as well as the feminist poststructural requirements.

Member-checking. One of the central feminist poststructural methods of ensuring credibility is by engaging in member-checking. Cresswell (1998) suggests it also speaks to confirmability saying, "This approach...involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (p. 203). For this study, the narratives were mailed or emailed to the participants with a covering letter (Appendix E) which asked them to check their stories, and to amend or delete them if they so wished. As stated above (see p. 64), none of the participants disagreed with my rendering of their story, and some found them an interesting review. Several participants stated they would keep copies of their story for their child's personal history. The only caveat to this process is the timeliness of return to participants, and that delay between interviews and return of narrative means that participants could not possibly recall all of an hour-long conversation. However, as the interview was tape-recorded and faithfully transcribed, I view member-checking as being not so much about accuracy of detail, but rather a check that the essence of their thoughts, beliefs, and their selves, are rendered truthfully. Due to the pragmatic constraints and reasons outlined in chapter 3, the thematic analyses and interpretation were not taken to the participants. It is my intention to provide the mothers with a précis of the thematic and interpretive chapters in due course, with an invitation to read the full account if they wish. In spite of these issues, I believe the data to be both credible and confirmable.

Throughout this project I have presented preliminary findings to maternal scholars and others engaged in social and health research. From the majority of these there has been resounding recognition of the data and my interpretations. Moreover, the data and interpretations mirror that of much of the maternal research discussed in chapter two. With some research, I had the experience of seeing how my data could replace the author's with no loss of meaning in their work (Carolan, 2004b; Le Blanc, 1999; Mauthner, 1995; Miller, 2005; Nicolson, 2001). In addition, during the project, when engaging in informal discussions with the wider community, my data

and participant stories have resonated with many individuals, and this acknowledgment not only reassured me, but encouraged and supported the completion of the research. Given the above, and that I consider data saturation to have occurred, I feel the findings will be similar for other white, middle-class, heterosexual, partnered, and able-bodied new mothers in regional areas. Moreover, I also judge from my international conference attendance that some aspects of the data are universally experienced, and that others strike a chord mainly for women from industrialised countries. Therefore, I believe that approximate generalisation or transferability can be made from my data and findings (Johnson, 1997; Lincoln, 1985).

Peer debriefing. Aside from member-checking and confirmation from peers and others, I also engaged in a form of peer debriefing. This process involves a disinterested individual who keeps the researcher honest by asking hard questions (Lincoln, 1985). For this study, my doctoral supervisor acted as an informal and formal peer debriefer. Supervisory sessions functioned in the four ways Lincoln and Guba suggest. They challenged my methodological understandings and operationalisations; they provided me with an avenue to discuss my fears about being a new researcher and highlighted the mothering dilemmas I was having; they challenged my methods and beliefs about the data, and lastly, helped me to examine and resolve understandings and interpretations of the data. Although supportive and compassionate, my supervisor asked the questions which did not allow me to hide from inconsistencies.

Voice, reciprocity and engagement with data. Earlier (see p. 82) I discussed member-checking as a way of ensuring credibility of research. In addition to checking the accuracy of representation, member-checking also has relevance for the qualitative criteria of voice, reciprocity, and sacredness (Lincoln, 1995). Drawn from, and resonating with, feminist research notions of value and respect, these criteria are concerned with representation of alternative voices, trust and mutuality of research, and profound concern for dignity and interpersonal respect. The exhortation to faithfully and truthfully represent all the voices of the participants was paramount to me. It is apparent from the processes discussed above that I approached the women and their stories respectfully and did my best to ensure their words were presented truthfully (see Interviews between Budding Expert and

Mothers, p. 60 and Analysis - a Quest for Understanding, p. 64). In doing so, I fostered equality of relationship, dignity, and the emergence of difference, and multiplicities as suggested by Lather (1993).

A further significant aspect of these criteria is the inclusion of both the stories and the rich, thick descriptions in the thematic analysis. Provision of the participants' voices in these ways permits readers to make their own judgements about its usefulness for other contexts. Moreover, by allowing alternate and common voices to be heard, I engaged with the complexities inherent in poststructural research. Several of the participants spoke of how enjoyable the interviews had been and that it had given them a space to contemplate and share important beliefs and feelings. Furthermore, the length of this project also enabled me to engage with the data over a prolonged time. Therefore, I was able to review the data and my interpretations several times, as well as refine the way I dealt with it. The inclusion of all views, albeit disconfirming ones, as well as the long period of data engagement, strengthens the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of this research.

By virtue of the criteria discussed above, I believe the processes, the data, my reasoning, and the interpretations I present are reasonable, plausible, and defensible and thereby underline the quality of this research. Furthermore, many of these criteria speak to the ethical nature of research, which, as discussed earlier, is an inherent aspect of feminist poststructuralist research. Hence, quality assessment needs also to judge the ethics of the research.

Ethics

Ethics are integral to any research process, but are thought about more broadly by postmodernist researchers and are not seen purely as a separate formulaic procedure that stops once informed consent is obtained (Mauthner et al., 2002). As discussed earlier (see *Doing the Research - ethical concerns and positioning the researcher*, p. 40), ethical concerns permeate every stage and process of this research. For this research, ethical considerations include care and respect for all parties involved in the research, care and respect for the data, concern for the potential uses of the research, as well as the formal requirements of ethical research such as consent and anonymity (Lather, 1993; Lincoln, 1995). At the outset of this research, formal ethics approval was sought and gained from the University of Southern Queensland

Human Ethics and Research Committee. Additionally, the ethical principles of feminist research, such as being caring, reflective, and honest about the purpose of the research, my personal positions, and the expected use(s) of the information obtained, were followed throughout the study.

Formal ethical requirements. After an initial personal approach, potential participants were mailed an Information and Consent Form to read at their leisure and to contact me if they wished to proceed (Appendix A). In this way, I let the women control their participation. As it transpired, one woman who had expressed interest did not ever contact me, and so she did not form part of the group. The form included details of the purpose, procedure, potential risks, and benefits of participation, a pledge to maintain confidentiality along with the details of how this would be achieved, and a statement of the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any stage without fear of any negative consequences.

At the first interview, I reiterated the details of the study and participants were invited to ask any questions before they were asked for their written consent to be interviewed. Each was reminded of the voluntary nature of her participation, especially her freedom to refuse any questions, to withdraw without reason at any time during the interview, or during the research process. I also rechecked agreement to the tape-recording of the interview, after which the participants signed the form.

One criticism of informed consent being given at the beginning of a research project is that it may not be meaningful due to the evolutionary nature of some qualitative studies (Birch & Miller, 2002; Miller & Bell, 2002; Williamson & Prosser, 2002). This was discussed in greater detail in the previous chapter. Thus, given the 10-12 month period between the two interviews, I repeated the informed consent process in full at the second one.

At the time of the first interview, I asked the participant to choose an alias by which they would be referred to on tape and in text. In this way, although I could not provide anonymity, participants' confidentiality was maintained. The partners and children were also given pseudonyms. Interview transcripts are identified by these, with personal details of the participants held separately in a secure place. All transcripts and my interpretations of them are also kept in a secure place. Where

necessary, identifying characteristics of the participants and their families were changed to protect their identities.

This project did not involve the use of intentional deception. The chief risk I foresaw for the participants centred upon discussions of personal, and sometimes intimate, issues which unintentionally cause distress. Moreover, participants may have revealed illegal or reportable actions. This did not occur in any of the interactions, although there were occasional times when sensitive issues arose. However, in those cases the participants made their position about disclosure clear to me. For example, in one instance when talking of tension in the family after the baby had been born, one mother said, *Um, well, um we had arguments with both sides, both sets of parents...and, without going into too much detail and stuff, basically...* indicating she would keep the specifics to herself.

The other major issue I anticipated was that one or more of the mothers may suffer from postnatal depression. This was not evident during any of the interviews, although one mother was struggling with some physical side-effects of the birth. At her invitation, I made inquiries and found an alternate medical professional for her to consult. Additionally, she spoke of the support she was receiving from a family member. In many instances, the mothers spoke of emotional difficulties they were having with their new mothering. As I had experienced similar feelings and due to my tertiary training in Psychology, I was able to offer support by empathising and listening. At no time was the distress of serious nature.

General ethical requirements. Essentially, these requirements concern the feminist principles in which the centrality of the women, their dignity, and their stories, is maintained and respected. Moreover, respect for, and truthful representation of, diverse beliefs is a cornerstone. The ways in which I have adhered to these tenets have been discussed in chapter 3 and above.

Although I theoretically outlined the reasons for doing this research in the previous chapter, I have not yet specifically discussed the intended uses of this particular research. Realistically, this document will only be read by a few people. As part of the informed consent process, I also advised participants that I might present data at conferences and write journal papers, assuring them that confidentiality and privacy would be maintained.

My initial intentions for this research were to gain a doctoral qualification, contribute to knowledge about modern Australian mothering and thereby validate these particular, and all, mothers and their endeavours. Subsequently, my greater knowledge and the findings of this research, highlight to me some of the social mothering issues that need greater recognition. Therefore, I propose to write several journal and other papers from it. At time of writing I see a need for greater understanding of the silencing that modern mothers often feel. Also, there needs to be greater appreciation of the paradoxes of new mothering, and that many-sided models of mothering are needed. Although these topics and many others already exist in the scholarly domain, they require far greater dissemination within the wider community to encourage discourse that is not simplistic but deals with these complexities. I recognise that once papers are published, they are in the public domain and, therefore, can be misconstrued, or used for ends antithetical to my and feminist research principles. To mitigate this, I will approach published maternal scholars for advice and guidance.

I posit that the arguments above outline how the interweaving of this study's research processes and the final products indicate the quality and the goodness of this research. However, as Embden (1999) suggests, the goodness of this research is as emergent as the research itself. I therefore believe, that for some aspects, only time will tell how good it is. Moreover, a final acknowledgement is needed. As the judgement of the quality of a study comes primarily through appraisals of what is documented in its written report, the reader/audience needs to hear and evaluate *the story* of the research as well as the research itself (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). For that reason, the goodness of research is ascertained not only by the researcher, but by the audience(s). Therefore, like Embden, I assert that that the claims I make are at best tentative and that the reader(s) of this paper will make their own determinations as to the quality of this research.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the approaches taken and decisions made about research design, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. It has also discussed the quality of this inquiry, and the steps taken to ensure that the research was ethical. In the next chapter, Thematic Analysis, the commonalities of these 10 women's experiences of new motherhood are presented. Prior to that, the reader is

invited to peruse the narratives of their individual journeys into the realm of motherhood. These are available in the supplementary volume of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: FOUR CLEAR VOICES - THEMATIC ANALYSIS

. . . it's not all just fun and games and we sit around and play all day.

Heidi, PN interview

Introduction

The personal stories presented in the second volume of this dissertation afford us a glimpse of each mother's unique journey into early motherhood. The jointly constructed narratives foreground participants' voices whilst masking my own, and are an excellent way of connecting with the raw data. In this chapter, the analysis continues, but uses a thematic approach which maintains the prominence of the mothers' voices whilst allowing my own voice equal standing. This thematic analysis presents a view of the data as a whole, assessing for commonalities and divergences across the narratives.

A complementary method of appreciating the mothers' experiences, this interpretive approach investigates the interview data further by looking for common topics or discourse within the data. Quotes, or 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973), are used to support the analysis. Drawn from the original transcribed interview transcripts rather than the constructed stories, these thick descriptions enable the reader to interact with the raw data and verify, or otherwise, my interpretation. By exploring the data in this additional way, the reader's understanding of the data is further extended.

This analysis has a threefold function. Firstly, by considering the themes present in the data, we can see the aspects of new motherhood which are salient and important to these women, as well as the wider contextual influences they may be subjected to. Secondly, the changes within the themes across time show how the conceptions of motherhood are reworked from the abstract and tentative in the antenatal period, to the experiential engagement of a new mother postnatally. Finally, this analysis launches the process of interpretation as the themes underpin the concept of maternal identity discussed in the following chapter.

As discussed comprehensively in chapter 4, the themes were drawn from the data inductively. Repeated readings of the data identified common discourses and topics which appeared in all the interviews. These topics distinguished themselves to

me either through textual quantity, repetition, or tonal emphasis. Additionally, my prior knowledge of the literature assisted me to identify and name particular topics. These dominant/stand out topics created the foundation for the analysis presented here.

The thick descriptions used are quoted as completely as possible to allow access to the original data. Mindful that it may not be feasible to include preceding and subsequent talk, I will describe the context of the surrounding discussion for each exemplar where that is relevant. To preserve the speakers' voices slang, misspellings, and other imperfections are retained. Text enclosed by () indicates emotions or non-verbals such as pauses, while text enclosed by [] denotes clarifying insertions. Missing text is signified by '. . .' Other common grammatical conventions will apply.

The Themes

For these 10 mothers, four key themes were excavated from the data. The themes encompassed four essential elements of their early mothering experiences: (1) Conceptions of Ideal Mothering embraces notions of archetypal maternity; (2) Likely and Challenging Realities involves the likely and actual experiences of motherhood; (3) Life Progression/Personal Growth considers the mother in the context of relationships, the broader community and growth; and lastly (4) Upholding the Self encompasses the concerns of the individual as separate from, but intersecting with the mother identity. This section will look firstly at the model ways these women would like to mother, then move to their good and bad lived experiences of early mothering, and, finally, consider experiences of the self independent of mothering.

Conceptions of Ideal Mothering

This theme, conceptions of ideal mothering, dominated all the women's transcripts and was, therefore, the initial category of talk I identified. Further analysis only strengthened that first impression. The underlying basis of the mother ideal is the notion of the 'good' mother or mothering which requires 'correct' attitudes, attributes, and actions of mothers. The constitution of 'good' is historically and culturally proscribed, and is easily obtained (albeit unconsciously) from our families, the medical establishment, mass media, literature, mother's groups, and government. The 10 women in this study ably expressed, ante- and postnatally, their thoughts about the mother they wanted to, or felt, they should be.

The beliefs about ideal mothering clustered into three main areas or sub-themes; Biological, Instinctive, Wonderful Mothering; Exclusive Mothering; and Good Mother Attributes. Biological, instinctive mothering is the notion that mothering is innate, natural, and the ultimate self-fulfilment for women. Exclusive mothering encompasses the child-centred nature of these participants' mothering. Lastly, good mother attributes comprises a list of mothering characteristics and behaviours that these mothers considered paramount.

Pre-baby the strongest component of this theme was biological, instinctive mothering. This greatly diminished postnatally, being over shadowed by an exclusive mothering ideal which was a major aspect of these modern 'good mother'

discourses. Good mother attributes pre-natally were about personal characteristics whereas postnatally the focus was on appropriate parenting skills.

Biological, Instinctive, Wonderful Mothering

And I think it just comes, it almost comes naturally . . . Like, being at a party and not having your usual couple of drinks. You just sort of, automatically, switch into this new mode. Yeah. So. Probably thinking as a mother I guess.

Meg, AN interview

Meg's comment was one of many examples of the overt and subtle references to the biological nature of mothering. All the participants regularly used words and phrases such as natural, innate, instinctive, normal, and 'just knowing'. Moreover, many remarks also inferred that good mothers were those who were intrinsically maternal and naturally in tune with themselves and, therefore, their baby. Furthermore, the biological nature of mothering was not conceptualised as something only individuals experienced, but that this was a universal occurrence for all mothers and women. When Heidi talked about the support she had with her son, she spoke about feeling uneasy leaving him with her brother-in-law but that,

the mother-in-law and my mother I'd feel comfortable leaving him . . . the mothers, I think, because it's just the mother instinct . . .

Heidi, PN interview

The belief that mothering knowledge and skills would emerge instinctively with the baby was voiced by many. For Jenny, this appeared to be true:

. . . you can tell. I don't know what it is but you know when he's hungry, you know when he's thirsty, you know just. I don't know, you know (laugh) . . . books can't tell you that sort of stuff.

Jenny, PN interview

Furthermore, although aware that life would be irrevocably changed, the participants felt that as millions of women gave birth daily, it was a normal, everyday occurrence. However, some were not completely convinced, and, like Amy, challenged this notion:

I never thought I had the mothering instinct. I never thought I could be a mother. I thought, well you know, that's not, that's not me . . . but, people say

to me, well it comes naturally and I say well it doesn't. I don't know whether it does or not, but we'll wait and see.

Amy, AN interview

Inextricably linked to ideas of mothering being natural and innate, was the notion that all women find motherhood wonderful and ultimately fulfilling. Jasmine captured the essence of this belief when she talked about what she was looking forward to about being a mother:

Oh yeah. I don't think I feel fulfilled in life if I couldn't have a baby . . . it's just having a little baby I think also, just emotional fulfilment, it's spiritual, it's physical fulfilment, it's everything.

Jasmine, AN interview

For others, illness throughout most of the pregnancy had robbed them of the enjoyment and wonderfulness they had felt was an inalienable part of the motherhood package. For example, Liza told of a time her partner had come home from work and been less than sympathetic when he found her in bed in tears:

And I said but you don't understand, this is different, this is supposed to be a good thing and it's a bad thing . . . you know seeing other mothers . . . I was just thinking oh gosh, I can't wait for that experience, I want to be one of those people.

Liza, AN interview

Moreover, some participants contested the view that being a mother was the pinnacle of womanhood. Aphrodite spoke about how much she loved her son and would never give him back, but that he was not responsible for all the happiness in their lives, commenting,

I'll probably have another one. But I don't think it's, no, it is fulfilling, but it's not that all-encompassing, warmth where you think, 'oh I've got a baby, it's so lovely.' I'm, our lives were quite fulfilled before . . .

Aphrodite, PN interview

Beliefs and thoughts about the biological nature of motherhood shaped much of these mothers' antenatal narratives, and were still evident in the postnatal discussions. Moreover, concurrence was often expressed covertly, even if statements overtly contested ideas of mothering being natural and the greatest fulfilment for

women. It is clearly apparent that biological mothering was an insidious, powerful, and influential motif for these new mothers.

In addition to the notion of instinctive mothering, the participants also subscribed to the idea that good mothering necessitates being completely engaged in, and focused on the child. It is to this second, dominant belief of exclusive mothering, we now turn.

Exclusive Mothering

This sub-theme of good mothering is one in which the child is the central concern in the mother–child dyad, as well as within other relationships. Antenatally, this child focus was based on hypothetical ‘shoulds’ of good mothering, and was also balanced by a concern with the individuality of the mother (see above Individual Focus, p. 129). Postnatally however, the mothers had engaged fully with their child-centred ideals, seeing them as natural and inevitable, creating a modern adjunct to the previous sub-theme. As such it dominated the postnatal discourse, taking the place of the mothering-is-natural conception. Exclusive mothering embraces several key aspects. These are; centrality of the child, sole responsibility, intensive mothering, and selfishness and guilt.

Centrality of child

First and foremost is the centrality of the child about whom all things revolve. Several of the mothers spoke very matter-of-factly about their baby dominating their life, commenting that they didn’t mind the baby coming first. Aphrodite’s comments aptly capture the general sentiments. She appeared perfectly at ease with her son’s position of importance and said she felt it was easier to work around him, reorganising plans to accommodate his needs and routines:

We have no life. No, we do have a life, we have Alex’s life and then our lives fit around his. Somehow I thought his life would fit into ours, but that doesn’t work like that at all. Um, I think the emphasis is obviously on him. We are just, we come second and third, if that . . .

Aphrodite, PN interview

Mother knows best

Not only are the child’s needs considered paramount, with the mother’s and father’s needs being secondary, the women also subscribed to the notion that they

should generally carry the sole responsibility for child rearing and looking after the needs of the family. Heidi's comment below was representative of the common belief in a monopolistic mothering model:

. . . this baby is sort of a 24 hour, seven day every, you know, constantly, so it's, yeah in that sense it's going to be a bit of a shock, you know, just sort of having someone there and knowing that they rely on you, solely and, you know, no-one else is sort of there to really do what you have to do, it's your job, so.

Heidi, AN interview

While many mentioned calling on their partner or own mother for help, it was more in the nature of a one-off, or for 'extreme' situations. Good mothering it seemed was about constancy of care and of 100 percent availability. Indeed, Jenny spoke disparagingly about a relative who would,

palm her kid off to everyone else but herself, and won't take that responsibility of being a good mum and being there for it, you know.

Jenny, AN interview

For some, like Alison, the feeling of responsibility was linked with the notion of instinctive mothering. Having felt that only she was able to attend appropriately to her son's needs, she had only just realised that this now meant she was the only one able to settle her son:

I haven't been willing to give him over . . . because I'll instinctively just go and pick him up when he falls over . . . Yeah just because I've been wanting to meet Cheyne's needs because I've been the one that's spent so much time.

Alison, PN interview

Intensive mothering and childcare

Apart from being the sole provider of food, security and love, these mothers also saw good mothering as intensive involvement in educating and cultivating their child's mind and body. Referring to the importance of growing her baby, Aphrodite said,

I'd wanna make sure that develop mentally, they grow properly and you stimulate them, play the right games and spend time with them and that type of thing yeah.

Aphrodite, AN interview

Additionally, most of the mothers saw themselves as the primary teacher of moral and ethical values. These attitudes flowed over into discussions of formal day-care. Many of the women spoke of not wanting to use it unless it was important for the child's socialisation. Additionally, many felt such care could not supplant the amount of attention and stimulation a baby got from its mother. Meg's comments were representative of many of the mothers' feelings:

I don't like the idea of putting them into day-care a lot. Um, like, I like the idea of the kids meeting other kids and the social aspect of the child but, yeah, not too much in the first few years of life.

Meg, AN interview

I didn't want my child to be in this structured environment from the first living experience . . . I mean, they can't do as good a job as I can.

Meg, PN interview

Furthermore, it was suggested that mothers who did avail of it had no other choice (i.e. financial), or were using it for their own selfish desires.

Selfishness and guilt

Selfishness and guilt were an additional aspect of the exclusive (good) mothering sub-theme. Most of the participants used these terms during discussions of placing their own needs first, about having had negative thoughts about the pregnancy, or about not having made their child's needs paramount. For example, a few participants, like Jasmine below, spoke about feeling guilty for not eating and drinking the right foods during pregnancy:

'cos I, now I'm thinking it's not just for me, it's for the baby as well . . . I at least get the guilts about yeah that was a bit selfish 'cos it's not just my body any more? You know, I'm sharing this body.

Jasmine, AN interview

while others spoke about suppressing negative feelings because their thoughts and emotions could be felt by the foetus. However, feeling selfish was predominantly in

relation to constant availability for, and focus on, the child. Sarah was quite condemnatory when she spoke about some of the mums she had met through her postnatal class:

I just think that some people just aren't mums . . . They're not interested in talking about their baby or how they're going. They're more interested in talking about themselves . . . more selfish . . . And sort of left the babies a bit too much . . . just not mums in that way you're meant to be at a mothers group.

Sarah, PN interview

A few of the women did challenge the belief in child-centrality. For example, Lucy saw good and bad mothering on a continuum where neither martyrdom nor selfishness was healthy. She went on to say,

maybe that's where Mum's have to make the sacrifices, not in being over, um over-available . . . Like sometimes indulging yourself is the best thing for the baby, because it means that baby's growing up somewhat independent.

Lucy, AN interview

Although amenable to putting their child first, several of the mothers were very aware that they had been overly absorbed or obsessed by their babies. Some spoke about how all their waking moments were taken up with implementing or thinking about the baby's needs, and were looking to change this. Liza commented she wanted to shift the pendulum her own way a little more:

. . . it still is focused maybe 100% on her and sometimes I'm hoping that I can balance a little bit more with myself as well as like with my husband as well.

Liza, PN interview

These quotes aptly illustrate these mothers' strongly held beliefs that their babies should dominate their lives, and that the babies' needs are foremost. This exclusive mothering sub-theme was particularly dominant postnatally, moving the spotlight from the antenatal focus on the notion of natural, instinctive mothering. The third and final sub-theme of the ideal conceptions of mothering is closely related to the previous two in that it is concerned with personal attributes and practices which denote the good mother.

Good Mother Attributes

This sub-theme was equally present ante- and postnatally. However, antenatally the concern was mainly with personality traits while postnatally the emphasis shifted to mothering practices. Ideas about what constitutes a good mother appeared to come from societal notions of good mothering, and were then supported by evidence of a healthy, happy baby. These ideas were then further contextualised by the mothers' engagement within the wider community, and the comments or scrutiny they received.

Some of the traits the participants saw as important for mothers to possess were being: loving, nurturing, affectionate and supportive; patient and calm, able to cope with most situations; organised; a teacher; as well as having time and good lines of communication. For example, Alison wanted to be loving as well as,

Being kind and gentle, and supportive and understanding . . .

Alison, AN interview

Although most of the women talked about positive traits, they did not want to focus on them at the expense of discipline, and producing a difficult child. Alison used the term tough love when she spoke about raising her child to be responsible in the community. Heidi, when speaking about how she wanted to be as a mother, said,

I think I might be a strict mother . . . I don't want to be a pushover . . . I want to be the sort of Mum that they'll respect me and they can approach me . . . that I'm there for the child...in that sort of sense I suppose a mother, you know, mother's role in just keeping them safe . . . still being able to interact with them and having fun with them as well and not being a stick in the mud.

Heidi, AN interview

She goes on to say she wants a child who displays socially acceptable behaviour. Others too spoke about parenting outcomes, that is, the qualities they wanted their child to have. For example,

I like the idea of any children that I have being resilient and flexible.

Lucy, AN interview

Postnatally, the notion of the good mother had evolved from someone possessing these traits to someone who was engaged in the right mothering practices as well as knowing the correct thing to do at all times. There was however a limit to

how far one should go as Jenny, speaking about another mother she knew who read a lot of mothering books, commented,

. . . she's sort of one of those ones you know who is against baby food in the tins and the bottles...But most of it's pretty good and I'll check it all out . . . because I'm not going to feed him shit . . . and she's one like, 'well I mash up all my own fruit and do all that sort of stuff and I do the potatoes'. I'd rather give him fresh potato and pumpkin every night than freeze it . . . you just wonder if it's her playing up how good a mother she is.

Jenny, PN interview

Sarah spoke about feeling the worst mother in the world when a trip to her doctor diagnosed her daughter's colic after they had tried controlled crying for 11 weeks, and her baby had cried non-stop over three days:

So I've had a few guilty moments like that. Where I've felt . . . like questioned if I've been a good mum. Um . . . have I done the right thing? What are people going to think if they know that I let her go for that long?

Sarah, PN interview

Many of the mothers used their child's good health and good behaviour as evidence of their good mothering abilities. Some of them mentioned attributes that were similar to those previously listed characteristics of good mothers, such as being relaxed. The main evidence of a good baby, and thus good mothering, was how much a baby cried, or whether it slept well. Alison's comment was typical of many of the mothers:

I mean he was a beautiful baby . . . like when I was sick he didn't peep unless he wanted to be breastfed . . . Only cried when there was something really wrong and went to sleep fine, you know woke up every four hours.

Alison, PN interview

Breastfeeding was a major determinant as to whether one was considered to be engaging in good mothering. Most spoke antenatally of expectations and desires to do so. However, many of these mothers experienced difficulties with it, and spoke about the reproving attitudes of health care professionals and other mothers, if they were bottle feeding. Lucy spoke at length about her breastfeeding travails, and the self-preservatory actions she had learned to engage in with other mums:

if I knew I was talking to a Mum who was a mad keen breastfeeder I just didn't go into the conversation because I was going to get feedback that wasn't going to help me . . . but just their enthusiasm for the way they did things would have, I would have taken some of that on board as a criticism in a roundabout way.

Lucy, PN interview

Part of being a good mother for these mothers was possessing particular traits and skills, as well as engaging in certain appropriate behaviours. However, the above breastfeeding example indicates that the concept of the good mother was not merely an internalised notion, but was constructed in relation to others. A part of that construction was the examination by, and of, other mothers.

Surveillance

An important aspect of the good mother theme was the part played by surveillance. Many of the participants spoke antenatally about having watched other parents as an exercise in thinking about what practices they might, or might not, engage in. Sarah's remark above about some women not being mums was typical of these observations which also acted as a way of gauging one's own mothering competency. Apart from the examination of others, postnatally, several of the mothers also commented about the intense public scrutiny they had been aware of, whether this was real or not.

Much of the scrutiny the mothers had felt was related to their babies less than perfect behaviour: They were either crying, or needed discipline in public. Aphrodite's experience during a time her son was teething appeared to be typical. From her remark it is clear she is extremely aware of what is considered good versus bad mother behaviour:

. . . he was super crabby so we went down to the park and I wanted to put him to sleep and he was crying and screaming and we were walking up and down and up and down the path and I was standing there reading a Woman's Day while I was walking and I think people walked past and thought I was a bad mother because I couldn't even be bothered to take my child for a walk but I wanted to tell them we'd already walked 45 minutes that morning, this was a second walk to put him to sleep.

Aphrodite, PN interview

Many of the mothers spoke of ‘people looking at us’ when talking about uncomfortable or difficult mothering episodes with their child. What ‘the people’ were really thinking is a moot point.

The sub-themes, Biological, Instinctive, Wonderful Mothering; Exclusive Mothering; and Good Mother Attributes when considered together form a compelling basis for the theme of Conceptions of Ideal Motherhood. The above quotes provide but a small number of the examples available in the overall data. As stated at the outset, it was an exceedingly significant and influential theme. Therefore, it formed a substantial part of these mothers’ newly developing maternal identities: An ideal concept of how they would like to mother. These ideals were challenged by actual mothering realities these participants experienced, which is the next theme.

Likely and Challenging Realities

Juxtaposed to the prominent, ideal motherhood discourse was talk surrounding the possible and actual realities becoming a mother would bring. In the previous theme, what the mothers' desired from motherhood was clearly evident. This theme deals with the participants' expectations and experiences of the actuality of motherhood. Encompassing some of the confronting and negative aspects of becoming a mother, it includes emotional responses, as well as anticipated and real practical hurdles and issues. Four main sub-themes were strongly represented in the data; Fear and Change; Practical Realities; Silence and Unpleasant realities; and, Support and Advice.

Antenatally, this theme was dominated by a discourse of fear and change: Fears about coping, and a generalised fear of the unknown, as well as the understanding that life would change. Additionally, the participants seemed aware of some of the practical realities or difficulties they might face, such as sleep deprivation and not knowing what to do. This aspect strengthened postnatally as their experiences gave their expectations clarity and emphasis. Although there was some suggestion antenatally that being a mum had an unseemly side that was not always discussed, silences, unhappiness, and unacceptable thoughts had a greater intensity in the postnatal discourse. Support and advice extended the private difficulties by considering with whom the mothers' looked to for assistance with managing any problems, the help this was to the mothers and some of the problems that came with the support and advice.

Fear and Change

All the women talked about the enormous, and often overwhelming changes having a baby would make in their lives. Most however felt this was within their abilities to cope. Many were aware their entire lifestyle would change: They might have less time; some hobbies and interests would have to be dropped or altered; family dynamics would change; and that, initially for some, they would be at home full-time instead of going out to work. Talking about a conversation with her partner Heidi related,

I sort of said look, I said this is a big step for me, 'cos he can still go to work . . . and back to sort of normal . . . but yeah, and I'm sort of at home with this bub and, you know, like it's a big sort of culture change for me.

Heidi, AN interview

She also commented later that things would never be the same again, another feeling universal to these participants. Although, these women appeared to be aware of the coming changes, and were doing their best to prepare for them, some felt as Lucy did:

no matter how much I think about it and analyse it and prepare for it, and do all my reflections on the way to work and all that sort of stuff, no matter how much I do of that, I'm never going to be really ready, it's still going to happen and I'm still going to feel out of control.

Lucy, AN interview

Lucy's remark is indicative of the anxiety expressed by all the participants. Some were aware that the trepidation they felt was normal considering the momentous changes coming their way. Jasmine aptly described the underlying apprehension most of the women felt:

I think it's just, change can be scary.

Jasmine, AN interview

For some, like Jenny, finding out they were pregnant gave rise to fears about their ability to live up to expectations of competent mothering. When talking about whether she pictured herself as a mother, she commented,

It's scary, 'cos, well when I first found out I was pregnant, I cried for about probably, oh a good couple of hours. I thought oh, I'm not ready to be my mum.

Jenny, AN interview

Many were concerned about dealing with the needs of new babies and making the 'right' mothering choices. As Meg observed,

that overwhelming, should you use disposable nappies? Should you use cloth nappies? Should you go back to work? Should you demand feed? Should you feed on the clock? . . . I mean, it's something that every mother gets

dumped with and I know it's gonna happen . . . but you wonder how you're gonna cope with it.

Meg, AN interview

She went on further to talk about feeling daunted about the unknown territory of new motherhood and all the things one needed to know. However, the chief uncertainty expressed by all the women was how to manage a crying baby:

My biggest fear is not knowing what's wrong. Like if it's crying, what it's crying for.

Jenny, AN interview

An interesting element to this sub-theme was the feeling of surreality and shock several of the mothers admitted to. For some, like Amy who had not planned on children, finding out they were pregnant was unbelievable. She commented,

But I mean we didn't tell anybody for about 13 weeks because we were just so shocked ourselves.

Amy, AN interview

A few of the women said they consciously had to remind themselves they were going to have a baby. Even after the birth, feelings of unreality persisted. One mother spoke of having had to remind herself to collect her daughter from the sitter, while others felt a decided lack of preparedness. As Aphrodite said,

I don't think mentally I was prepared even though you've got all that time to do it, it was still a shock. We came home and we sat him in the thing and I said, "There's a baby in there and he belongs to us. What are we going to do with him now?" And we just sat and looked at each other.

Aphrodite, PN interview

Several of the mothers were surprised by the post-birth feelings for their baby that were opposite to expectations. Meg's pre-birth plan of returning to her career soon after the birth was very quickly squashed as her happy absorption with her daughter took hold:

I think I was quite cool about going back to work after about three months, but as soon as I had Emma I extended my maternity leave drastically. Um, and then went back to my previous job . . . and after the second day decided

to call it quits. So that was a very different outcome to I guess what I was expecting.

Meg, PN interview

The above examples indicate that, regardless of the preparation modern women engage in for impending motherhood, the initial experience of motherhood for these women was somewhat overwhelming. Furthermore, awareness that life would irrevocably change, brought with it a large amount of trepidation. Generally this was expressed in terms of concerns over whether one would be up to the task, as well as about the new skills and knowledge one would need. Although the women were prepared for some upheaval, some changes were greater than expected, and some were new. Apart from these apprehensions, participants also spoke about some of the practical difficulties they had anticipated and experienced, as well as unforeseen experiences.

Practical Realities

All the mothers were able to talk about the practical issues they imagined would face them once they had their babies. Generally, the women spoke about sleeplessness, managing chores, and having the knowledge to cope with problems. Although these expectations were correct, often they were experienced with greater intensity than predicted. Moreover, some mothers had to deal with completely unanticipated aspects of new motherhood.

One of the main comments made by the women ante-natally about the challenges they might face was the lack of sleep. Sarah's comment was typical when she listed some of the expectations she had about how it would be when she first brought the baby home:

I know it's going to be testing . . . I know that I'm going to get not much sleep. I know that, there's, I'm going to have no time for myself. I know it's going to be really hard to get things done.

Sarah, AN interview

The expectation of sleep deprivation had become an unpleasant postnatal reality for most of the mothers. Although many of the mothers foresaw tiredness, they appeared to have been unprepared for the extreme level of fatigue they would feel. They spoke of going to bed exhausted as well as getting up tired in the mornings:

I think the thing that got me when I first had Dylan was how tired I was – how actually physically tired you are and you just, you know, 3 o'clock in the morning you just – when you're trying to breastfeed and you're physically just about falling asleep and you're thinking: 'ooh I knew it was going to be hard, but you know, aw' . . . you don't actually realise it till it actually happens . . . And then you've got the next day to look forward to and then you've still got all your routine . . .

Amy, PN interview

Prior to the baby, others imagined that lack of sleep could lead to getting cranky and frustrated, that the house would be messy, and that they would not have time or energy for their partner. Some, like Heidi, were aware that fitting chores around a new baby would not be easy:

And just simple things like, you know we went grocery shopping yesterday and I think, 'how am I going to do this with a baby?', (laugh) you know, and I think, God those mothers are good when they've got this screaming kid and they can still go grocery shopping, so yeah.

Heidi, AN interview

Generally however, although the participants knew they would have some hurdles to face with a new baby, they were positive that they would work things out. Postnatally, it appeared that Jenny at least, had worked out her system to incorporate baby and household responsibilities:

. . . I'll do whatever I've got to do around him. I'll put the clothes in the clothes basket and he'll take them out and yeah, just help me . . . The washing up I'll do at night time so. Because that's a bit hard to start and stop and start and stop.

Jenny, PN interview

Nonetheless, Jenny's comment hints at some of the frustration doing tasks with a baby in tow gives rise to. Indeed, she later remarked about things taking longer, and being harder to achieve. Although Sarah's and Heidi's earlier antenatal comments suggested an understanding of this, what was not anticipated was the constancy of need that a new baby has of its mother. Aphrodite's postnatal comment was typical of many about how time-consuming and dependent a new baby was:

But, yeah, it's tough . . . it just gets tougher and tougher and tougher. From a demanding of your time point of view.

Aphrodite, PN interview

Furthermore, apart from the additional time everything took, many of the mothers talked about the extra level of organisation and planning they had to engage in, the complexity of which none of them had discussed prior to the birth. For the majority this related to the effort it took to leave the house. Some talked about how a simple chore such as getting milk became a major logistical event, while others spoke about the number of items they needed to carry with them:

Like I just get so frustrated . . . There's so much preparation to get out that door and then if you forget one thing it could be the end of your life . . . like if you forget [pain relief] and they're teething . . . and if you forget the dummy then you have to go and buy another dummy . . . so you do have to plan.

Alison, PN interview

Apart from frustration with juggling the demands of baby with chores, several participants talked about boredom, social isolation, and the lack of stimulation they got from a baby that few of the mothers had predicted:

I run out of activities to do with him. So, I don't know. I don't know what other mothers do with their babies but there's only so much Play School you can watch in one day.

Aphrodite, PN interview

As Alison and others found after the birth of their babies some desired outcomes resulted from trial and error, rather than a controlled implementation of prior or learned knowledge:

I've had to realise now I mightn't necessarily know . . . You try one thing, if that doesn't work, try another, try another and then go through it again and then sometimes it will just happen like they'll fall asleep . . . and you think, 'what did I actually do? I don't know?'

Alison, PN interview

In an effort to gain some control over the variability of life with a baby, many of the mothers spoke about their need to try and impose a routine on the day. This provided them a feeling of achievement. However, others talked about the way time just

disappeared, due in large part to the repetitive nature of feeds, nappy changes, and play and sleep times:

I don't know, my week days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months before you know it. Like this week, I don't even know where it's gone but it does seem to go a lot quicker.

Jenny, PN interview

One of the largest differences between antenatal expectations and postnatal reality was these mothers' experiences of breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding

Generally, there was very little discourse about breastfeeding during the antenatal interviews. Most of the participants wanted to breastfeed, but, although a few spoke about problems such as cracked nipples, or low milk supply, the overall attitudes were similar to Meg's when she spoke about how she saw herself being as a mother:

I hope to breastfeed, but in the same instance, you know, if something was to happen that didn't work, it's not something I'm probably hung up on.

Meg, AN interview

Postnatally, this had altered dramatically. The majority of the mothers had a lot of difficulty with breastfeeding, and some narrated at great length their breastfeeding story. Antenatally, Liza had commented she would try breastfeeding, but her experience of breastfeeding was less than wonderful:

So, she [baby], I had problems breastfeeding on the left . . . I ended up finding a lactation consultant and I thought right, I don't want to give up until I find a professional . . . so this went on for a week and then after that that's when I got the thrush. And she, the lactation consultant told me well I'd better go to the doctor and get some antibiotics because we didn't want . . . cross infection and that sort of thing. And then I just burst into tears in the doctor's and I'm like, oh I can't do this, I'm you know, tired and emotional. then I went back to the lactation consultant and she said, "Well, you can shut down on your left and only breastfeed on your right," and I thought, I'm not doing that! . . . I'm not going to have a soccer ball and a little pin . . . they don't make bras like that! So I went home and through my sister-in-law and a

friend who, you know, breastfeeding, it didn't work for them, or where they didn't have enough milk they decided to go to bottle so I spoke to all of them . . . my husband was, well whatever suits you . . . and I was stressing and I was sore. So we decided well that's it, we'll do the bottle. So then after like 2 weeks of trying different formulas and going out at 8:30 at night . . . she got constipated, go back to the doctor. . .

I think it was just that trial of having an expectation of I want to do this right and then it was like, why isn't it working?

I probably didn't realize that it, how it was such a hard job to do it.

Liza, PN interview

For these mothers, the practical difficulties they expected mainly involved sleep and tiredness problems, along with concerns they would not know what to do. Postnatally, they encountered, and coped with these as well as unanticipated issues such as managing chores around the baby, boredom, isolation, and breastfeeding problems.

One of the reasons Liza felt comfortable making the decision to bottle feed was her sister-in-law's/friend's advices that they had bottle-fed. The encouragement Liza had was typical of the type of support and advice many of these participants called on in times of need. Assistance of this nature was vital to the management of some of the practical difficulties the mothers encountered.

Support and Advice

Integral to the discourse regarding the practical realities the new mothers faced, was the support and advice they received when they looked to others for help or knowledge. Not surprisingly, the main sources of help cited were their own mothers or sisters, and friends who were mothers. Additionally, some mothers spoke about contacting professionals such as child health nurses, midwives, and doctors. A few mothers also mentioned baby and parenting books. However, the discourse showed a certain level of tension when engaging with the sources of support.

A close mothering or pregnant friend was cited as the greatest source of assistance by these mothers. Having a friend who was going through similar experiences provided them with immense support. Discussion about the stages of pregnancy, problems, and uncertainties, as well as asking for advice, and swapping

knowledge was something most of the mothers appeared to be happiest doing with a friend. Meg's main confidante while pregnant was a friend who was having her third child:

because we have been pregnant at the same time, we've developed a fairly good bond and she's cried on my shoulder a lot and I feel quite comfortable ringing her and saying, what in the hell's going on today. And I'd probably, probably even ring her before I'll ring my Mum . . .

Meg, AN interview

Additionally, many mothers talked about their postnatal group as a place they could express problems in a supportive atmosphere, obtain information, and reassurance they were on the right mothering track from midwives and other new mothers. Conversely, several mothers remarked about a feeling of competitiveness that existed within mothering groups. In spite of the constructive experiences, Sarah also expressed the double-edge of involvement with other mothers:

the worst thing about mothering is mothers. Like just the comparison. That's probably the thing that shits me the most . . . Like it is overwhelming...you need these support networks when times are tough . . . No-one should be judging you in your mothers group anyway because that's what they're supposed to be about but sadly they do. Some women do.

Sarah, PN interview

Aside from contemporary mothers, most of the participants spoke about their own mother as an important source of information and guidance. Overall, the participants seemed to feel very comfortable getting help from their mother. Jenny was extremely grateful to both her parents for their help and for her mother's advice:

It's made it heaps easier. Lots . . . like every morning...he goes up there and plays and I can come down and put my washing on and have a shower and all that sort of stuff . . . They're a big help.

Jenny, PN interview

However, concerns about advice being outdated and at odds with modern knowledge did exist. For example, one mother commented about having to say no to her mother when she wanted to put her daughter on her stomach to sleep. Lucy highlighted

these generational differences when she talked about asking her mother and mother-in-law for help:

I'd feel comfortable ringing Mum . . . But, my Mum's only 20 years older than me. While my mother-in-law's 40 years older than me, so there's almost a generation between them, and, and there's a generation of (laugh) opinions between them as well.

AN interview

This ambivalence towards older women's wisdom was also evident in the general acceptance of and reliance on advice from professionals such as doctors, midwives, and child/developmental psychologists over the experience of lay persons. However, while most of the mothers had greater faith in expert support, many of them expressed the uncertainty they were caused from receiving many differing professional opinions. Some also felt overwhelmed by the enormous quantity of information that was available such as the multitude of baby and parenting books:

. . . 'Cos I met about 12 midwives, all different opinions, in the hospital and then the hospital ladies had different opinions to the doctor . . . that's tough when you don't know what you're doing . . . everyone warns you that will happen anyway . . . but it just makes you slightly frustrated.

Jasmine, PN interview

Although all the mothers talked about finding support when they needed it, a common attitude amongst the women both ante- and postnatally was that help was for specific situations or emergencies, rather than having it on a daily basis. Moreover, some felt that asking for help would be an imposition on other mothers. Generally many saw themselves as being self-reliant, and that they would keep trying until they had exhausted their personal mothering alternatives.

For these mothers, help was viewed as something they would not turn away, but would use sparingly, and was something they would accept on their own terms. There were many contradictions in that they saw mothering friends, their own mothers, and professionals as being supportive, but also as problematic. However, advice and help was generally taken in the spirit it was intended, with the mothers choosing what felt right for them. From this generally positive aspect of the reality of early mothering, we turn to the unseemly and sad experiences these mothers had.

Silence and Unpleasantness

Many of the mothers spoke of the ugliness and silence that they had experienced. Although minimally present ante-natally, especially for those women who were ill throughout their pregnancy, it was strongly evident within the postnatal discourse. This sub-theme describes the unpleasant, and often messy, side of mothering that these mothers were willing to speak of. Additionally, these women discussed some of the silences and silencing that is commonly expressed in mothering research, as well as some of the unhappiness they felt.

Silence

There were many comments made which either alluded to, or directly dealt with, the silences and silencing around the negative aspects of becoming a mother. Several of the mothers spoke about particularly unattractive aspects of mothering information they were not privy to until they joined ‘that mother’s club’, and remarked that it was as though they had spoken to the wrong people. Liza, who was quite ill throughout her pregnancy, commented on the purely positive tone of her pre-natal book, and also said that it wasn’t until she spoke about her own illness that she had heard of others who were also ill:

oh they’re not telling me things, about the bad things, they’re only telling you all that nice, positive, vibey stuff, and it was like, well I’m not feeling like that . . . Yeah, so it’s been, it’s been an experience . . .

Liza, AN interview

Liza’s account shows how her disclosure of her illness encouraged other similar stories to be heard. Alison recounted a poignant conversation she had had with her neighbour in which she admitted to an awful day she had had with her son. Her story also appeared to give the other mother permission to speak about some of her own less-than-delightful mothering experiences:

I remember on, I had an absolute shocker of a day and Cheyne was teething and I didn’t know . . . anyway came home and Julie came from next door for some reason and I said, “Oh I’ve had a crap day. Blah, blah, blah . . .” It just, it all came out and she said, “I’m so glad to hear that someone else has days like that”. . . And I just thought ‘we’ve been neighbours for ages, how come you didn’t feel like you could say that to me’ . . . So we’re sharing that

more now . . . but yeah it was just an interesting . . . situation . . . because it was just like the relief in her face and her voice when I said that. She said, “Oh, Alison, I have days like that too!”

Alison, PN interview

Lucy’s awareness of the cultural constraints about negative motherhood were clear when she talked about how she had learned to amend her anger about the impositions a new baby had had on her life and so was able to voice her discontent:

it wasn’t acceptable to say [I] resented her . . . No one to express it to. I only told Shane a month ago. That I was having those thoughts . . . it’s not the sort of a conversation I think that you can have on the phone, but the closest people I have nearby are my mother who I wouldn’t say it to, Shane’s mother who I would never dream of saying it to, and my best friend . . . who’s going through the IVF process. So having a discussion with her about wishing I’d never had a baby is probably totally inappropriate. And at the same time that created a whole new set of feelings of guilt. Like, we should be pleased that we’ve had a baby and she’s healthy and beautiful . . . so I really needed to reframe it so that I can talk to [my friend] about missing work. That’s okay. Talking to her about resenting having a baby is not okay.

Lucy, PN interview

Others were also conscious that the negatives of mothering were socially taboo and were to be kept within close family. Several of the mothers related occasions when they had been unable or hesitant to speak freely because the private thoughts and feelings did not correspond with the expected ideal of motherhood. Amy posited that many mother’s caution was due to a concern that others would judge them and see them as bad mothers. Heidi amplified this concern more clearly, stating,

I mean I suppose it’s a big thing for I think mothers to admit that they’re upset. And you wouldn’t tell a general person, “Oh God, I’m really upset today or depressed or, um, I can’t handle this”. You try and just put on a brave face for the general public and you say, ‘oh no, I’m fine’. Nothing is wrong and so they think that you’re coping with it. But, you know, at home then you sort of break down . . .

Heidi, PN interview

Feeling down

Heidi made this comment after she spoke about how she had ‘probably’ been ‘a bit depressed’ in the early months of her son’s life due to having to come to terms with a new life. She said she had only mentioned this to one other girl who was also having difficulties, and that it wasn’t until she had focused on her own needs that she felt ‘back to normal’. Several others identified with this general sense of wretchedness. Alison talked about being emotional and crying all the time and that

it was just being sick all constantly, all the time, so that really got to me . . . I remember saying . . . “Oh, do you think I’m suffering from postnatal depression?” because I just felt like everything was on top of me all the time and like I couldn’t really enjoy Cheyne that much.

Alison, PN interview

Alison had bled heavily after the birth and had had to return to hospital for a dilation and curettage, as well as having had family and financial problems at the same time. For others, feelings of unhappiness, although experienced with similar intensity, were more transitory in that they related to specific incidents that, once solved, eliminated the negative feelings. Sarah recounted the time her baby cried incessantly due to colic, which caused her to become extremely miserable and,

. . . not . . . just depr, down, just felt down in myself a little bit of a failure you know “am I good mum” like questioning yourself.

Sarah, PN interview

Once the colic had been diagnosed and treated, things improved considerably, and although Sarah had had some residual guilt about the length of time it took to sort out, she had been enjoying motherhood since. For most of the women, a crying baby, and inability to solve the problem, was a major source of stress and irritation. Occasionally it led to less than attractive responses.

Ugliness

One mother brave enough to voice her extreme frustration with and ugly thoughts about her baby’s crying was Aphrodite when she observed,

there are some things that just make you uptight . . . like when he screams all the time when he has, like when he’s been sick and he, we’re lying there at three a.m. and he’s screaming and I’m going, ‘for God’s sake, just shut up!’

And I can see why people would shake a baby and, for babies who are really naughty and he's a good baby but, um, I think we're quite relaxed though.

Aphrodite, PN interview

although she rescued her negative comments by reversion to a good mother attribute at the end, however. The main examples of the ugly side of motherhood often came from the physical side of early mothering experiences. Several of the women spoke of the bodily discomfort they felt during the latter part of their pregnancy:

. . . the swollen feet and the huge stomach and the kicking all the time and it never stops at night and the leg cramps. (laugh) . . . It's wonderful to be pregnant – no it isn't!

Amy, AN interview

Labour and birth accounts provided the most examples of bodily ugliness. Whether the birth was long or short, several of the mothers were shocked and dismayed by the reality. Heidi had an exhausting and extremely difficult 13 hour labour, at the end of which her son was born with his thumb in his mouth causing her to tear badly on one side. After relating the tale of the birth she went on to remark,

I was in bed . . . first two or three weeks . . . that's another thing, I got haemorrhoids with it which most people do I think when they have a natural birth . . . Um, so on top of my leg being very painful, like I'd always get sharp pains down my leg if I moved the wrong way and just putting weight on my right-hand leg was, um, really hard. Um, and still is a little bit . . . Lying down was the most comfortable position for me. And if I wanted to sit down say in the lounge then I had to have, like a nice cushion on my bum. You know, it's a horrible thing to talk about but everyone goes through it I think and, um, but some people just don't admit to it. So.

Heidi, PN interview

An adjunct to the birthing experience was the sense of dehumanisation or invisibility several of the mothers experienced. Although Heidi had received some home help after the birth, it had been focused on her son, with her own discomfort receiving little useful attention. Her right leg still troubled her at our eight month interview:

my doctor . . . he just shrugs it off and says, “Oh well it’s just the muscle,” and, but I don’t think it should have gone on for this long. Which I’m a bit annoyed about. Like I don’t want to have to put up with this pain for the rest of my life just because of having a baby.

Heidi, PN interview

Alison also spoke about how her wishes for a quiet, calm birthing environment were not heard, the disrespect with which her person was treated, and the midwives’ lack of professionalism:

. . . I did have a few fights with the nurses in the middle of labour . . . [S] was so rude. She later came in, because I told you I had the probe to check, to keep an eye on Cheyne . . . the first time when she came in and she said to me, “I’m going to do this.” And I said, “Who the hell are you?” You know, like she didn’t even introduce herself, nothing . . . so she came in later, I was on all fours, and someone was playing with my probe and obviously they were just putting their fingers anywhere they wanted to and I knew it was her and I just said, “Is that you [S]?” And she said, “Yes, yes, it’s me. I’m so sorry.” And I just thought, ‘ohhh’.

Alison, PN interview

Learning to breastfeed also caused angst and physical distress for some of the mothers. Apart from a multitude of diverse suggestions, the new mothers had to contend with sore and cracked nipples, mastitis, and changed body shape. Most of these mothers had difficulty with breastfeeding, but decisions to use formula were often met with disparagement. Some spoke at length about the extent they had gone to, to breastfeed, as well as the anxiety choosing to bottle feed had caused them. Despite this, midwives or child health nurses were very authoritative, or dismissive, hurtful, or just plain rude. Jasmine touched on the invasion of privacy she felt, and the almost cursory treatment of a woman and her body when she related the difficulties she had experienced getting her daughter to feed:

. . . we had all these different midwives roughly shoving her on and some of them were, a couple were gentle but a few were really rough. And it wasn’t a pleasant experience

Jasmine, PN interview

The examples above provide a clear picture of the unappealing side of early mothering experiences. Furthermore, it appears that on occasions these mothers felt unable to reveal or assert any genuine negative feelings. When combined with the practical realities of mothering, the paradoxical nature of support and advice, as well as the enormous life changes experienced, it was evident that the transition to motherhood was not necessarily easy for these women. However, at the same time these women suffered difficulties, they also experienced motherhood as self-affirming and joyous. To discover the positive aspects that becoming a mother engendered, we now consider the third theme, Personal Growth.

Life Progression or Personal Growth

I've been wanting, been feeling the feminine urge to reproduce since I was about 23, so, and that actually really came on strong when I met my husband . . . meeting the person that you just think, yes, you know, this is the one. And I would like to have a family with this person . . . I think it's one of the most important things you can ever do in life . . . Part of why we're here really . . . It's a spiritual sort of thing to believe . . . it's all part of the circle of life and, yeah. And that feels great. I feel already more connected, I think, to other mothers and other people in a sense that well I'm, I've now joined this other circle. And I, I'm producing life and it's growing in me and, and yeah, you know, it's just an amazing feeling.

Jasmine, AN interview

Spoken during Jasmine's musings about what she was looking forward to about having a baby, the above text aptly encapsulated the essence of this particular theme. This category of talk was about considering oneself and one's mothering within a larger context where the participants have moved from individual concerns to thoughts of self in relation to others. Antenatally, this theme was seen mainly in talk about motherhood as being an expected part of the human life cycle, the importance of family, and the self as connected with the wider community. Postnatally, the emphasis had changed considerably. Whilst some talk about family and community was still present, it was overshadowed by a more personal sense of a broadened or extended self. Engaging completely with motherhood, the participants were beguiled by their babies, something which was surprising to some and not anticipated by any. This was evident through talk of their integration and enjoyment of their new role as well as their sense of confidence and assurance about their mothering.

The final component of this forward-looking theme, present both ante- and postnatally, relates to the spiritual, and deeply-felt emotions of love and awe. This element of motherhood was expressed through a general sense of the wonder and joy associated with the production of new life, as well as through something I have called Mother Love. This intensely personal expression of the mother's special relationship with their child concludes this section.

Normal Life Cycle: The Right Time to Become a Family

It is apparent from the excerpt above that Jasmine's view of motherhood is profoundly linked with notions of naturalness and the predetermined aspect of the human lifecycle. Analogous to the biological nature of mothering discussed earlier (see Biological, Instinctive, Wonderful Mothering, p. 92), it relates more to the individual-within-relationship contexts. Although motherhood and babies were wanted by nearly all the mothers, for most, falling pregnant had not been consciously planned. Rather it was more an acceptance of the correct order of things: The time was right to move on to the next life phase. As Jenny and Heidi so eloquently said,

I was on and off the pill . . . and we sort of said, well, if it happens, it happens.

Jenny, AN interview

. . . you know, we're established . . . it was just, you know, okay, this baby's come along and we're ready . . . We didn't want to have kids until we were ready . . . we feel that we're mature enough now and we can handle the next step I suppose in life. People say you go through stages in life . . . you know, it's just, be nice to have our own little family.

Heidi, AN interview

Even for those who questioned this dominant life-progression narrative, its persuasiveness was undeniable. Overseas travel had opened Lucy (and her partner) to alternate lifestyle options which had challenged her previously held assumptions that she would follow the 'normal' lifestyle trajectory, "*and all of a sudden it actually had to be a choice, it wasn't just following the path anymore.*" However, she and her partner had decided that not becoming parents would be a cause for regret in later life. Amy though, showed very real resistance to the traditional family experience, stating she'd never felt maternal. Having married later in life, her pregnancy had been a complete shock for her and her partner:

. . . neither of us had ever thought that we would, um, we would have children. And I mean my sisters and friends and everybody are all having babies at the moment. And, yeah, it's nice to go over and see them and play with them and give them back. And I'd never thought, no, I'd like one of those. Never.

AN interview

Inextricably tied to the notion of readiness for motherhood, was the desire to 'be a family', and of a shifting focus from the self and coupleness. All of the mothers spoke about friends with children and of the importance of family as reasons why they were looking forward to motherhood. Although also pertaining to extended family, these 10 mothers conceptualised 'family' as predominantly being mum, dad with child or children. For example, Meg and Alison say,

And to, yeah, to have this little person and watch them develop and take on that new facet of our marriage as a family, too, I think, will be really exciting and challenging.

Meg, AN interview

. . . like I've always said, there's no way I would be a single mum by choice . . . I've had girlfriends . . . have desperately just wanted to be a mum and would give up any idea of having a partner if they could just be a mum and I've always said, "No ways. I always want to have a family".

Alison, AN interview

It is clear from the quotes above that for most of the participants, although the pregnancies were not planned in terms of exact timing, they were ready to move on to what they saw as the next customary step in their personal development. This focused primarily on their burgeoning nuclear family, and their relationship within that. However, for most of the participants, the image of motherhood incorporated their evolving place within an extending kinship group and the wider community. It is this extended sense of a mothering self we now consider.

A Broadened Self

Although the creation of their own family was of great importance antenatally, many of the participants spoke in terms of connectedness with, and growth of, their extended families and the broader community. This discourse was

future-oriented rather than present-focused. While still evident postnatally, talk became more centred on the concept of an expanded self. At the eight month mark, the new mothers predominantly talked about changes to themselves, an altered perspective of the world, and of their roles within it.

Connectedness

Meg's view of family captured the importance of kinship groups and the sense of looking forward. Hers was a longitudinal outlook that encompassed not only her immediate future as a new mother, but a vision of her family in later life:

And then sort of, it's a whole new planning for the future of you know . . . Watching them develop and just an achievement to get them there. A huge achievement. And someone to love and share your life with . . . Like, my overarching longsighted views is, it would be very sad to grow old without family around you.

Meg, AN interview

The optimistic view of, and desire for, an extended family group was echoed by several others. When asked what images she had of life after the birth, Lucy talked about family get togethers and watching the bonds between multiple generations:

I have a rosy picture of Christmas, because my brother and his wife will be down and their little girl . . . that's, that's nice, like I like that idea of you know, Mum and Dad being able to see their kids, and their kids' kids and that whole connectedness. I like the idea that this is something that Shane and I are really doing together.

Lucy, AN interview

Lucy's remark also alludes to a theme common to many of the women. Having a baby was not only about a self-interested extension of one's own family, but about contributing positively to the future of their community. Their child would be someone who they would teach and share with so the child could participate and make its own contribution to the world. When asked what she meant by being a responsible mother Alison said,

Um, also bringing up the child . . . teaching him to be responsible as well . . . To be an active part of the community or like so that he can function himself.

Alison, AN interview

In addition to extending family and community, many of the mothers spoke of their interest in meeting other mums and of involvement in a group they had hitherto been outside of. As Jasmine said, *“I’m now joining, you know, the ranks of other mothers.”* Moreover, there was talk of the deepening of other relationships through an increased appreciation for, and understanding of, friends and family who were also mothers. This feeling of collegiality was also indicative of the women’s emergent identification as mothers.

Acceptance/integration of new role

An important aspect of this theme was the concept of an extended and changed self. Many participants talked about their views of the world having altered, as well as speaking about having to come to terms with their new role and identity. When asked what, if anything, was different for her since her son had been born, Amy commented,

I think I’ve grown a lot, actually yes, and I have actually learnt a lot, yeah. A lot of my ideas have changed, from having a child . . . I’m probably a lot more tolerant of children now than I used to be . . .

Amy, PN interview

For most, identification as a mother was a gradual process. These mums spoke of mothering more as being their job, or the role they had assumed within the family. For example Aphrodite said,

when he’s asleep and I’m lying in bed about to go to sleep I think, ‘oh isn’t life nice and I’m happy,’ and that’s great. And you get up the next morning and it all starts again. And that’s okay.

Aphrodite, PN interview

For Heidi the integration of her new mothering self with her old identity had been quite difficult, and she seemed to still be coming to terms with it. When asked if there were other comments she would like to make, she spoke about how enjoyable she found mothering, but went on to say,

So, yeah, it’s a totally different lifestyle and I, I like it, so. I’ve just learnt that this is, this is my life now . . . okay this is what I have to do now. Um, this is my job, so, yeah . . . I’ve really had to work on myself with it.

Heidi, AN interview

All these mothers spoke about the affirming life-changes having a baby had brought them, which were indicative of their acceptance of their new role, and their growing identification as mothers. Jasmine however, was unique in that it seemed she had completely embraced her new life and now identified fully as a mother.

Um, yeah, it's really important to jump into the role of motherhood as much as you can.

Jasmine, PN interview

Linked to the integration and acceptance of their new role, was a general feeling of happiness and confidence in their mothering abilities. Having managed the first 8-9 months without major incident, the mothers were generally feeling happy with themselves, and competent.

Enjoyment and confidence

For some of the mothers, the ease with which mothering occurred for them came as a pleasant surprise. When asked what she was enjoying about being a mother Jenny said, “*Everything.*” She then went on to explain,

It's been easy. Very easy. I don't know what I was worried about at all. Um, the birth was really easy. I actually enjoyed it . . . Yep. It's very good. I love it. Wouldn't change it for the world.

Jenny, PN interview

For some, it had also meant greater flexibility. For instance, Meg found that she had been able to socialise with friends in a way that had previously been closed to her because of paid employment commitments;

I have kicked back and had coffee with my friends. And it's been a really good life. Very relaxed . . .

Meg, PN interview

The enjoyment Meg had in her new life suggested a certain level of assurance in her mothering, so that she was able to go out and about and socialise with her baby. Certainly, many of the mothers indicated they felt confident in their new skills, after their eight months of practice. For several of the mothers, the good health of their baby was evidence for knowing that they were doing the right thing. As Liza said when asked if she felt she was a good mother,

I look at her and I think she's healthy, she's happy the majority of the time. She's not broken. She's got a lot of coverage.

Liza, PN interview

The trust in one's own mothering abilities had not been easily come by for some of the mothers. Lucy related her early difficulties with breastfeeding and how she had felt incompetent because, *"I felt, you know I felt it was all me....It was nothing I could learn....There was nothing I could do."* However, that had been replaced with complete self trust. The large amount of time she spent with her baby meant that she felt she knew what to do, and could, therefore, ignore others' advice. This was similar to most of the others, whose confidence was clear from comments they made about their parenting choices. For example, when Amy spoke about getting advice for problems and the many different suggestion she received, she said,

And then you just think, "Well what's going to work for me?" and you do whatever suits you . . . You sort of just work your way.

Amy, PN interview

It is evident from the excerpts above, that the women saw their entry into motherhood as a broadening of their self identity. Apart from the practical impact of a baby on their relationships, the importance of family and friends became more salient. Furthermore, postnatal talk indicated that they now identified themselves as mothers, and felt confident and comfortable with their role and skills. Related to this more external expression of one's personal growth and contribution to the world, were the deeper feelings, or spirituality engendered by the conception and production of new life.

Spiritual Essence

A fundamental aspect of this theme, the spiritual nature of motherhood was articulated by all the women in either of two ways. The first was a more universal expression of joy, excitement, and wonder at the pregnancy and birth, and thus the intensification of the spiritual self. The second feature, Mother Love, extends this sense of the miraculous, but illustrates the individual's specific sense of attachment and captivation with her baby.

Antenatally, all the mothers talked about being excited, and this was expressed in various ways. For some, like Lucy whose earlier pregnancy tests had been negative, finding out was a wonderful experience:

found out that I was pregnant, so it was a big surprise . . . that was the week before Christmas. Got all excited about that and told everybody, then the week after Christmas I started bleeding so . . . went off and had a scan and found out the baby was still there . . . so that was very exciting to know.

Lucy, AN interview

However, not all the participants were as delighted in the early stages of their pregnancy. For others, positive feelings had been delayed by illness or unhappiness about the pregnancy, and only came later, or were activated by prenatal scans:

We're excited now. And now that we've actually, we had a scan not so long back...and you could actually see everything. This is the eyes, and this is the nose and this is the mouth . . . I think Robin got excited.

Amy, AN interview

For several of the mums, exhilaration was connected with tension. The anticipation about meeting the baby was tempered by feelings of impatience and anxiety as they approached the impending birth. As Aphrodite stated,

It's sort almost at the point now where you're just going, 'oh I wish it would just hurry up' . . . just come and get out . . . and then we can just start getting on with life,

Aphrodite, AN interview

while Sarah's succinct and candid comment sums up the contradictory feelings common to many of the women:

I'm pretty excited though. Scared and excited.

Sarah, AN interview

Feelings of wonder and awe were related prenatally to feeling movement, and to the realisation that there was a baby inside. As Liza said antenatally, “sometimes I think, I look at my tummy or my belly button sticking out, I think, that's a baby!” For some, the miraculous nature of growing a child was something that intensified their familial relationship both ante- and postnatally:

um, some of the most beautiful moments we've both said to each other that we've ever felt together is when like when I'll be just sitting there alone and the baby will kick and he'll put his hand on my belly and we'll sit there together feeling it move, just look at each other in just amazement of wonder

and think, wow, we made something in there, and it's just, you can't describe that feeling.

Jasmine, AN interview

Jasmine, like others, found being a mother at home, “good for self-analysis and reflection.” Having a baby had taught her many things about her self, and had expanded her self-awareness and spiritual nature. Not all the mothers spoke of the wonderment of pregnancy. However, all the mothers expressed an important aspect of the spiritual nature of motherhood: The very personal and special love they all felt for their baby. This is called Mother Love.

Mother Love

Deeply personal, Mother Love is the individual's feeling of love and connectedness with their baby. This component is a transmogrification of the expression of the awe and wonder most humans feel at the miracle of life. All the mothers spoke with great emotion about their love for this new person in their lives, which transcended all previous loves. Moreover, this love was something intense, unique, and unlike any love felt before. Liza's comment about what she was enjoying as a new mother referred to this inability to adequately comprehend this new love as well as the miraculous:

it's such a different sort of love that comes before, well before anybody else. I sometimes think I can't believe she's mine. You know although you're with her the whole day and you're doing all these things you sometimes have a reality check and think, oh my God, this is mine.

Liza, PN interview

For Sarah, this feeling was expressed viscerally as a longing to somehow absorb the quintessential beauty and purity that is intrinsic to new babies:

She's so beautiful, she's so beautiful; I just want to bite her....You know when you just get . . . So excited . . . mmm . . . (laughing). Show you how much I love you.

Sarah, PN interview

This desire for absorption of the miraculous was articulated by many of the mothers who spoke about their babies' laughter, their ability to lose themselves in their babies' play, or as Alison says, watching them think and grow:

I really love watching him explore the world and stuff he's never seen before or . . . when a butterfly has come around him . . . and he will just sit there and he will be just so amazed at this thing flapping its wings.

Alison, PN interview

Associated with the overwhelming love the mothers had, was the feeling of an elemental connectedness with their babies, from whom their love was returned unconditionally. Although dubious about the concept of bonding, Lucy spoke with great poignancy about the first moments of her daughter's life:

After she was born they took her away to do all the little checks, and then they brought her back . . . and she was crying and crying and crying and I just turned my head and went "hello" and she stopped crying. And that worked for the first week in the hospital. Whenever she heard my voice she would stop crying and I thought, oh, she knows who I am. That's so lovely.

PN interview

Many of the mothers spoke of the babies' love and need for them. For some this was articulated in terms of the intense and overpowering protective feelings they held for their baby as suggested by Amy:

I mean once you hold 'em you just want to protect them, you just want to love 'em, you just think, you know, "I'll do anything for you".

Amy, PN Interview

The powerful emotions of wonderment and unnameable love were experienced by all the participants in this study. Although spoken about antenatally, the profundity of their feelings took them all by surprise, but with great delight.

One can see that for all the participants, motherhood has meant a profound shift in their interests as well as their individual identities. They were now focused on their new position as mothers within their families and the world. Moreover, they appeared to have developed a new side to their maternal identity in which confidence in their abilities had helped the integration of this new aspect. Additionally, on a very personal level, a sense of the deeply spiritual nature of the world and human life supported their enjoyment of their emerging mothering self.

Upholding the Self

This fourth theme was a subtle, but noteworthy part of the discourse regarding the transition to motherhood. In many ways it was separate to the other themes because it dealt with the importance of the individual, and their personal needs and wants, rather than aspects of the self which relate directly to the mothering role. Antenatally this took the form of the centrality of the self and maintaining the status quo. Postnatally this transformed into the mothers' desires to regain and retain parts of the pre-baby person by finding and making space for the self. This theme was often antithetical to the exclusive mothering ideal, and existed in tension with the broadened self discussed previously.

The sub-themes in this section therefore encompass aspects of the person separate from their family. Antenatally, the quintessence of this theme was the concept that life will continue on much the same, notwithstanding the participants' expressed knowledge of change that would occur. Furthermore, antenatally there was a notable discourse about the importance of the individual. Pre-birth this was voiced through talk about career and work, and the intrinsic rewards that were obtained through this. Postnatally, the emphasis had shifted dramatically. Although career was referred to by some, it was now secondary in relation to the importance of the child. Postnatally, time for the core self and fulfilment of the mothers' personal needs dominated. As with Life Progression above, this theme also touched upon the relationship with the partner. However, the focus here was on the couple as an expression of individual needs found through equity partnership and intimacy. Antenatal discourses of shared parenting and the importance of couple time were engulfed postnatally by realities of the mother having to shoulder the bulk of child and house care, and by couple time becoming family time.

Life Will Continue On

Underlying much of the antenatal discourse relevant to this theme was a sense that life would continue on much as it had, except with an additional person. Even though on one level the participants anticipated great change in their lives, on another level they wished for their lives to be interrupted as little as possible. Aphrodite felt that being pregnant and having a child were normal and that life would just 'plod along'. Her comment was typical of the general feeling amongst these mothers:

I think the baby's got to just fit into your life and if you're gonna do something they just come along . . . Because it's still like your life and they're just added in extra to start with I think . . . but life still has to go on.

Aphrodite, AN interview

Others extended this idea and spoke about children not limiting them in their desire to travel, or their life plans. Some spoke about the child learning to respect the needs of all family members. Meg, recognising her expectation might be an ideal, voiced her concern about a child ruling the house when she said,

I don't envisage, you know, sort of turning the telly off at 8:00 so it goes to sleep or you know, changing our whole lifestyle so that this baby runs the house and we don't. Because, I don't believe it's actually um, a good way to bring up um, a family anyway.

Meg, AN interview

These two quotes suggest that antenatally the mothers expected their lives to continue essentially as they had done thus far. Not only did the mothers make specific remarks about wanting life to remain relatively uninterrupted, this core feeling was inherent in individually-focused discourse about self and couple time, shared parenting and career interests.

Individual Focus

A dominant aspect of this theme was the centrality of the individual. Antenatally the mothers talked predominantly about maintaining careers and the importance of time alone with their partner. Postnatally, these, perhaps naïve, ideas were engulfed by a growing realisation amongst the mothers that they had somewhat lost themselves in their babies' needs. Speaking emphatically about wanting to regain their individuality, talk about space for the self dominated. Lucy's succinct remark captured the essence of the importance of her self identity when she said,

I had big issues with the missing my freedom, missing my work, missing being a grownup, um, missing being important . . . I think I've had a temporary absence from, from my own self.

Lucy, PN interview

The self

In this study the mothers viewed themselves as having equal importance in the family and, as Lucy commented above, a self-identity separate from that of mother. Antenatally, they wanted to be able to pursue their own interests, and have time to spend on themselves. Sarah spoke firmly about the place she saw her child having in her life; not as her whole self but as one part of her self, concluding with her fears that her priorities might change:

I'm still a person and I still want to be that person. Just because I'm having a child shouldn't mean that my life has to end and I have to become neglectful to myself and I think that's what it is but, ah, please don't let me change. I don't want to change.

Sarah, AN interview

Moreover, Sarah talked about other mothers she had seen who had relegated their personal needs to the lowest priority, and that it had had negative consequences for those children who were 'out of control and needy'. Many of the women talked about needing to find equilibrium between the needs of a dependent child and their own adult requirements. Meg was quite concerned about maintaining her career, her voluntary interests, and her leisure pursuits while caring well for her baby:

I'm mindful that I will need stimulation, too. So, I don't want to drop my life, as such. So that's probably a bit of a contradiction but, trying to get that even balance.

Meg, AN interview

Liza postnatally echoed this desire for balance when she commented that her sole focus up until recent times had been her daughter and that,

now I have to sometimes, I have to kind of re-focus and think okay, now I need to do stuff for me. And I think that's starting to get important to me now. Whereas I look at her and I think she's happy, she's healthy. Things are going okay.

Liza, PN interview

Others had also come to this realisation that they needed a break, or had forgotten their own needs. Alison talked about how she had stopped journaling which was something she found important for her mental health stating, "and um yeah I really

need to spend some time with myself.” For her it was exciting to go out without all the accoutrements one needs for a baby because “it’s like, ‘wow, I’ve got a little bit of freedom. What will I do? you know’ . . .”

For some the challenge to their sense of self and agency upon the world had been substantial and had caused some torment, as Lucy commented,

There have been bad days where I’ve thought, and it’s not been, it’s not been because she been a hard baby to look after. It’s just been the lack of freedom for me where I’ve thought, ‘God, if I knew now, if I knew then what I know now, would we have made the same choice?’

Lucy, PN interview

Others supported this feeling of loss of self, but, like Jenny, were more pragmatic about their response:

. . . sometimes I feel like, ‘God, I just want to get out of this house’. But it doesn’t worry me. And I’ll go.

Jenny PN interview

An interesting adjunct to the need for self-time, was the notion that taking that time, especially for leisure or exercise, was selfish. Meg commented in both interviews that for her to put her needs ahead of her partner’s and baby’s was unfair to them, and that there was no real justification for it. One of the few valid reasons for taking time out was that the baby and/or the family would benefit by virtue of a mother who was refreshed or renewed. For example,

I’ve always been a person who’s really believed in self-time. No matter how busy you are, you’ve really got to make time for yourself. So even though I say I won’t have time, I’ll probably make it a big priority um because I know it’s going to benefit everyone around me, not just myself. Because if you’re – if, you know, you’re not feeling the best, then you’re going to affect the bub . . . Peter will know that I’m not happy, so the best thing I can do is look after myself.

Alison, AN interview

Finding time to pursue leisure activities, or just having time away from the baby was extremely important for these mothers, especially postnatally. For many the issue was of trying to achieve a balance between competing personal needs and

desires. Maintenance of careers was an important part of these mothers' self-identities.

Career and work

There were several reasons these participants cited their paid work or career as a significant aspect of their selves as separate from being a mother. For some, paid work was seen as providing intrinsic rewards such as social stimulation, competence, and recognition. This was especially so antenatally. For others it was a financial necessity, but one which saw them contribute tangibly to the home. The importance of career for these mums was far more diverse post-birth. In all instances the word work was used to refer to paid-work, but rarely in relation to mothering chores or endeavours. As well as socialising with adults, antenatally Lucy commented on the external and internal recognition she got from holding a responsible position:

So I'm taking the twelve months off . . . I think I'm going to miss my job. I think I'm going to miss the, the responsibility and adult contact . . . but I think I'll need the recognition that you get from your job and all those sorts of things.

Lucy AN interview

Lucy still felt this way after the birth of her daughter. Despite assurances that motherhood was important, she talked about having attended a conference where mothering was considered an adjunct to her career, not all of who she was. What was also clear from the comment above was that Lucy, like most of the mothers antenatally, saw having a baby as providing time-out from the rigours of daily life.

Postnatally, the reverse was expressed. Paid work was now seen as enjoyable and time-out from the demands of the baby:

I can go to work and put the kettle on and make a coffee and sit down even . . . people are demanding of my time there but they can wait two seconds . . . So, Yeah, it's a real break for me. Even if it's flat out and demanding it's still important.

Aphrodite, PN interview

However, the intrinsic rewards were still spoken of. As Sarah commented,

I enjoy what I do, um I find it mentally stimulating to go back and talk about work and talk about things that are going on. And not having to just talk about babies all the time. Because I don't like to talk about babies all the time, because I feel like that's all I do.

Sarah, PN interview

And although Jasmine had chosen to take at least 12 months off from any paid work, and was quite delighted to be at home, she appeared to miss some of the respect a career engendered. The absence of regard she felt was evident when she spoke about being out and about with her daughter:

I have to admit, a couple of times I've felt like, 'oh what am I? Chopped liver?' because you know the way people are just more interested in your baby than you, and they won't really listen sometimes to what you're saying, they just want to goo-goo talk with your child. And even your family does that sometimes, but you get used to it.

Jasmine, PN interview

Some had expected that they would return quickly to paid-work. Meg however, was content to be at home, a quite different story from her antenatal expectations. Post-birth her career had taken a back seat as her new baby usurped primary importance:

I was really torn was the word, um, between Emma and work and Emma came first and I couldn't do either properly.

Meg, PN interview

For several, return to paid work was a necessity to maintain their household budget. For some, engaging in paid work was vital as they earned a larger wage than their partner. However, for most of the participants, return to paid work was an effort to regain a part of who they were before they became mothers. Aphrodite captured this sentiment when she said,

But it's nice to just drive to work and you're the only one in the car. And you get there and you just get out and shut the door and you don't unclip, and come on in, and gather thirty thousand things. So it's probably reminiscent of what life was like before Alex.

Aphrodite, PN interview

Career or paid work contributed significantly to these mothers' self-identities. However, the impact differed postnatally between mothers. For some, paid work provided a brief respite from their baby while for others staying at home resulted in a loss of appreciation. Irrespective of its value, having a baby had meant dramatic changes to these mothers' paid work or career selves. As well as this aspect of the self, these mothers also grappled with altered bodies.

Bodily concerns

Along with new mothering roles and practices, many of the mothers had to adjust to the changes pregnancy and birth brought to their bodies which had to be incorporated into a revised sense of self. Some had had to deal with illness and injury (see *Silence and Unpleasantness*, p. 114) while others had to accommodate temporary or lasting alterations to size and shape. Additionally, most of the mothers had to incorporate the personal and physical implications of breastfeeding into their lives. Some of the women indicated that switching to bottle-feeding had given them more control and freedom generally. For Sarah, having to be ever mindful of when her milk might let down (something which often caused leakage), had eventually made her angry and uptight:

So I just sort of had enough. It was too hard umm for my lifestyle . . . trying to run a business and leaving her with other people and I was constantly feeding, expressing and um I had the most ridiculous mammaries – they were just so big!

Sarah, PN interview

It was clear also that the size of her post-baby breasts had been disagreeable. Heidi spoke about the extreme difficulty she had had adapting to her altered body which had not resumed its pre-birth configuration. She felt depressed because none of her clothes fitted her new shape:

I've had to totally change my style because what I used to wear doesn't suit me any more, so's its like, 'oh my God, who am I'? It's sort of like a, um, a personality change, you know . . . Um, yeah, it has, that, that's been a challenge for me.

Heidi, PN interview

Jasmine on the other hand enjoyed both her pregnant belly, and breastfeeding. Although she wanted to regain her pre-pregnancy stomach, she felt the change was worth it considering her baby and the positives that brought.

Alterations to their physical beings were confronting for these participants. For most, the changes were temporary or could be alleviated. For others, the challenge was more profound. Discourse about the self, one's career, and physicality emphasises these mothers' desires to acknowledge and cherish their individuality. Aside from their own endeavours, support from partners such as the sharing of child and house work, as well as maintenance of their couple identities further helped to protect the mothers' personal selves.

The Partner

As the participants were all in stable relationships during the study period, the role of the partner was of prime importance. Not only were they significant in terms of being a father, but also in supporting the needs of the mothers. Sharing the burden of child and house work allowed the mothers space and time to pursue personal interests. Moreover, the mothers were all keen to express their individuality in terms of maintaining a strong couple identity. Antenatally they spoke about the importance of ensuring time for the couple and fully shared parenting and housework. Postnatally couple time was subsumed somewhat into family time and although still desirous of equality with regard to parenting and housework, the reality had proved rather different.

Equally shared parenting and housework

Pre-birth the majority of the women envisaged that parenting and housework would be equally shared duties, as most of the relationships already operated this way. Heidi extended this need to include her baby learning the value of gender equality when she said,

my husband and I both share responsibilities, so I want to the bub to grow up like that . . . like a woman just doesn't sit in the kitchen and cook all day and wash their clothes, you know and tidy the house, you know, like the men have to get in there and do it as well.

Heidi, AN interview

Some thought it was important for their partners to be practised so that if the mother was unavailable, the father would be able to cope without trouble. Others wanted the partner to be actively involved so they could appreciate the whole experience of mothering. Moreover, for some, having a partner was crucial in terms of support and being a family. Lucy, after talking about a friend whose partner was barely able to change a nappy, said,

I don't want to carry it by myself. I want to be able to share it, and share it properly . . . where he actually knows from experience, not just knows from watching, or being there, like on a bad day, or I want him to have the bad day and know what it's like to be on your own.

Lucy, AN interview

A few of the mothers' post-birth experience did meet their expectations. Meg was extremely positive about her partner's capabilities, and later went on to say that sometimes mothers needed to trust their partners and not be too critical:

James gets up as much as I do at night and does as much as he can considering that he works all week as well, but, you know it's not, um, he knows how to feed her as well as I do and is as, is comfortable and confident with her as I am.

Meg, PN interview

Jenny was similarly happy with her partner's assistance. She praised Pete saying that once he got home from his work, he took over many of the chores. Paradoxically, though, she does admit to feeling annoyed with him on occasion. Her main complaint appeared to be that although he did set tasks, she was the main carer and that when they were together she usually had to hold or entertain Brady:

. . . sometimes just going to get groceries, or just doing . . . the every day things it's heaps quicker to just go without him [Brady] . . . Not that it worries me taking him but sometimes you just think, 'God, I could just go and be back in that short amount of time and it won't hurt him to look after him for 5 minutes'.

Jenny, PN interview

The postnatal experience for most of the mothers was more like Jenny's in that although partners were happy to do requested chores, the mothers felt they were

responsible for the majority of the parenting. This was quite different from their expectations of equality. Some felt it was just a fact of life that mother's did more. Others however were less forgiving, and did not want traditional attitudes to household chores to prevail. While respecting the long hours paid work often required, they wanted more help at home. As Liza said,

sometimes if he'd come home if he'd just want to sit down and have a beer or something it's like, sorry . . . you can do that at 8 o'clock tonight. You know, or. I'll bath can you organize dinner . . . So we had a few little teething things which is only natural.

Liza, PN interview

Furthermore, some were unhappy that their partner had the luxury of being the fun person while they had to be the disciplinarian. Amy, for example, was concerned that her partner did not appreciate being at home meant keeping up with chores while also enjoying their son. She felt that, initially, after she returned to paid work, he saw his role purely as an entertainer and baby-sitter:

Robin didn't do a lot around the house, but he does now and I leave him little notes every day . . . Because basically all he was doing was looking after Dylan...and playing. And I said "You know, there's a bit more to it than that.

Amy, PN interview

For these mothers, the equal participation of their partners in parenting and housework was a strong desire that was not always fulfilled postnatally. Although not directly voiced, it was evident that sharing of the house and child work gave them greater ability to find time for themselves. In addition to equality in the home, these mothers also wanted to maintain, with their partner, a strong and separate couple identity.

Couple time

In addition to self-time and the equal sharing of parenting, these mothers all appreciated the need to maintain a strong couple identity. Antenatally, this was seen as essential to the health of the family by the majority of the participants. Postnatally, while its value was still upheld, the mothers talked about the difficulties finding couple-time entailed. Furthermore, the type and content of couple-time had altered. Amy voiced the value of time away from the baby when she said,

One of our big concerns, whether we will be able to continue to do what we normally did and I said yes, we've got to have our own time, family time, and then...couple time. Because both Robin and I are very . . . independent and we like our own time and our own space . . .

Amy, AN interview

Others were aware that having less time and energy could make it more complicated to have couple time. Sarah's plan to deal with this problem was that they would make sure they had time in the evenings together so they did not "lose focus in their relationship". She saw it as crucially important that the child realised that the parents have their own life separate from the child. Aphrodite's experience bore out Sarah's antenatal concerns, in that her and her partner did not go out often after their son was born because,

Just at the end of the day we're so buggered that it's easier not to go out for dinner.

Aphrodite, PN interview

Some mothers were unable to go out because they did not have family nearby and finding help with child minding required more organisation than going out separately. A few were loath to trust family or friends with their child. This 'mother knows best' attitude (see also p. 94) was quite prevalent, as Liza's comment explains:

I mean we need to probably do something together as a husband and a wife, but at this stage that's not a, it's just not, not an issue, it can't really be done . . . we can't find the time and then what would we do with her, you know if we went out to dinner.

Liza, PN interview

Others spoke about their spousal relationship having lost spontaneity. A couple of mothers spoke pre-birth about ensuring their sex-life was maintained, and commented postnatally that this was easier said than done. They also felt their relationship was becoming mundane in part as the little time they had together was often taken up with practicalities. As Lucy said,

Like I miss him when he leaves to work . . . But then as soon as he comes home . . . it's more about practical stuff and which bills need to be paid, and it's not about the fun things.

Lucy, PN interview

Moreover, many of the mothers wryly admitted that couple time often had an invisible participant, as they often spent time together discussing their child. Some stated that they were content to include their baby in their relationship conversations, while others felt no need to have dinner alone together, but were happy with a threesome. That couple time had been subverted into family time was a happy occurrence for some mothers. Amy said that this had given them a common bond, and made their family more cohesive because they did more together:

I think it has been different . . . well we do talk, yes we do talk, I can't say we don't, but we mainly talk about Dylan (laughs) . . . And in some ways it's brought us closer together . . .

Amy, PN interview

For these mothers, equally shared parenting and separate couple-time was seen as an important way to pursue individual needs and desires. Not only interested in reclaiming a personal sense of self, these mothers also included their hitherto central relationship as part of their individuality. The significance of partnership coalesces with the wish for life to continue unchanged, and the centrality of the individual to provide a compelling view of these mothers' desires to maintain, retain, and regain themselves as distinct from their identity as mother. Despite real life-changes, they tried to renegotiate some sense of who they were prior to becoming mothers.

Conclusion

You can't, you can't tell somebody that's not a mother, or explain it to somebody who's not a mother. You have to experience it. It's not something in life that you can sort of show or demonstrate because everyone is, every baby is different.

Heidi, PN interview

Heidi's remark, made in reference to comments from those who did not have children, aptly describes the fluidity, and at times, the turmoil the competing demands of motherhood entail. The themes above describe the main contextual components these mothers had to negotiate within both prior to, and after, the birth of their child. Although some of these are externally driven, they also have a strong internal and individual component. Therefore, the themes are also representative of four characteristics of maternal identity that are recognised by these mothers as being significant. These are discussed in the following chapter.

The four themes (1) Conceptions of Ideal Mothering, (2) Likely and Challenging Realities, (3) Life Progression/Personal Growth, and (4) Upholding the Self also show that conceptualisations of maternal identity are not static, but are reworked to incorporate the lived experiences of motherhood. Moreover, there was a marked ebb and flow of the importance of particular aspects of the themes, from the ante- to postnatal period. Generally, it could be said that a, perhaps naïve, and tentative antenatal maternal identity grew and strengthened with postnatal realities. Furthermore, this movement was not always easy but often challenging for these mothers to negotiate. Moreover, Heidi's comment alludes to the profundity of the transition, and the ineffectiveness of language to render the journey. It is anticipated that the passage of time would cause further modifications of these themes.

The following chapter takes up these findings, and explores them in relation to established theoretical understandings about the journey to contemporary western motherhood. In so doing, it answers the 'so what' question by discussing the significance of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 6: JOY AND DIFFICULTY - COMPLEX, JOURNEYS TO MOTHERHOOD

. . . we learned always to expect sentences to have two parts, the second seeming to contradict the first, the unity lying only in our growing ability to tolerate ambivalence - for that is what motherly love is like.

(Lazarre, 1997, p.70)

Introduction

This research provides a glimpse of ten Australian mothers' unique, engaging, and predominantly enjoyable journeys into early motherhood. For these contemporary Australian women, it was unmistakably evident that becoming a mother necessitated drawing on four dominant, often contradictory voices or identities resulting in a complex transitional experience of individual and personal negotiation and integration.

These four voices, present within individual narratives, derived via thematic analysis, and articulated in the preceding chapter, demonstrate how the mothers conceptualised (a) motherhood and mothering in the modern world, (b) their own identities as mothers within that world, and (c) the transformation of their thoughts and identities. It is apparent from the contradiction between themes, and the numerous inconsistencies within individual discourses, that these voices were not always harmonious.

Indeed, paradox and tension were the cornerstone of these women's early motherhood journeys. Although all the mothers (bar one) had always envisaged themselves as mothers - children had always been part of their life plans - they still found the reality dissimilar to expectations. These findings are consistent with previous maternal research that discuss entry to motherhood as a time of chaos, growth and rebirth, regardless of which maternal discourses are drawn upon (Blumenthal, 1999; Brown et al., 1994; Carolan, 2004b; Crittenden, 2001; Featherstone, 1997; Hays, 1996; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999, 2002; Lupton, 2000; Maushart, 2006; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Oakley, 1992; Rich, 1995; Wearing, 1984; Wolf, 2001).

That conflict and difficulty were features of these women's experiences may be because the transition occurred within a cultural milieu which continues to impose the same traditional, simplified and idealised expectations of mothering and motherhood (Bryce, 2007). Thus, the 10 mothers' journeys echoed that of prior generations of mothers except for the additional expectations of autonomy and having one's own life. The major challenge for these new mums was, and is, to live within and with this chaos, while ultimately finding a personal way through it. There is therefore, a need to find and develop new and useful models of modern motherhood.

For these women, the initial maternal identity develops from an unambiguous self confidence in her capacity for natural and instinctive mothering, to one in which the challenges of 'good' mothering were recognised as grounded in emotion and as more complex than had been anticipated, but where the expectation of ideal mothering was strongly situated within the centrality of the child and intensive, monopolistic mothering. Moreover, the earlier notion that equality amongst the needs of the child, the self, the family and others could be straightforwardly achieved was replaced by joyful and overwhelming devotion to the child alongside a dissatisfying reversion to somewhat traditional gender roles, and the realisation that self-time needed to be recognised and self-orchestrated.

This chapter considers the four maternal identities, and their transformation as the new mothers moved from expectant to bona fide motherhood. The Ideal Mother; Extended, Spiritual Self; Practical, Challenged Self; and Independent Self are the sometimes disparate, sometimes intersecting maternal identities they were endeavouring to incorporate into a revised sense of self. The transformation in maternal identity is examined by looking at the complex alteration in themes and sub-themes across time. Additionally, since transformation is inherently a time of flux to which conflict is fundamental, the tensions and intricacies of the relationships among the individual aspects of maternal identity are explored.

Furthermore, this discussion takes place within the context of historical and contemporary maternal research which suggests that some maternal identities drawn on for modern day transitions to motherhood are repetitious of previous experiences (Brown et al., 1994; Le Blanc, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2000a; Oakley, 1992; Porter, 2006; Rich, 1995; Wearing, 1984). Additionally, influences of feminism and

individualism are explored. The implications for these women, and for other new mothers, are discussed, as well as possible ways forward. These findings contribute to current theoretical knowledge about the multifaceted nature of the experience of contemporary motherhood for Australian women. They also provide another data point in the historical picture of western, white, middle-class motherhood. It is hoped that this knowledge will enable professionals such as nurses, doctors, mental health experts and government policy makers to provide more informed, particular and empathetic support for new Australian mothers.

Ideal mothering, feminist, and individualist discourses were the bases from which these mothers prepared themselves for, and explained their experiences of, early motherhood, and thus formed their maternal identities. However, there were also transitional, emergent and transformative aspects to them as the pre- and post-birth selves differed and altered across the early mothering period. I use the terms identity, self, or voice interchangeably throughout this chapter as this was how the different aspects appeared to me as I read and analysed the data. As others found these dominant voices or selves were distinct, and therefore suggestive of independent (albeit intersecting) identities with unique narratives (Blumenthal, 1999; Brown et al., 1994; Gilligan et al., 2003; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; McMahon, 1995). Moreover, I considered these identities to be fluid and shifting, rather than static. That is, all were of equal significance, but this depended on the context and individual salience. It was therefore imperative that the four main emergent maternal identities drawn upon by these mothers were explored, as well as the way the mothers endeavoured to integrate them into a functional and constructive unit.

The participants in this study conceptualised mothering in a somewhat two-dimensional way. The Ideal Mother (the mothers' concept of what a mother *ought* to be) overlapped with both the Extended, Spiritual Self and the Practical, Challenged Self. Being experiential aspects of the ideal, these two voices represented the positive and negative realities of motherhood. The Independent Self however, was separate to this triad as the needs of the individual (separate to the mother-self) were seen as being in opposition.

The expectant and the new mother both draw on the ideal mother discourses to frame her vision and experience of motherhood. Although they spoke intelligently and thoughtfully about motherhood, the expectant mothers had a somewhat

straightforward vision of their mothering identities. As with all new endeavours, they were apprehensive about their ability to face and manage the challenges they foresaw. However, they were generally certain that they would cope with the anticipated difficulties and were looking forward to their new child and new lives. Moreover, while disputing some cultural preconceptions, they generally accepted the dominant conceptions of an elementary and two dimensional picture of 'mother'.

Pre-baby notions of the natural and instinctive mother are used repeatedly as a way of bolstering self-confidence, and add to the sense of happiness she feels about the prospective child. The biological notion of motherhood not only provided assurance that she will know what to do, but also availed her of comforting images of calm, nurturing, patient motherhood. Eight months post-birth, the emphasis had shifted, with the ideal having come to mean intensive, child-centred mothering rather than natural, innate mothering. Although present in the sense of knowing and having the instinct of what to do, nature was predominantly related to breastfeeding. The child's needs and wants had become centre stage, and were now the starting point for the mother's every decision.

The practical aspects of motherhood discussed pre-baby centred on tangible issues (e.g. tiredness, managing household chores) as obstacles to be solved similarly to challenges in an outside workplace. Although there is some apprehension, one strategically utilises appropriate resources (for example, books, health experts, own mother, mother-friends) and controls the outcome as one would approach a new job or position. Post-birth, enjoying her new role immensely, the new mother has faced and dealt with many of the tangible issues capably, thereby instilling confidence in her mothering self. However, she has had to deal with unanticipated and concealed aspects of early motherhood such as the psychologically and physically exhausting demands of a new baby. Additionally, conflicting negative thoughts and emotions about mothering have had to be confronted, along with the constraints the ideal imposes on the disclosure of these.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, both the expectant and post-birth mother experienced strong positive and pleasurable aspects that extended or deepened their maternal identities. This identity drew strongly on a positioning of the self within a growing immediate and extended family, as well as interconnectedness with the wider family community. A spiritual aspect of new motherhood also developed.

Tentative, and expressing the wonder and magnitude of new life beyond the self, antenatally, this was additionally experienced by the post-birth mother as a profound passion for her baby. A compelling motherlove, which transcended all other forms of love felt before, was willingly submitted to. Consequently, her child and immediate family assumed primacy over other relationships.

Existing in counterpoint to the previous selves, was the voice of the Independent Self. Calling on feminist ideals of gender equality, the expectant mother anticipated retaining her individuality in terms of career and personal interests, and her couple entity. Moreover, she viewed shared parenting as an established fact. The new mother however, has become more realistic. Her new baby has taken up far more of her person and time than predicted, and the mother has experienced some loss of self. Eight months on, the need for recognition and forefronting her personal needs had become important. Furthermore, despite desires and efforts to the contrary, these new mothers were dismayed to realise that gender roles in terms of household chores and parenting had reverted to the traditional.

The post-birth mother modified her initial identity based on her early mothering experiences. She has experienced not only the predicted challenges, but has confronted unexpected ones, which challenged her earlier under-developed notions of motherhood, including an astonishing and passionate love for her child. In these early days of motherhood, she has continued to hold on to some aspects of the dominant motherhood discourses. However, becoming a mother has been more disorderly than expected. The contradictions evince unanticipated experiences of chaos and uncertainty. Not only has the recent mother given life to a new, unpredictable being, she has experienced the beginning of a transformed selfhood. The post-birth mother has been forced to negotiate a new self and a new world where ambivalence prevails. Therefore, this mother has a much more realistic grasp of the profundity and complexity of early motherhood, which was previously hidden to her. Consequently, notwithstanding some dominant discourses which continue to suggest otherwise, it is evident that the early motherhood period is still not as stable and predictable.

This transitioning mother identity encompassed four distinct but interconnected selves: Ideal Mother; Extended, Spiritual Self; Practical, Challenged

Self; and Independent Self. The following section examines these four aspects of the transformative maternal identity and their alteration across time.

Four Maternal Identities

Ideal Mother

For most of us (and often against better judgment) the words ‘good mother’ or ‘good mothering’ or even just ‘mother’ and ‘mothering’, when used generally rather than specifically, conjure not just the biological nature of mothering, but images such as devoted, nurturing, instinctive, responsible, selfless, baking, stay-at-home, maybe sacrificial, fulfilled and happy women. These notions of ideal mothering are long-enduring and easily accessible in our western society, as many studies and commentaries attest to (Blumenthal, 1999; Brown et al., 1994; Cannold, 2005; Carolan, 2004b; Ex & Janssens, 2000; Hays, 1996; Hewlett, 2002; Kitzinger, 1992; Le Blanc, 1999; Lupton, 2000; Maushart, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2000a, 2000b, 2005; Oakley, 1992; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Phoenix et al., 1991; Porter, 2006; Rich, 1995; Speier, 2004; Summers, 2003; Wall, 2001; Wearing, 1984; Woodward, 1997; Woollett & Marshall, 2001), and exist despite any contrary models of mothering our own mothers may have provided (Andrews, 2002; Edelman, 2006; Ex & Janssens, 2000). This is not surprising, as the western master narrative (Miller, 2000b), or myth, of the ideal mothering identity is a compelling one and has become so entrenched in our culture that it is accepted as a statement of fact (Barthes, 1993) rather than an evolutionary historical construction (Hrady, 1999; Rich, 1995; Woodward, 1997; Yeo, 2005). The data in my study confirm the continued and robust influence of this conceptualisation of the ideal mother. For these 10 women, the ideal mother was someone to whom mothering came naturally and instinctively; who exhibited particular characteristic attributes of exemplary mothering; and who, especially postnatally, was intensively involved with her child.

Natural instincts. Irrespective of concurrence or disputation, references to the ‘instinctive, natural’ mother dominated the antenatal discourse and persisted, despite the realities of early mothering, in the informants’ postnatal discourse. This is a common feature of early mothering discourse (Brown et al., 1994; Carolan, 2004b; Kitzinger, 1992; Le Blanc, 1999; Lupton, 2000; McMahon, 1995; Oakley, 1992; Wall, 2001) and is also evident in popular literature and media (Buttrose & Adams,

2005; Ex & Janssens, 2000; Hafen, 2000; Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Noble, 2000). Rightly or wrongly, these women, similar to previous prospective and new mothers, spoke about wanting to birth ‘naturally’ without medication or a C-section, about their love and mothering traits arriving automatically with the birth of the baby, and about ‘knowing’ what their baby wanted and how to do it. Moreover, it was clear that an instinctive mother was seen as a ‘good’ mother and being natural, the ‘right’ way to mother (Hafen, 2000; Miller, 2005).

Western and other societies’ essentialist views of the biological fitness of women for child-rearing is rooted in the age-old argument of nature versus nurture. Many feel that mothering is an innate, genetic inheritance directly tied to the fact that only women have the physiological capacity to carry, birth and breastfeed a child. And despite recent scientific advances which may see a different future, birthing and breastfeeding remain the undeniable province of women. Certainly, the antenatal data in this study intimated that giving birth was something millions of women did daily worldwide and, although the women were aware that labour and breastfeeding could present difficulties that might require ‘unnatural’ intervention, they felt it would occur naturally for them. Unquestionably, evidence does exist that biology is responsible for some mothering behaviours in some primates including humans. Sarah Hrdy (2000) gives examples of hormones like prolactin and oxytocin which prime mothers to breastfeed, to experience warm and pleasurable sensations while doing so, and mothers’ abilities to pick their own baby’s cry, as well as their faster response times to crying compared to fathers. Indeed, Alison spoke of how she responded automatically and more quickly to her son and that this had meant she was now responsible for settling him. Additionally, Hrdy talks about the inherent attractiveness of newborn babies to adults generally, and each baby’s ‘beauty’ to its own mother (often dispelled by later review of photos of the newborn!) which usually ensures they are well cared for. Certainly, this group of mothers adored and enjoyed their new babies, and commented on the overwhelming protectiveness they felt (see intensive mothering below and also *Extended, Spiritual Self* p. 160).

However, for the mothers in this study, the meanings of natural and instinctive had mostly transcended biology with the terms being used generally (e.g. it, that is, mothering comes naturally) rather than specifically. Thus, antenatal appeals to innateness were common when speaking about the coming birth and

especially in relation to having the knowledge and skills for the unknowns of a new baby. These appeals declined postnatally, given that many of the birth experiences challenged notions of naturalness, but the women still spoke about ‘just knowing’ what their baby needed, and that mothering was something they did without thinking. This was the case even for those such as Amy who had been doubtful about the veracity of ‘instinctive mothering’. Similar new-mother discourses have been documented by other researchers (Le Blanc, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Wall, 2001). By calling on instinct, the women would have felt some reassurance antenatally that they would cope with prospective new tasks, while postnatally, feelings that their mothering instincts had generally kicked in engendered these new mothers’ self-confidence and enjoyment. Miller (2000a) saw similar discourse patterns in her study, and suggested that uncertainty and appeals to the natural in antenatal motherhood accounts are indicative of concerns about one’s own sense of mother-self and others’ perceptions of that self. Notwithstanding these mothers’ accounts of getting help or advice and the existence of antenatal classes, mothering manuals, etc., the reliance on ‘mothering is an instinctive set of skills that arrive with the baby’ dominated antenatal and postnatal talk about mothering skills.

The constancy of the biological determinism of womanhood is striking. It seems this group of women had disregarded any learning they had undertaken over the early months of immersed mothering as a possible reason for their apparently natural skills. This alternative explanation to the apparent innateness of women for mothering work is based in sociological ideas which posit mothering skills result from gendered role-socialisation (Rich, 1995; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). With industrialisation and a gendered division of labour in which women stayed at home, girls and young women were daily exposed to, and learned, women’s work (Bulbeck, 1997; McMahon, 1995). This predominant responsibility for, and constant exposure to, the infant’s needs makes women appear intuitively prepared for mothering in the same way a concert pianist’s early years of music practice may make their mature skill appear inborn. Thus, innate mothering is viewed not as an inherent feminine predisposition, but skill borne through need (Everingham, 1994). Despite many social advances which have fostered elements of gender equality in western spheres, a traditional division of labour still exists, with more women than men involved in fulltime parenting, and with working women (full- and part-time) bearing greater

responsibility for childrearing and household tasks (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, 2002; Bryce, 2007; Phoenix et al., 1991; Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005).

Although the sociological explanation is “potentially more emancipatory for women”, because it provides avenues for rejection of the instinctual discourse, it does allow researchers to ignore and trivialise women’s often very real ‘natural’ mothering experiences (McMahon, 1995). Irrespective of this, the social-acquisition explanation for the innateness of mothering did not seem to have been greatly accessible for these mothers. Jasmine, for example, talks about believing “*your instincts will kick in when they’re needed to kick in,*” but in the same paragraph goes on to speak of getting help from books and other people, ending with a recognition that, “*You’re not going to know everything anyway; you’re always going to have to learn things.*” Whilst acknowledging that one could learn skills and knowledge, it was not consciously applied to mothering, and the mothers seemed to be unaware of the discrepancy between this and their beliefs about the naturalness of motherhood. Explanations of learned mothering appear to have been assimilated into ‘natural’ justifications for women’s superior mothering skills and thus continue to perpetrate the notion that mothering is innate.

Appeals to the innateness of motherhood for women have been further cemented by the fact that mothering mostly occurs in the veiled, private home-sphere which have helped to construct it as a somewhat mystical endeavour, that is the ultimate desire and fulfilment of natural women. Only one mother used these words specifically, however, it was implicit in many antenatal comments about having always seen oneself as a mother, or concerns if one could not become one. Certainly this view is strongly advocated by some pronatalist sections of western society (Buchholz & Follme, 2000; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Hafen, 2000; Kersten, 2001) and others who suggest that women who are not mothers are not complete women (Donald, 2007; Letherby, 1994). Moreover, efforts to have mothering and its unique strengths recognised and valued have also been construed as supporting this belief (Crittenden, 2001; O’Mara, 1999; Ruddick, 1990; Thomas, 2001). However, maternal scholars have argued that this is a social construction or myth strongly related to biological determinist beliefs (Hays, 1996; Hewlett, 2002; Hrdy, 1999; Maushart, 2006; Rich, 1995) and this was endorsed postnatally by the women in this

study as references to mothering being the ultimate fulfilment for women were negligible.

Although the natural mothering ideology was strongly evident, there were different levels of acceptance of it. For example, Jasmine identified strongly with this motif, while others spoke doubtfully about whether mothering instincts really would 'click in' or was all they wanted to do in life. So saying, the fact remains that the notion of natural and instinctive mothering, irrespective of the level of agreement, was conspicuous in both ante and postnatal discourses, alerting us that this belief was an exceptionally strong and enduring one in these contemporary Australian motherhood discourses.

Mothering attributes. Connected with the biological fitness of women for motherhood, are the attributes that good mothers are supposed to possess. The women spoke of the importance of being gentle, patient, caring, loving, responsible, firm but fair, a good listener and available, echoing the lists of attributes found in prior research (Brown et al., 1994; McMahon, 1995; Wearing, 1984). These attributes, which first became strongly associated with mothers in the early 1800s, have maintained currency ever since, despite second wave feminists' contestation. Moreover, for this group of mothers, these traits were relevant regardless of whether they saw themselves as full-time, at-home mothers or combining paid work and mothering. A characteristic desired by most of these mums was that of being relaxed or not anxious (for examples see Aphrodite or Jasmine). The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, the mothers were concerned that anxiety would affect the child in-utero or post-birth, making for difficult labours and unsettled and difficult babies. The images of an anxious mother and restless, fretful baby contest the prevailing ideals of natural motherhood, exemplified in the images of the serene Madonna and child within Christianity, and were therefore unpalatable and 'wrong' to these mothers. Additionally, natural motherhood implies management without fuss, and most of these mothers wanted to cope and be in control of their new life. Hence, traditional serene motherhood was extended by modern ideals of the capable, managerial woman who is able to unflappably organise and manage the demands of new motherhood as she would a new job (ABC, 2003; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Hays, 1996).

These traits were also used when referring to their own mothers as examples of good mothering. Rather than the real-life, unique, complex, perhaps uncomplimentary, identities of their own mothers, they reverted to idealised and conventional mothering images (Edelman, 2006; Ex & Janssens, 2000; Johnston & Swanson, 2003). For example, Jenny spoke about her mother's patience and of her always being there for her. The dominance of these traditional traits is predictable considering the images and commentaries about proper mothering usually presented in women's magazines (Cohen, 2008), media commentaries (e.g. (Jackman & Clark, 2003; Lunn, 2008; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2003)) and pronatalist motherhood literature (Buchholz & Follme, 2000; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Hafen, 2000). As with innateness above, identification with these attributes of motherhood would have enabled this group of mothers to feel normal, successful and correct. Moreover, these traits bolster essentialist arguments as popular magazines and publications continue to present them as unique to mothers and separate from the masculine, and public spheres, including the world of paid work (McMahon, 1995; Oakley, 1992; Rich, 1995; Woollett & Marshall, 2001). Furthermore, traditional good-mother characteristics have been extended by certain activities and behaviours that are also considered appropriate for modern day mothers. New mothers are not only to feed, clean and shelter their child, but must engage in "child-centered, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive and financially expensive," mothering (Hays, 1996, p.8).

Intensive mothering. If natural, innate mothering was the main theme of ideal mothering pre-baby, then 'intensive mothering' became the central motif post-birth (Hays, 1996). Women who employ this ideology believe that it is crucial that the mother (the best person for the job) be the central caregiver. The sacred, pure, innocent child and their needs and wants, which she should recognise and respond to, come first, especially before her, others and the world of work. Although evident antenatally in such comments as the importance of being physically and psychologically healthy for the babies' sakes (see Jasmine, Meg and Liza), this motif was largely tempered by these expectant mothers' desires for life to continue as it had always done. However, post-birth this group of mothers engaged unequivocally with intensive mothering evidenced by the numerous examples found throughout the discourses. Hays (1996) argues that intensive mothering is a permutation of essentialist discourse. Many mothers feel that intensive mothering is an innate and

necessary consequence of the natural love parents feel for the child and the multifaceted requirements babies need to survive and thrive. However, Hays shows that intensive mothering is actually socially created, evolving from various child-rearing eras and ideologies, becoming clearly evident post-WWII along with Dr Spock. Others agree that meanings of mothering are child-centric – mothering is constructed in relation to the supply (or not) of a child's needs (Everingham, 1994; Lawler, 2000). This was certainly the case for all the mothers in this study in that their babies were all the central point of reference. Phrasing like, “*s(he) comes first,*” or, “*everything revolves around him/her,*” were common, along with remarks that they were comfortable or happy with those circumstances. Moreover, following the suggestions of the prolific number of child-rearing manuals, as well as other experts, these mothers all engaged in various developmental activities, such as book reading, baby and toddler music groups, and social outings to prepare their child physically, emotionally and intellectually for the wider community and formal education. This child-centricity was also seen in comments about mothers constantly talking about their babies, thinking about and planning for their needs, and only participating in activities that embrace the child. Additionally, these mothers felt this was their job alone and that, as Meg said, “*no-one can substitute that role.*” Consequently, for most of these women, formal day care was seen as inadequate. In fact all other potential carers were perceived as risky alternatives. Although they could trust their partner, own mother, or close friends to baby sit, their care was not considered to be an adequate replacement for the mother's.

Increased knowledge and prolific, global reportage of such things as SIDS, childhood depression, substance abuse, abuse, paedophilia, abductions, as well as environmental and human disasters, have led parents, especially mothers, to be protective and fearful for their children. This unsafe world-view has no doubt reinforced these modern mothers' beliefs in the correctness of an intensive mothering ideology. These mums felt they should protect their children from external threats as well as ensuring their mothering would lead to well-reared, responsible community members. Furthermore, improved levels of education and employment for women, greater affluence, labour-saving devices, easy access to ever-increasing numbers of child-rearing manuals, and fewer children per mother has meant that 20th century women have been able to spend more time, energy and money on each child. This trend, which started in the 1950s with the suburban, stay-at-home mother, has

continued despite a growing awareness in the 1970s that this might not be in the best interests of women. As Jane Lazarre (1976/1997) wrote in that era,

We the middle class mothers of America are probably the only grown women who have ever been told to stay home and give all our energies to caring for one or two children. Do not do all the chores due to tech. So in order to seem to be engaged in life, we play with our children - for we have been convinced that they require every ounce of our waking energy in order to grow. We pretend that they need us when it is really we who need them. And we continue to believe the lies we are told about the needs of little children and the instincts of mothers. Who would take care of them if we did not? (p. 87)

The view that exclusivity is the correct and necessary way to mother, was evident in these women's discourses about bad or selfish mothering. Mothers who 'palmed their kid off to others', spoke about themselves instead of their baby, put their own needs first, were rough or inflexible with their children, or did not play and connect with their babies, were considered deviant and unnatural mothers. Paradoxically, however, there was a limit to how much a mother should be child-focused. They should not suffocate or overprotect their children, nor should they be so child-centred that they are unable to interact with other adults. For some of these mothers, the notion of the blissful, at-home mother, breastfeeding at 12 months, maintaining strict child-based routines was too extreme. The beliefs of absolute responsibility and bad mothering equating with a bad child, meant that their personal sense of mothering competence was largely based on their baby's well-being and behaviour. Consequently, these mothers were anxious about getting things wrong and experienced high levels of guilt when their actions caused harm. Both Sarah and Jasmine related how awful they had felt when they had caused minor health complaints for their daughters (ongoing colic and a high temperature respectively) even though information about the problems was unclear and others were involved. Conversely, many of the mothers spoke of their child's excellent well-being (happiness, sociability, physical health, good sleep patterns) as evidence of their maternal fitness.

Irrespective of the legitimacy of their beliefs, or their level of acceptance of the ideal, the above discussion shows how strongly the Ideal Mother identity existed for these 10 mothers. Despite arguments that many facets of modern ideal

motherhood are historical and social constructions rather than biological fact, and some societal grasp of this, generally these views did not find purchase amongst these women. The acculturated notions of what it means to mother transcended, and became, female biological fact. For this group of mothers, although some aspects of the ideal were not fully accepted (e.g. how natural was it?) there was no *myth* of the ideal mother. Rather, good mothering was a natural, trait specific, child-centred fact. In the collision between the ideal and their real experiences of the difficulties and ugliness of early mothering, the myth prevailed (Andrews, 2002).

Practical, Challenged Self

While drawing on the Ideal Mother for guidance and support during their advent to new motherhood, this group of 10 women were also engaged in the practicalities of the tangible issues they might face. Given their education levels and intelligence, and despite their anticipation, optimism and enjoyment, these women were all aware, and had some experience antenatally, that becoming and being a mother might not be as unproblematic as the ideal portrayed. This practical and challenged self was, in many ways, the persona which most clearly represented the “powerful disturbances to life-styles, routines and identities,” (Oakley, 1980, p. 181) experienced by these first-time mothers. Many spoke, like Alison and Heidi, of feelings of shock for example, *“I found out I was pregnant, and it was a big shock to start with and I was thinking, ‘Oh, my God,”* and, post-birth, *“it was just sort of a shock really of having this little, the baby I suppose being there and, um, wanting me, like, and that, that was quite bizarre as well.”* What was noticeable about the transition was that the anticipated difficulties of motherhood were not as problematic as expected, while there were unanticipated problems which had far greater impact on these mothers’ early mothering experiences.

Therefore, the practical mother spoke on two distinct levels. The first level related to the trying, but publicly acknowledged, aspects of mothering; for example managing and coping with sleep disturbance, breastfeeding, and understanding the needs of a crying baby. Apprehension about the impending birth and coping skills, and life changes were also expressed antenatally. The successful management of these anticipated difficulties at the 8 month period gave the mothers a sense of achievement and confidence that supported growing self-images of competent motherhood (Oakley, 1980). Secondly, and particularly compellingly, were the

unanticipated and often hidden and distressing aspects of mothering. The practically-oriented mother had to face unpleasant thoughts and experiences that fundamentally challenged the ideal. The impossibility of preparing pre-birth for unforeseen aspects of new motherhood, and those that were incongruous with expectations, caused these mothers anxiety, guilt, and frustration. However, the capacity and willingness to voice these counter-narratives (Somers, 1994) showed that, while obtaining confidence from identification with the Ideal Mother, these women were also able to recognise, resist, and challenge it. It also suggests that at the time of the second interviews, these women were beginning to 'find their feet' in terms of their practical abilities as well as their personal mother identities.

Practical realities. The contradiction between ideal and practical mother personas is not as odd as it may first seem. This practical persona of these 10 women was drawn from two dominant and related 20th century themes. The first is that of the capable, managerial, efficient, career individual who also mothers. This individualist persona is discussed below under Independent Self. Additionally, since second wave feminism posited that mothering oppresses women, there have been increasing numbers of western scholarly and popular writings on the difficulties motherhood can bring (Arendell, 2000; Brown et al., 1994; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Cannold, 2005; Carolan, 2004b; Chodorow, 1978; Crittenden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Hewlett, 2002; Kitzinger, 1992; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Lupton, 2000; Miller, 2000b; Nicolson, 1998; Oakley, 1992; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991; Rich, 1995; Wolf, 2001). Most of these insightful and complex works incorporate the voices, words and stories of new and experienced mothers. Some of the themes have filtered through to print and audio-visual media, such that there is basic coverage of the issues (AAP, 2007b; ABC, 2003; "Bumpy ride for single parents: Welfare to Work reforms mean sweeping changes to system," 2007; Doogue, 2007; Lunn, 2008; Sexton & Fleming, 2007).

However, for various reasons, not the least of which may be an unwillingness to disturb a powerful ideal, many of these focus on superficial discussions of non-confrontational issues, with some suggesting that the miserable mother (Duffy, 2002) is a myth developed by feminists. Common topics have been the experience of tiredness and sleep disturbance, breastfeeding, (paid) work and family balance, childcare issues, infertility, and ageing mothers, as well as family- or women-focused

government policies and reforms. It is not surprising therefore, that these were the concerns discussed by the mothers antenatally. For example Aphrodite's and Amy's comments, *"My house is going to be messy. I probably won't eat very well, I think it'll be busy,"* and *"I mean I'm aware that it's going to be, you know...no sleep and all that,"* were typical. Awareness of the possibility of these problems however, did not prepare these women for the intensity and amplification of them postnatally. Instead of sleep disturbance, the mothers now spoke about daily being *"quite exhausted"* or *"really tired"* physically and mentally. Apart from sleep deprivation, these experiences were also contingent on the hard work, constant responsibility and dependency that went with their new baby. Although these more relentless aspects of new motherhood have been poignantly expressed by mothers (Le Blanc, 1999; Maushart, 2006; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Rich, 1995; Wearing, 1984; Wolf, 2001), this group of mothers seemed unaware of them. Their surprise was clearly evident as Amy's comment shows, *"you're thinking, 'ooh I knew it was going to be hard, but you know, aw'...and it was just really, really tiring. I don't think I was actually prepared for that...."* By voicing such experiences, these women highlighted counter-narratives of motherhood such as mothering was hard work and not the story-book vision they had previously held.

Juxtaposed to these issues, was talk about the intense apprehension these women felt antenatally about how they would deal with a crying baby: *"I mean if it cries all the time how are we going to cope?"* (Amy). This particular concern revealed their deeply felt anxiety about not coping or performing as well as their own and others' expectations. However, this group of well-educated, careered, women believed antenatally they would solve mothering problems in the same manner as one would learn the tasks of a new job or position. Sarah's comment, similar to many, illustrates this instrumental approach, *"people love telling you all the things about mastitis and breast milk and not sleeping and, but you just, you know, you deal with it."* Eight months post-birth the crying baby was no longer mentioned. Having mastered this and other problems, these mothers' feelings of competence and self-esteem were expressed as enjoyment and pleasure in their mothering and baby (see Extended, Spiritual Self below). Congruence between expectations and experiences meant that their new self-images as competent mothers were not disrupted (Oakley, 1980). It may also be that the lack of talk about crying babies postnatally was due to the adherence to the natural model of motherhood discussed earlier. Pre-birth

admissions of this fear would be acceptable in light of beliefs that maternal instincts arrive with the baby, whereas post-birth talk of not managing would contest this and undermine these mothers' beliefs and identities as capable, natural mothers (Miller, 2005).

The practical mother-self was also subject to uncertainty and disruption caused by support and advice from others. Although social support was an important part of these women's feelings of competency, it also created tension as they had to negotiate a personal path through often conflicting knowledges. Differences existed between lay-person knowledge (e.g. mothers from her own and other generations) and expert or scientific knowledge (e.g. midwives, doctors, psychologists), as well as within these two groups. Antenatally this group of women generally preferred expert opinion to that of their mothers' possibly outdated ideas, while postnatally they were utilising both sources, and other mother-friends' suggestions, equally. Moreover, they were also questioning the usefulness of some expert advice. This tension between expert and lay knowledges is common in western mother discourses as it has long been understood that mother-knowledge (or old-wives tales as some would say) has been seen as suspect because of its lack of scientific base (Le Blanc, 1999; Maushart, 2006; Miller, 2005; Oakley, 1992). As these mothers were all well-educated and, therefore trained to operate from a scientific paradigm, it was difficult (especially antenatally) for them to adopt lay experience over expert. It was not until they were forced to find their own way post-birth between many suggestions, that they came to value mother-knowledge. However, differences between these two paradigms did cause self-doubt and unrest.

Hidden thoughts and difficulties. The most evocative type of disruption to self felt by the practical persona of these women was through their experiences of unexpected or discordant thoughts, feelings and occurrences. For example, their unpreparedness for experiences that did not correspond to culturally prescribed norms resulted in unanticipated feelings of guilt, frustration, and anger. Some of this was evident antenatally, especially for the mothers who did not have 'normal' pregnancies. Liza was disturbed that some motherhood experiences and models had been unavailable to her and so her experience could not be validated as normal. She said, "*I was angry, like I thought, I was disappointed. I had this big let-down because I thought it was supposed to be some other thing.*" Her experience challenged her own and cultural

beliefs in an ideal motherhood. Becoming “one of those” was not possible for her and her self-identity as a healthy and glowing mother-to-be was severely contested.

However, it was postnatally that these mothers’ negative and difficult responses to motherhood became most intense. As stated earlier, although these mothers had mostly adopted an intensive mothering ideology, they were not prepared for feelings of isolation, resentment, and lack of freedom were common feelings as Heidi said, *“Um, I don’t feel resentment against my baby, um, I mean you do have those days when you think, ‘Oh, if only I didn’t have a baby.’”* This sentiment resonates with those of many participants from other studies who also experienced loneliness, exhaustion, and a “what have I done?” feeling (Le Blanc, 2002; Miller, 2005). Oakley (1980) posits these emotions are evidence that the realities and unpleasant aspects of early mothering have become apparent to the mothers who now need to face them and find ways of integrating them into their selves and ways of being. This psychological reaction is the same as that often felt to other major life changes such as redundancy, or marriage which often cause identity stress and disruption. Talking about the difficulties faced by those wishing to combine paid work and mothering, Bryce said, “the silence around these issues increasingly deafens” (2007, p. 23). This applies even more so to emotions and issues that challenge cultural notions of good mothering.

The mothers in this study all felt the constraints imposed by mainstream mothering discourse, understanding that particular talk was taboo and should be silenced. For example, Amy said she did not talk about the negatives because other mothers in her circle didn’t, while Lucy said that instead of saying she resented having a baby and being a mother, she felt it was more appropriate to say she missed her work and freedoms. Amy engaged in self-suppression and concentrated on the positive aspects of her new life, while Lucy acknowledged her feelings but found a socially acceptable way of voicing them to herself and to others, so as to manage the dissonance between ideal mother beliefs and reality. Many spoke apologetically or stated, ‘that sounds bad’, or ‘I sound awful’ after making negative comments. Some asked for reassurance (especially after the interview) with comments like ‘am I normal’ or ‘is this how the others talked?’ These discursive techniques reveal that these 10 mothers were all aware of their own and others’ gazes, and the ways they should present as a mother. Self-suppression is a common experience for mothers as

other research attests to. New mothers experiencing normal difficulties or depression will try to mask their problems, endeavouring to talk and appear as competent, happy mothers (Carolan, 2004b; Tardy, 2000; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000; Williamson, 2005). Despite the cultural constraints however, the mothers in this study were beginning to accept their new reality and the not so glorious aspects of mothering, and thus were able to voice (to me at least) these counter-narratives. Some researchers have suggested that these types of emotions and thoughts are actually a more normal part of the transition process for most new mothers than not (Crittenden, 2001; Maushart, 2006; Nicolson, 1998; Oakley, 1980) and that it is the dissonance between the publicly touted ideal and these privately experienced realities that contributes to postnatal depression (PND) (Nicolson, 2001) (see also *Independent Self* p. 166).

The data from this study show that the pressure to prepare appropriately for motherhood, and to appear as competent mothers, although mostly covert, was extremely influential. Indeed, for this group of women, the successful management of anticipated difficulties supported their vision of a practical, capable self able to care for their new babies. However, the desire to relate the whole truth was potent and resulted in resistant counter-narratives. This study provided a sympathetic ear that wanted to hear their mothering experiences; gave them a safe forum to disclose the realities they knew were not suitable for public revelation; and provided validation of their experiences. Additionally, several of these mothers wanted to 'get the truth out there' – to warn others about what they had not been told. Tina Miller (2005) also commented about her participants' desires to enlighten and allow truths to be shared. Furthermore, because some of the realities undermined earlier images of the mothering self, making sense of it all through talk allowed them to (re)construct a cohesive self. Most of these mothers commented it was good to talk through their experiences, demonstrating their need for reflexive grasp on a somewhat chaotic time (Frank, 1995, 2002). Finally, the counter-narratives suggest that these women were not passive absorbers and transmitters of mainstream mothering beliefs. Rather they show them to be empowered agentic shapers of their own destinies and mothering identities. Thus, the practical, challenged persona was the self through which an active reconciliation of the beliefs of the ideal mother and the realities of new motherhood was enacted. However, their transitions were

supported by the more positive side of new motherhood through their extended, spiritual selves.

Extended, Spiritual Self

For this group of women, not only were their ideal and practical voices fostered and confronted by the journey to motherhood, but their sacred and spiritual selves were amplified. Their positions within a growing family, and a greater connectedness with kinship groups and the wider community, provided them with support, self-confidence and grounding. Additionally, the presence of the new child expanded and nurtured a more open connection with a divinity of the personal and of the natural world. This latter growth was articulated through expressions of motherlove. Motherlove is defined as that which concerns the passionate love, joy, wonder, hope and appreciation the mother has for the new child (Ruddick, 1990). This spiritual self therefore contrasted the former by highlighting the positive and wonderful realities of new motherhood. The connection, love and joy experienced by these mothers highlight the growth of self that took place with the growth and birth of the child. This aspect of new motherhood has been mostly disregarded because of tendencies towards saccharine sentimentality and biological determinism. However, some have documented the intense joyousness felt by new mothers (Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Lupton, 2000; McMahon, 1995; Porter, 2006), and this was an essential aspect of these mothers' journeys to motherhood.

For this group of women there was a burgeoning awareness antenatally of the importance of the connection of the self with family, kin and the wider community. Having achieved personal and couple goals, this group of mothers spoke of having a baby as being the next, inevitable, if not desirable, stage of female adult development as well as of their couple relationship. Moreover, for these women, the family was viewed as a heterosexual dyad plus child(ren), all of whom share the same home. Single parenthood was seen as undesirable and extremely difficult, understandably so, considering the negative connotations and consequences attached to it ("Bumpy ride for single parents: Welfare to Work reforms mean sweeping changes to system," 2007; Kearney, 2007). This view of the family is strongly promoted by those who see marriage and family more traditionally: Fathers are the authority who provide the material aspects of life from outside the home, while mothers provide care, love and moral direction inside the home (Buchholz & Follme, 2000; Hafen, 2000; Kersten,

2001). They rely on biological arguments of women's superior fitness for mothering to enable this configuration of family life. Certainly, many of these mothers' remarks were flavoured by biological destiny as the main reason for people to procreate and become family, for example, "*um, yeah, I think it's just part of being human. Human nature,*" (Jasmine). Notions of essentialism permeated not only an ideal of motherhood, but also an ideal of the family. Moreover, these women spoke of appreciating and joining the ranks of other mothers. Membership of this group marked them as normal and complete rather than deviant (Downe, 2004; Letherby, 1994; McMahon, 1995; Miller, 2005; Oakley, 1980) (see also ultimate fulfilment above, p. 143). Interestingly, talk about mothering often instigated talk about the partner and his positive fathering attributes. Presentation of the father as committed and engaged to them and the baby bolstered these mothers' desires for an ideal family as well as the tangible support they hoped he would provide them post-birth. For many, the pregnancy had strengthened (as the child would continue to) their couple-bond. Moreover, the baby (and the adult it would become) was evidence of their committed relationship and viewed as a positive and joint contribution the couple would be making to their community and, as Meg said, "*it's a whole new planning for the future . . .*" This is certainly an expression of psychological theory in which contribution is an important phase of adult development (Maslow, 1999). Similar comments were made by expectant mothers in other studies (McMahon, 1995) and McMahon posits that becoming a family for heterosexuals is not only a biological desire, but is a socially constructed imperative. As with the Ideal Mother, images of the ideal nuclear family dominate popular media (Doogue, 2007; Lunn, 2008), in spite of increasingly diverse family compositions (e.g. blended and single parent families, same-sex couples) (Hewlett, 2002; Jackman, 2003; Jackman & Clark, 2003).

Additionally, becoming a family extended their kinship group, reinforcing the importance of community ties, as Lucy commented, "*I have a rosy picture of Christmas, because my brother and his wife will be down and their little girl...that's, that's nice, like I like that idea of you know, mum and dad being able to see their kids, and their kids' kids and that whole connectedness . . . I like the idea that this is something that Mark and I are really doing together.*" Families of origin were often referred to as models of love, security, and warmth which were the characteristics they wanted for their own, new family. Grandparents were seen as people who could

share in the joy of the new person, as well as supply guidance and support. In part, this discourse can be seen as another aspect of preparing properly for motherhood (Miller, 2005). However, and given the shifting sense of self first-time motherhood produces (Miller, 2000a), drawing on the notions of family and other wider connections provided these women an empowering way of envisioning and positioning themselves within a new, uncertain world.

Postnatally, there was far less talk about kinship groups (although grandparents were mentioned, but in a far more utilitarian way), while the nuclear family had become central. Like the child-centrality discussed earlier, the mothers spoke of their family being “*the most important thing to me now*” and expected others to consider and adapt to their family’s needs. Rather than using generic terms such as ‘the family’ or ‘family’ these mothers were now talking of ‘my family’. This suggests that they had begun to integrate the new person, and tasks and identities into their old lives. Family changed from esoteric notions of connections to a real experience. Although having disagreeable aspects, the new reality also provided enjoyment and satisfaction. Many of these mothers felt a growing competency, they now enjoyed being a mum, and identified, not so much with the Ideal Mother, but with their personal mother-self.

Aside from family connections, having a child meant reinforcing and making new connections with other women. The importance of relationships and community for women has been well documented and will not be reargued here (Dowrick, ; Hrdy, 1999; Jordan, Kaplan, Baker Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Oakley, 1992; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998; Ruddick, 1990). However, it is clear that for this group, their relationships with new and older friends who were mothers provided them with validation, feelings of competence, collegiality and identification. All the women spoke of formal or informal mother’s groups as valuable sources of support, information and social contact. In fact Jasmine went so far as to say, “*I would die without that, I really would. I’d probably go a bit crazy.*” Despite the competition and judgment that sometimes exists amongst mothers, it is common that contemporary mothers provide much of the support to new mothers that a kinship group would have previously done (Gilleatt et al., 2000; Hendriks, 1998; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Mauthner, 1995; Miller, 2005; Oakley, 1992; Ruddick, 1990). Important assistance also came from other ‘mothers’ such as midwives, child health

nurses and grandmothers. The aid some of this group received had made them feel supported and also competent, as well as able to offer their own help to others. The consequence of support for new mothers has been documented not only by maternal scholars, but also in pre-industrial societies and primate worlds (Hrdy, 1999). Becoming a mother ignited or recaptured a sense of community that many maternal authors see as the great strength of women generally, and mothers in particular (Ruddick, 1980).

Not only did these mums develop practical skills, and meaningful community connections, but also inner growth. Most often these were directly triggered by the baby's needs, for example they had had to learn greater patience and tolerance for others and themselves. The need to care for and protect a vulnerable infant also made them reassess life and their immediate and wider environments. For instance, hearing about abducted children was far more meaningful to Amy post-birth than it had been before. For many mothers also, maternal care extends additionally to the community, and can be seen in such personal actions as backyard vegetable-growing or mothers' grass-roots activism. Through this it is clear that having a baby can transform not only the outer life, but also the inner. Some posit that this profound change in life-view touches on the spiritual (2003; Ruddick, 1990; Thomas, 2001), and it is to the passionate and joyful aspect of extended self we now turn.

Motherlove. The passionate love, two-in-oneness that mothers can feel for their child has been termed Mother Love (Ruddick, 1990) and has only begun to be dealt with in academic literature. Moreover, this powerful aspect of new motherhood, similar to the intense, negative mothering feelings, is not commonly heard, and as such came as a great surprise to many of these mothers. As Sarah said, *"I love her that much that I look at that face and . . . I just I wouldn't want to not have her now, and it's really weird I didn't think I'd be like that . . ."* This loving connection with the baby was almost immediate for most of this group of women. Some suggest these are instinctive hormonal responses produced through the birth event or is the mother-instinct (Buchholz & Follme, 2000; Le Blanc, 1999). However, this 'instinct' has been questioned. Sarah Hrdy says the desire to protect one's baby is environmentally driven. She cites examples from the animal and human worlds in which males provide the care and protection or where mothers

choose to kill or sacrifice their child because circumstances are such that the child is unlikely to grow to productive adulthood (Hrdy, 1999).

Irrespective of origins, Sarah Ruddick (1990) posits that this preservatory feeling is the first of a trio of imperatives of maternal work: That mothers firstly see and act in response to the biological vulnerability of the infant. For example, the desire to, “defend them from anything,” (LeBlanc, 1999, p.52) is commonly expressed by many new mothers, and some of these 10 mothers did comment in this way. It was also clear from this study that the mothers were all profoundly in love with their babies. The love they felt was stronger to any felt previously, and was, as Liza said, *“such a different sort of love that comes before, well before anybody else.”* Furthermore, there was a visceral aspect to this love, related to the physical perfection they saw in their babies’ bodies, but was difficult to express, for example Sarah exclaimed, *“She’s so beautiful, she’s so beautiful; I just want to bite her... You know when you just get... So excited, you just mmm . . . ”* The trouble Sarah has articulating her feelings is no doubt due to the difficulty humans have acknowledging and expressing their joy and connection with the divine, in whatever form it takes, and it may be that this response is a desire to absorb a sense of purity into ourselves. Or as Ruddick (p. 83) states, it is “a primary experience of preservative love,” the, “admiring wonder at what a new body does,” especially as those bodies take on the ‘spirit’ of the person. Although sensitive to the miraculous nature of the growth of the baby during pregnancy, this was greatly magnified post-birth. The mothers spoke about how hours could slip away while watching their baby discover the world. For all the mothers, the evolution and development of the new person was fascinating; something to be treasured and they submitted willingly to the many duties this provoked. The transformative power of the mother-child relationship has been expertly discussed in an Australian context (Porter, 2006), while some have suggested that feelings of love, care, protection are common to mothers worldwide, and provide a way of dissolving boundaries and connecting with other, seemingly different, mothers (Miller, 2007).

Simultaneously with preservation, these mothers felt profound responsibility for the child’s healthy physical and moral development (see Practical, Challenged Self, p. 154, for negative aspects of this). This group of mothers all spoke of choices they had made regarding their child’s growth which were based not only on factual

or experiential knowledge, but on their maternal judgment - what they 'felt' was best for their baby. This holistic and personal spiritual commitment and reflection that mothers engage in was identified by Sarah who spoke of the self-questioning she did which she felt was part of confident, albeit 'good' mothering. Successful choices added to feelings of maternal competence and a sense of 'rightness' about their mothering. After eight months of mothering, these 10 mothers were beginning to know their own minds as to how to raise their child, *"I'm doing it my way...anybody's got something to say about it, then it's too bad,"* (Lucy). Ruddick (1990) suggests that fostering emotional and intellectual development is not merely a matter of pragmatics, but also a matter of spirit. Children need a mother's nurture to allow the "unfolding, expanding of their material spirit" (p. 83). Additionally, Ruddick says mothers are also required to ensure their child's behaviour is socially acceptable. They are responsible for training children in one's own family's and culture's values and morals. This is an interpretive, potentially critical act requiring conscience which often causes mothers to reflect on their own, and society's, mores (Everingham, 1994). Jasmine welcomed this side of mothering, stating that many of the chores and tasks of motherhood allowed for self-analysis and reflection. Others also have found motherhood to be a time in which personal ethics are confronted and clarified (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Crittenden, 2001; Dowrick, ; Edelman, 2006; Hays, 1996; Lazarre, 1997; Porter, 2008; Thomas, 2001; Wolf, 2001). This can, however, be challenging when cultural and personal values conflict. Alison felt this dilemma, speaking at length about wanting her son to know how to be in the world and be a responsible member of the community, but to also be an individual, something that was personally important to Alison. Porter refers to the complex mothering work her participants engaged in, and recognised them "as active agents whose agentic skills developed with experience" (p. 20). Their motherwork was not oppressive, but was transformative and engendered feelings of power and competence.

Some maternal scholars say the moral and spiritual aspects of motherhood have been either ignored or underrated (Le Blanc, 1999; McMahon, 1995; Ruddick, 1990) and suggest these important characteristics provide a way to gain recognition and appreciation of the work required to preserve and raise children. The complex thinking and effort required by mothers should be acknowledged as work in its own right and has, therefore, been termed motherwork by some (Porter, 2006) (see also

Independent Self, p. 166) However, these have been used by pronatalists and others to reinforce essentialist arguments that women are best placed to be mothers in the home. Certainly, mothers have historically been seen as society's main moral force, responsible for influencing wayward men and raising responsible citizens (Hafen, 2000; Hrdy, 1999; Maushart, 2006). This continues in the more recent debate over formal childcare and its effect on children's development, which has come out strongly in favour of mothers remaining the primary at-home carers (Arndt, 2007; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Manne, 2005). In their endeavours to alter this attitude and move women from oppression to equality, second-wave feminists ignored or underplayed these aspects of mothering work. Indeed, it is difficult to separate the imperatives of motherlove from socially prescribed intensive mothering. It may well be that the former leads to the other. However, Ruddick and others say that much of this work can be ably done by others (Hrdy, 1999). Notwithstanding this, it is left to mothers to negotiate this difficult junction between motherlove and intensive mothering.

The Extended, Spiritual Self provided these mothers space in which to voice their optimistic and pleasurable expectations and experiences. Family, kinship groups and wider relationships were important in providing some security antenatally for women facing major life-changes. Postnatally, the developing baby provided them great joy and pleasure and the child and immediate family took centre stage, although relationships with other mothers supported and strengthened the mother-self. This persona enabled expression of an intense, overwhelming Motherlove and also allowed connection with the divine. It provided a welcome counterpoint to the difficulties of mothering work, and engendered a growing sense of self-assurance, confidence, and personal growth as these mothers now identified themselves as mothers. However, a final self that desired to regain an independent voice also existed.

Independent Self

Despite the grasp of the Ideal Mother and extended, spiritual personae, these 10 women also recognised a core individual self, distinct from the mother-selves, which required attention also. Pre-birth, these women saw themselves as powerful, agentic shapers of their world. The maintenance of personal interests and needs were felt to be vital by this group of women, as a means of retaining their sense of self.

They appreciated that a baby would change their life, but they saw the child as *fitting in to their* lives rather than the child assuming the centrality that it did postnatally. Although a naïve expectation, it is understandable. With the social movements of the 1970s (e.g. feminism, black power), a discourse of the significance and rights of the individual have become part of the bedrock of modern western nations. These 21st century Australian women have grown up expecting, and generally receiving, equality in terms of education and career opportunities, as well as in many other social areas (Bryce, 2007). Having experienced this also with partners who contributed equally to household and other chores, they expected this status quo to continue postnatally. Moreover, many contemporary parenting manuals speak of the importance of caring for the self and for the couple, as a way of ensuring healthy parenting and family (Biddulph, 1998). This individualism discourse has also modified and contributed to some notions of the Ideal Mother. For example, several of the mothers spoke about the sacrifices traditionally expected of mothers, suggesting they were irrelevant to modern (feminist?) women's lives. However, post-birth realities of the acute dependency of the baby, and their partners' relatively uninterrupted lives, these 10 mothers realised that their individual self had been displaced somewhat. Eight months post-birth the desire to reclaim an independent self was evident through discourses about paid work or career, personal needs, and equality in terms of parenting and other chores.

Paid work and personal needs. Paid work was strongly tied to these women's notions of independent selves, especially antenatally. All but one of them saw themselves returning either part or full-time to their jobs after 12 months, and some earlier than that. The dominance of this discourse suggested that the public, working self was an important aspect of their self identity. As Jenny remarked, "*And I don't think I could do it, just not work.*" After all, most of them have been (well) educated to expect career and independence as a right. Some realised their jobs were important for intrinsic reasons such as the approbation they received, the stimulation and adult contact it provided, as well as daily structure while others spoke of the financial need for them to continue in paid-employment. Miller (2005) cites similar examples from her research in which the mothers expressed enjoyment at returning to paid work although her participants felt this was inappropriate in terms of good mothering, and experienced guilt or selfishness. In the current study, those that had returned to paid work were relatively unapologetic about the pleasure it gave them.

Like Miller's participants, they found it provided them space in which to reclaim their old, independent, adult selves as well as respite from the demanding world of intensive mothering. Their talk about involvement in paid work was also much less tentative than it had been antenatally. However, it needs to be recognised that for the majority of these 10 mothers paid work had still taken a back seat in relation to the importance of their child and their motherwork (see Contradiction p. 171 for further discussion of this term coined by Marie Porter, 2006). Pre-birth paid work was seen as an integral part of the independent identity and would coexist equally alongside the growing family while, postnatally, although a major part of these mother's selves, paid work had lost its equal footing. Notwithstanding this, it was paid work, rather than motherwork, that made them feel worthy and competent in wider society (see also Miller, 2005). It had become an escape which allowed them a personal identity.

Apart from participation in paid work, these women were keen to maintain their core personal identities by ensuring time for personal needs and couple relationships. Raised with the Euro American view that individuality and uniqueness are to be fostered, along with feminist tenets of equality and rights, the preservation of the self was viewed by these 10 women as an imperative equal to that of the new child. Antenatal comments about, *"having time out, individually and as a couple, I think will be important"* (Lucy) were common. Self- and couple-time would allow this group of women to pursue interests that were personally and relationally significant but separate to their mothering activities. Moreover, most of the 10 women were very certain, especially antenatally, that they were not going to forego individual needs for the sake of the child, seeing this as unhealthy for the child and the family, notwithstanding the self. Although admiring of their own mothers, they cited 'unnecessary' sacrifices which they did not want to repeat. Postnatally, as these women surfaced from the intensity of the early months of mothering, the need for self-time had begun to re-emerge with new force, so as to get their lives back on track and feel human again (Heidi). Once again though, although committed to their own needs, several expressed feelings of guilt and selfishness in being so, and most justified it for the sake of the child and family (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Lerner, 1989; Miller, 2005).

Equality. A significant way these women envisaged finding time for the self was through shared parenting with their partners. Discourse about household and

parenting chores expressed their beliefs in women's equality, especially within the home and the value the antenatal mothers placed on their independence and their self. And this was despite their strong identification with the Ideal Mother. Often when asked what they looked forward to about becoming a mother, these women responded by talking about their *partner's* positive fathering attributes, his engagement with and solicitation during the pregnancy, and the help he would be once the child was born. Aside from the appeal to an ideal family model (see Extended, Spiritual Self), I see this discourse as these mothers' reflection of the equality their single selves experienced and hopeful constructions of future equal parenting. Postnatally however, the realities of new motherhood had tempered their ideals and undermined their constructions. Like many other new mothers, they were not at all prepared for the unequal divisions in labour caused by a child (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Cannold, 2005; Crittenden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Le Blanc, 1999; Miller, 2000a; Moriaty, 2000; Summers, 2003). Not only were they required to take on more of the household chores and responsibilities, thus greatly changing these 10 women's lives, their partners' lives continued on relatively unaffected (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005). Roles had reverted to the traditional with the mothers being astonished, and/or frustrated, that they had to press their partners for general and specific help. A common remark was that the father played with the child but did not do any major household chores because either he did not think to do so or thought it was the mother's job. Instead of active parenting, he babysat. Sarah and Meg were the two exceptions. They felt their partners did as much, if not more, than they did. As a group however, these women expressed dissatisfaction with the division of household labour and lack of regard their mothering endeavours received. They counteracted this challenge to their beliefs in equality and self-worth by telling of the mothering work they did and stories about asking for recognition from partners and work colleagues or disputing disparaging comments made by others. However, their pre-birth beliefs in individualism and gender equality had been disrupted by greater responsibilities for parenting, housework and family needs than envisaged and also by their desire to love and nurture their child. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the wish and need to find time for the self was very powerful.

Related to self-time was the importance to these women of maintaining their couple relationships. Many saw this as an imperative to maintaining a healthy family life, a view often expressed in parenting manuals (Biddulph, 1998). Post-birth

however, a very different story had emerged. Along with reduced time for the self, for the majority, time alone with their partner was virtually non-existent, apart from evenings when the baby was sleeping. Most were only just starting to notice this absence, because they had been so caught up in the needs of their child. Unlike time for the self however, time for the couple was not spoken of with the same intensity or desire. For the majority, family time had superseded couple-time. Sarah, who had been able to have regular dinner dates with her partner, remarked on how much of this time was spent talking about their daughter. Tiredness and time constraints, as well as difficulties finding appropriate carers, were the main reasons given for the loss of couple-time, and have been cited in other studies (see for example (Le Blanc, 1999; Miller, 2005)). Moreover, emergence of gendered labour divisions may have resulted in some ambivalence about couple-time. Others have suggested that the energies and self-investment the mother makes in her new child and mothering, plus the physical demands of breastfeeding, holding, cuddling, carrying and comforting a baby depreciate these resources, so that little is left for the partner (Maushart, 2006). Self-time and the support of girlfriends, who nurtured the mother, became vital for these resources to be replenished.

The unique and individual self of each of these women was an important aspect of their pre-birth identities. Most expressed the significance of paid work to this identity, as well as personal interests and hobbies. They expected to retain this identity after their child was born, although they appreciated that there would be some change. Post-birth, for the majority of these mothers their sense of unique self had been severely challenged. Not only had they either left or considerably reduced their paid work, they had been overwhelmed by the dependency of and love for their new baby. This had meant that they had assumed greater responsibility for parenting and housework, which contradicted the beliefs they had in gender equality. Notwithstanding the challenges however, and the need to integrate a new mothering persona, these mothers were all profoundly committed to regaining the essence (albeit altered) of their independent self and were beginning to find ways of doing so.

The above discussion reveals the four significant identities or voices called upon by these mothers to express their expectations and experiences of becoming a mother. Additionally, it shows the alteration and transformation of these selves as

they moved from late pregnancy to early motherhood. Although drawn with some simplicity pre-birth, there was evidence of the complexity which deepened as the realities of a new baby and new life took hold. As with the integration of all new or changed self-identities, these mothers tried out those that were available to them from cultural, historical and personal repertoires. Still in the early stages of their mothering careers at the time of this study, and despite drawing heavily on the Ideal Mother model, they were still constructing and reconstructing their new mother selves. It is likely that these voices of maternal identity will continue to alter as context and need requires, but it is at the time of first motherhood that the identities crucial to mothers are at their most distinct and chaotic (Frank, 1995). It is clear from these 10 mothers' stories, and the above examination, that the identities called upon were simultaneously contradictory and harmonious.

Contradiction

As stated at the outset, conflict and ambiguity were the cornerstone of these women's early motherhood journeys. This was clearly apparent from my first interviews and readings of the data, in which there was continual contradiction between the maternal selves. The fluidity and shifting nature of their significance, ruled by context and personal salience, meant constant competition. For instance, the goals of the Ideal Mother (e.g. natural and innate mothering) and Practical, Challenged Self (e.g. faith in medical knowledge and experts) were often antithetical. It can be argued that much modern human life is inconsistent, ever-changing and chaotic. Human identity, apart from significant developmental periods, is generally uncontested and can be managed and controlled relevant to select contexts. However, it is now well understood and documented by maternal research that the advent to motherhood is a time of immense chaos, growth, ambivalence, and rebirth, the stresses of which are similar to those undergone by people confronted by terminal illness, retrenchment, or death of a loved one (Blumenthal, 1999; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 2002; Maushart, 2006; Miller, 2000b; Parker, 1997). Each of these maternal selves were seen as equally significant.

Although the conflictual nature of new motherhood has been noted since the 1970s, I contest that it has become more complex latterly. Contemporary mothers are subject not only to the traditional and idealised expectations that their own mothers grappled with, they are also influenced by modern expectations and

mothering models of autonomy and having one's own life (Williamson, 2005). The major challenge for these new mums was, and is, to live within and with this chaos, while ultimately finding a personal way through it. For these new mothers therefore, aside from coping with the unfamiliar physical and practical aspects of mothering, this early period was a time in which they tested, rejected or adopted new selves, and modified or sloughed off old ones. The recurrent expression of two or more voices concurrently, often within the space of one or two sentences, was evidence not only of the chaos being experienced by this group of mothers, but their efforts to construct a cohesive or workable whole self (Frank, 1995; Miller, 2000a).

For each woman, the confusion was experienced differentially, attendant upon their level of acceptance of and usefulness of the identities. Moreover, I view all the identities as flexible: They fluctuate according to contextual priority and each woman's personal needs. Sometimes these selves complemented or reinforced each other to strengthen a position, for instance when the success of the practical self promoted confidence and enjoyment and hence self-growth. Alternatively, divergence between maternal selves occurred when the needs or emotions of one self was juxtaposed with another. The existence of multiple voices offer avenues of choice, resilience, enrichment and empowerment, if all are viewed as useful to a new mother (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2005). The notion of a singular state of motherhood does not allow women to anticipate nor to voice the turbulence that comes with a complete upheaval of their life. There is therefore, a need to develop new, useful models of modern motherhood which recognise and embrace the coexistence of diverse voices, rather than endeavouring to make them a cohesive, immutable singularity (Blumenthal, 1999; Williamson, 2005).

Ideal Mother v. Independent Self

Some tensions between identities have already been reflected upon above. A major source of conflict was between the requirements of the Ideal Mother and that of the Independent Self, especially between exclusive mothering beliefs and desires to maintain the equality of self. Mostly this was reflected in discursive techniques of rationalisation for 'selfishness' or reversion to acceptable mothering talk, as these mothers endeavoured to find an amenable coexistence between them.

Discussions of paid work were often dominated by rationalisations. These appealed to both ideal mothering and individual discourses. For example, going out

to work provided a break from the baby that was viewed as being important for revitalising the self (and self-confidence) and thus for renewing the mother-child relationship. Moreover, formal childcare, although conflicting with the ideals of intensive mothering, was spoken of as a necessary evil which provided socialisation and independence building for the child. Financial needs were also socially acceptable. For example Heidi, after talking about wanting to keep in touch with her paid work for personal needs, finished with, *“And plus also we can’t really afford to have me off work, you know, as a luxury thing . . .”*

These reasons for returning to paid work highlight two opposing cultural narratives at work. Firstly, the personal motivations for paid work put us in touch with the notion that it is important for individuals to find private meaning as well as feminist ideals of paid work outside the home. Financial necessity draws on the western imperative of money for realising power and security within a public and capitalist system and is, therefore, a legitimate rationale for leaving a baby with others. Moreover, it has been well documented that mothers are economically disadvantaged by virtue of conflicts between family and paid work commitments, interrupted or altered career paths (e.g. full-time to part-time, changed careers) and perceptions of lower work dedication (Cannold, 2005; Cornell University, 2005; Hewlett, 2002; Craig, 2006; McDonald, 2000; Summers, 2003; Grace, 2002). Notwithstanding these discourses, citing personal needs for returning to paid work was considered shaky in light of what is considered acceptable mothering talk, even though the importance of the self seems to be a common phenomenon for current generations (AAP, 2007b; Albrechtson, 2003). Amy, for example, inserted a comment about her enjoyment of the stimulation of adult company between her difficulty leaving her son, and how she always loved coming back to him. Elevating ones own needs was clearly inappropriate, being viewed as unmotherly, and caused feelings of guilt, but was justifiable in terms of fostering the child and family (Buttrose & Adams, 2005).

Interestingly, none of the mothers in this study expressed guilt because they had *not* returned to paid work, as one of Miller’s participants did. Miller posits this was because being at home full-time is not the correct moral stance for contemporary mothers (see also Johnston & Swanson, 2003). This tension between at-home mothers and mothers in paid work has been termed the mommy wars and

reverberates for modern Australian women (Colling, 2005; Haran, 2003; Hays, 1996; 2003). It also highlights the paradoxes about what work is perceived to be. For this group of women, particularly antenatally, work occurred outside the home. The clearest example of this is that most of the women saw becoming a mother as allowing them to take time off work! Postnatally, although most of the women recognised the labour and intensity of childrearing, and saw paid work as fun or a break from the intensity of mothering duties, still spoke about their partner needing his sleep because he “went to work.” Miller (2005) and others suggests these types of remarks result from “the ways in which mothering work is (under) valued in Western societies,” (p. 119) and correspondent beliefs that outside paid work is more valuable (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Crittenden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Le Blanc, 1999; Maushart, 2006; Oakley, 1980; Rich, 1995; Ruddick, 1990). The positioning of mothering and paid work as contradictory is based (falsely perhaps) on the dichotomy between public and private lives. Generally, mothering is seen as a private endeavour with the attributes of good mothers being antithetical to the requirements for operating within the public world of paid work (Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Cannold, 2005; Crittenden, 2001; Hays, 1996; Horin, 2005; Nolan, 2007; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2003). For example, although gaining some ground latterly, caring and nurturing ‘mothering’ qualities have been seen as inappropriate within an unemotional, profit-driven business world. Moreover, women with workplace ambitions have been seen as unwomanly, unnatural, and often anti-feminist, especially if they have adopted ‘male’ ways of being and uncaring if they leave their babies in formal childcare for long periods of time (Arndt, 2007; Legge, 2005). Interestingly, a different reading of women’s desire for economic wealth, position and power has been made by Sarah Hrdy. She sees it as a modern equivalent of women’s traditional (dare I say, natural) desire to ensure the successful survival of their offspring. Ensuring financial success, mothers guarantee the superior health, education and, hence, future of their progeny (Hrdy, 1999).

Extended, Spiritual Self v. Independent Self

Paradoxically, although endorsing the notion of work being outside the home, these mothers also challenged and rejected it. For example, Heidi disputed those who suggested mothering was easy and felt insulted when people identified her as ‘just a mother’. For her, it was important to establish that the preservation, growth

and training of her child that she engaged in daily were acknowledged as work. Liza captured the ambiguity with her pithy remark, *“before I had her there’s no way I would say, ‘a mother’s working’....when people ask me [now], oh, would you go back to work, yeah I’m a mother. I work.”* Marie Porter has coined the term motherwork to encompass the multifaceted nature of mothering (2006). She posits that the fact that mothers are required to operate and negotiate within numerous, diverse, private and public contexts, in constant relationship with their child and others, utilising new skills and knowledge to grow a healthy, happy and socially acceptable product is evidence enough that this is a legitimate form of work to be valorised and rewarded. Certainly, for Meg, antenatally a confirmed careerist, and Amy who had not wanted children at all, paid work interfered with the enjoyment and level of nurturing they wished to provide their child postnatally. Despite these mothers enjoying motherhood, feeling comfortable with their mothering, and growing personally and spiritually, it was paid work, rather than motherwork, that made them feel worthy and competent in wider society (see also Miller).

The cultural dichotomy between individualism and ideal mothering can be seen to intersect in intensive mothering ideals. This ideology suggests that much of today’s motherwork needs to be concerned with fostering the individual self of the child (Lawler, 2000). However, engaging properly with one’s child and raising a unique individual requires a mother to put aside much of her self and own needs. These mothers viewed the mother and child dyad, the nurturance and preservation of another and the community, as inconsistent with, and isolated from, today’s individualism and the outside world (DiQuinzio, 1999). But as these new mothers had also grown up with the model of the competent, achieving, self-reliant, (career) woman, their discourses indicated that mothering was something to be managed as one would paid work. Hence, this group of mothers felt that they alone were responsible for the raising and well-being of their child in the privacy of their own home.

Relegation to the home largely contributed to confusion and feelings of loss of self experienced by this group of women. Similar to aged retirement, moving to motherwork meant a loss of economic power as well as the intrinsic worth one’s career skills provide (Oakley, 1980). Additionally, although these women felt that what they did was important, they were aware that mothering (hence mothers) was

not respected in the same way their paid work (work self) had been. The subjugation of their individual selves early on, needing to “*focus on myself more now*” and the isolation at home, generated the need to escape the home and reactivate the self by adult interactions through shopping, playgroup, or exercise. As with other life transitions, requirements to successfully assimilate diverse and new models of mothering, involved feelings of loss and desires to regain the old life. Many are surprised by their grief over these losses (Hays, 1996; Lazarre, 1997; Le Blanc, 1999; Miller, 2000a; Nicolson, 2001; Oakley, 1980; Wolf, 2001). However, new mothers, and those who support them, often do not understand these responses. Anathema to the notion of the ideal mother they are not often publicly expressed, except in restricted ways to researchers or close friends. Therefore, although some of these mothers were able to express feelings of loss, others spoke only of desires to get out of the house or of physical changes. This silencing and invalidation of personal feelings and experiences undermine the individual and self belief. Disallowing new mothers time and space to discuss and mourn their losses as western culture does, can result in depression (Nicolson, 1999) and many new mothers do experience non-clinical levels of depression post-birth (Brown et al., 1994; Mauthner, 1995; Nicolson, 1998; Tong & Chamberlain, 2000). Some regard feelings of depression and grief as more normal responses to new motherhood than not, similar to expected responses to other life transitions (Nicolson, 1999; Oakley, 1980). Nor do these feelings fit with the overwhelming feelings of joy and love that all these new mothers experienced. The pleasure and spiritual impact of becoming a mother clearly contradicted these negative emotions. This very conflict aroused feelings of guilt that were sometimes unmanageable (Parker, 1997) and resulted in a return to acceptable mothering talk. Although the birth of the baby, and the father’s virility, are celebrated in our society, neither the emergence of a new mothering self, nor the worth of child rearing is recognised or honoured. Certainly, the transformative and spiritual aspects are completely hidden.

Ideal Mother v. Practical Self

Universal inconsistency for this group of women was found between their ideal expectations and real experiences (for other Australian examples see (Brown et al., 1994; Buttrose & Adams, 2005; Cannold, 2005; Le Blanc, 1999; Porter, 2006)). Liza’s, Sarah’s and Jenny’s problems during their pregnancies revealed discrepancies

that did not match the glowing, enjoyable, natural ideal of expectant motherhood. Although these negative accounts were candidly related, the phrasing used was often apologetic, suggesting that they felt their thoughts and unfavourable stories were inappropriate, with their closing words in each instance either hoping the ideal would be realised, or assuring that things had recently become much better. The return to culturally acceptable mother-talk indicates the difficulty that goes with giving an account that is contrary to personal, and society's, expectations of idyllic motherhood (Miller, 2005). Miller proposes that unflattering stories of one's transition may be too risky, implying that one is not preparing correctly for motherhood or is not a 'good' mother. Furthermore, the desire to be natural and enjoy pregnancy and mothering 'like everyone else', is overwhelming. Therefore, voicing one's unease with the conventional, blissful mother image, especially if one's real, and contradictory, experiences go unrecognised by others, sets that self apart and adversely undermines self-perceptions in a time of great challenge to personal identity. In many ways, the Ideal Mother is a decorous mask that muffles voices and mutes ears to pain, anger and frustration as well as to joy and wild rapture. The fact that *some* stories of unpleasant motherhood were aired to me at least, is suggestive that some realities of mothering as portrayed by the maternal and feminist scholars of this century have taken root in the psyche of Australian women. It may also be that these ambivalences are manageable, and so can be spoken publicly (Parker, 1997). Miller's research also led her to posit that at nine months post-birth mothers are starting to feel like experts and somewhat able to face and voice their difficulties, although the transition required by new motherhood is an extremely gradual process.

It is evident that these mother's journeys to early motherhood were complex and contradictory. Becoming a mother is chaotic and destabilising to the self. At nine months post-birth these mothers were beginning to come to terms with the demands of their baby, their new, often confusing but joyous, lives and their diverse but interconnecting mother-selves. Although cosmetically different, in many ways their journeys emulated those of their own mothers and prior generations of mothers.

Comparisons to previous mothering

Many aspects of these mothers' transitions to motherhood are similar to that of previous generations of mothers. They were subject not only to the traditional and

idealised expectations that their own mothers grappled with, but also experienced similar ambiguity about their changed lives. Although there were cosmetic changes, such as improved education levels and increased wealth, the gender equality experienced by contemporary childless women did not transfer to motherhood (Oakley, 1980, 1992). Despite also the funding provided for child health, little is focused on the mental and emotional health of the mother. Like previous mothers, these women were;

- Still bearing the major burden of care and responsibility for child-rearing – children still seen primarily as women's responsibility and a private, not public, endeavour despite family friendly policies;
- Still holding 20th century ideals of the white picket fence mother who is natural, intuitive, always available, patient, loving, sacrificing, at home etc despite numbers of mothers in paid work using formal childcare and feminist challenges to these;
- Still shocked by realities of birth and breastfeeding, despite increased medical knowledge, as well as experiencing similar isolation, depression, a lack of freedom, constancy, and exhaustion but still unable to express many of these negative feelings.

It appears that for these contemporary women, mothering has not been substantially redefined for modernity. Many diverse expectations exist but no new concepts or models of mothering were utilised.

Conclusion

Yes, yes, definitely [enjoying being a mother]. I wouldn't have it any other way. No, it's not all flowers, definitely. But it's, the positives outweigh the negatives.

Aphrodite, PN interview

This chapter has provided an interpretation of 10 Australian mothers' unique, engaging, and predominantly enjoyable journeys into early motherhood. Notwithstanding diversity of experiences or the pleasure it engendered, it was evident that their transitions necessitated drawing on four dominant voices. By looking at the complex alterations in the Ideal Mother; Extended, Spiritual Self; Practical, Challenged Self; and Independent Self, the transformation in maternal

identity was examined. Additionally, since transformation is inherently a time of flux to which conflict is fundamental, the paradoxical nature of the relationships amongst the maternal identities was explored. The major challenge for these new mums was, and is, to live within and with this chaos, while ultimately finding a personal way through it. Consequently, for these contemporary Australian women, it was unmistakably evident that becoming a mother necessitated drawing on four dominant, often contradictory voices or identities resulting in a complex transitional experience of individual and personal negotiation and integration.

These findings contribute to current theoretical knowledge about the multifaceted nature of the experience of contemporary motherhood for Australian women, irrespective of their dichotomous view of it. The findings suggest that there is a need to find and develop new and useful models of modern motherhood (Williamson, 2005). As Parker comments, “having a baby is a step in an unending series of transformations for women” (1997, p. 19). It is hoped that this knowledge will enable professionals such as nurses, doctors, mental health experts and government policy makers to provide more informed, particular and empathetic support for new Australian mothers.

In the following chapter, conclusions resulting from the interpretation of the data are drawn, and recommendations and future research are presented.

CHAPTER 7: LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

I suppose, I've become more relaxed and happier with the person that I am, within myself. And I suppose that just all comes together and makes you a good mum, a relaxed person, a good wife, a business woman . . . (laugh) God hail the supermum!

Sarah, PN interview

Introduction

This research has investigated 10 contemporary, middle-class, Australian mothers' journeys to motherhood. Using a feminist, poststructural, narrative approach I listened to and analysed their stories in chapter five to discover how these women experienced their transitions to new motherhood. The meanings garnered from their narratives and the thematic analyses were interpreted in the previous chapter in light of the theories from other maternal research. This chapter recognises the strengths and limitations of the research, presents recommendations and applications and, finally, concludes with a discussion of the general implications of this work.

Strengths and limitations

Reaching the end of this research, it is timely to reflect on the quality of the entirety of the project, rather than individual particularities. Although it falls to the removed readers of this study to ultimately ascertain the value of this research, I believe it is a sound piece of work. This work will contribute to maternal scholarship and to a wider community of scholars and practitioners who work with Australian mothers. Additionally, and with equal merit, it has contributed to the mothering careers of the 10 women who generously allowed a glimpse of their early mothering careers. Notwithstanding this, this research does have its strengths and limitations.

The greatest forte of this research is the rigor with which the collection, analysis, and the interpretation of the data was approached, the particularities of which have been outlined comprehensively in Chapters 3 and 4, Methodology and Method, especially the sections on research quality, and so will not be reiterated here. My understanding and application of the chosen methodology and method have ensured dependable and trustworthy results.

Another strength of the work is that the unique and collective voices of the mothers are unequivocal in their clarity. Moreover, these mothers' insights have enabled additional understandings of modern Australian mothers' journeys to new motherhood. I am especially grateful that these women revealed the intensity of the negative *and* positive characteristics of new mothering. Many previous studies (possibly due to concerns of essentialism) have concentrated on the difficulties, with only passing comment on the joys of motherhood. However, the data in this study has provided the base for an even-handed representation of the joys and troubles of the transition to motherhood.

Some may argue that the remit of this study is one of its greater limitations, given its broadness rather than specificity of topic. However, I contend that in order to investigate the *transition* to new motherhood using a qualitative methodology and method, one cannot pick and choose foci. Rather, one is led by the data and the participants. In this case, *all* the aspects discussed above were salient and significant to these new mothers. To present only certain portions of the data would have been erroneous.

Although it is important to realise that no universal 'mothering' story exists, and therefore, transferability of all the results is an inappropriate goal, elements of these women's narratives are likely to be pertinent for many modern new mothers. One weakness that I regret was that my participants were not from a broader socioeconomic mix. It is impossible to accurately predict how the findings of this study may have differed, but it is safe to assume that substantially different socioeconomic circumstances would influence the transition to motherhood, but equally reasonable to speculate that some of the experiences would be similar. With unlimited funding, time, and varied participants, differences of this nature would have been possible.

Recommendations and future applications

This research has shown that the journey to new motherhood can be joyful, thrilling, encouraging, and enlarging, but concurrently and conversely depressing, tedious, confronting, and restricting for new mothers. These contemporary Australian mothers were simultaneously constrained and empowered shapers of their new world. Moreover, these effects are not confined to one's personal arena, but reverberate in many aspects of a woman's life. However, it was evident that the 10

women who participated in this study were under-prepared for the paradoxes and intensity of their journeys. Despite successive generations of mothers and a large body of maternal research since the late 1970s that has investigated and highlighted the complex realities of mothering, these aspects remain relatively hidden.

In light of the masked nature of warts-and-all motherhood, **my first recommendation is that maternal scholars continue to endeavour to find ways of making their academic work easily available to practitioners who work with mothers, as well as to the general population.** To this end, I believe they need to speak openly about their work formally and informally in as many fora as possible. I believe they also need to be prepared to share their own maternal stories. By doing so, they will facilitate a contemporary and continuing public dialogue. This has been attempted since maternal and feminist research began. However, I believe that scholars need to build and foster ongoing relationships with community groups and practitioners/organisations who work with mothers. In addition **maternal scholars need to form a coalition with maternal practitioners so that the significance of maternal research, and thus mothering and mothers, becomes more widely recognised.** Such a group with common aims will be more able to influence government policy. They need to put aside differences and look for the commonalities of their research and goals.

A clear finding of this study was that contradiction was a very normal aspect of the transition to early motherhood, and that this was the major difficulty these mothers needed to manage. **I recommend that maternal scholars play a primary part in increasing awareness and acceptance of this phenomenon by facilitating maternal discussion groups through websites (See for example www.mothersbeheard.com; www.worklifeinterconnectivity.com) and clearing houses of articles and reading lists.**

From comments made by these and other new mothers, it is clear that life experiences and antenatal classes do not currently cover all the practical or psychosocial aspects of becoming a mother. **I therefore recommend government funding to promote greater education about the complexities of motherhood.** As one of the main aims of feminist maternal research is empowerment, I believe providing full knowledge and information from a variety of sources is one way to aid

future and new mothers to choose ways of mothering that are pertinent to their individual lives. Strategies to achieve this recommendation might include:

- Units within secondary school social science and/or sex education courses which encourage teenagers to actively reflect upon and discuss their beliefs about mothering.
- Units within compulsory tertiary courses which encourage young adults to actively discuss contemporary constructions and realities of mothering.
- Longer antenatal classes for mothers and partners which have a number of components looking at the psychosocial aspects of new motherhood.
- Postnatal groups, again for mothers and partners, which are primarily focused on the new mother and that facilitate discussions which enable participants to voice thoughts and experiences considered unacceptable elsewhere. These classes would also encompass practical skills. Inclusion of both parents would assist in communication and sharing of parenting. Provision would need to be made within paternity leave entitlements.

Storytelling by recent new mothers and their partners about their experiences would be a very useful integral part of all the classes. Providing a public forum for early mothering stories would provide a way for women to (re)construct their mother identities, as well as legitimising and validating their experiences and motherwork.

The classes and groups would require multidisciplinary staffing by midwives, counsellors and so forth, so that participants are properly supported. Postnatal groups have been in place for at-risk mothers⁷, however the focus is on their specific problems, not the culturally insidious issues. Given the recognition of the importance of parenting, such a programme should be available for *all* new mothers. It would highlight experiences that are common to all new mothers regardless of social, economic, and cultural boundaries. The existence of such a national programme would breakdown the stigma attached to asking for, and receiving, help, as well as the stigmatising of particular groups of mothers (for example, sole, poor, black).

⁷ EMMA Program – Educating, Mentoring, Mothering Adolescents – www.sunshinecoastyouth.com.

This study also highlights the belief that mothering is a task to be undertaken predominantly by women in isolation and that they alone are responsible for the outcomes. Conversely, these mothers expressed the value of the support they received from contemporary mothers and child health nurses, especially if their own mothers were distant. In light of this **I recommend that a mentoring programme be established that provides support for new mothers in the same manner as the YWCA Big Brothers Big Sisters⁸ mentoring programme does.** The mentors would be experienced mothers who would provide regular contact in the way of mothers and grandmothers of the past, but be properly paid for their services. They would undertake a course which would provide current information and also make use of their experience. This programme would have a threefold function. It would avail of the growing number of retirees looking for fulfilling, meaningful work. It would utilise the skills and wisdom of previous generations of mothers. By passing on this knowledge, it would recognise and rekindle the value of women's knowledge and ways of knowing. Along with professional knowledge, these two aspects would thereby strengthen young women for their mothering careers.

The programmes above would provide both one-to-one and group avenues for the new mother to air concerns, and find support or validation. This study also demonstrated that despite the many commonalities, and being a mother is still culturally proscribed, mothering is very much an individual experience. Hence, **I recommend that 'bottom-up' approaches to the establishment and maintenance of programmes be used, so that the foci of the programmes are driven by the new mothers.** Doing so would foster the belief that mothers can be agentic shapers of their worlds who have unique ways of mothering that are equally valid or appropriate. In line with this, **nurses and other health professionals should be educated to identify, and where possible, promote new mother's agentic experiences.**

Given that most Australian maternal research uses white, middle class participants, but that we are a culturally diverse society, **I recommend that future research investigates specific groups of mothers to determine the commonalities and particularities of early mothering experiences.** This would provide a way to

⁸YWCA NSW - www.ywcansw.com.au/family_services/big_brothers_big_sisters_2.php

look at specific issues, but also a basis on which to build community connections between seemingly dissimilar groups, and find other useful models of mothering for contemporary Australian mothers to draw on. Moreover, the findings can be used as a starting point for similar research with specific groups of new Australian mothers. If, as is apparent with other international research, the findings contain similarities, it would be suggestive that these facets of early motherhood would be connective points for ‘different’ groups of mothers and so transcend artificial divisions.

Finally, to move mothering to an equal footing with paid work, **I recommend that motherwork be financially rewarded in similar fashion to Sweden, that it be counted in GDP and census data, and that workplace programmes which do not penalise mothers or fathers, be implemented.** Appropriate financial recompense would provide individual mothers (or fathers) with independence and economic power; and minimise the current financial inequities between mothers and those in paid work, thereby encouraging sharing of this work. Additionally, governments should encourage the arrangement of workplaces such that parenthood does not exclude career opportunities. For example, career advancement programmes should be equally accessible to part-time employees as full-time employees. Along with inclusion in the census, these measures would send a message that raising children is valuable work and those who do so are valued in the Australian community.

Conclusion

With the birth of a new child, comes the rebirth of a woman (Maushart, 2006; Rich, 1995). This doctoral research explored Australian mothers' unique, engaging, and predominantly enjoyable transitions to early motherhood. A feminist, poststructural methodology underpinned this study as it acknowledged the fluidity and multiplicity of women's lives, and also that a diversity of truths exist. This methodology promoted the use of narrative and thematic analysis methods in which in depth ante-and postnatal interviews were conducted allowed for multiplicity, and recognised the 'truth' of women's lives as it was expressed by the women in their own words. It also recognised the influence of the researcher in the construction of truth. Processes such as reflexivity, member-checking, minimal editing undertaken during data collection, analysis, and interpretation ensured the participants and the data were treated respectfully and honestly. Therefore, the rigorous processes used have ensured the findings are good because they are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. A feminist, poststructural, narrative approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed the mothers to voice and reflect upon their stories during the period of major change that becoming a mother is.

Although motherhood is generally viewed as a static state in which one enters with the birth of a child and where the child(ren) grow and mature but the mother stays the same, this research has shown that it is a complex and turbulent period, especially during the early, transformative months. For the women who participated in this study, it was unmistakably evident that becoming a mother necessitated drawing on four dominant, often contradictory voices or identities resulting in a complex transitional experience of individual and personal negotiation and integration. These were; The Ideal Mother; Extended, Spiritual Self; Practical, Challenged Self; and Independent Self. Moreover, it is evident from this study that many similarities exist between the early mothering experiences of previous new mothers and these modern Australian women. However, not only are contemporary Australian mothers still shaped by the 1950s and 1960s models of mothering, they are also influenced by later models which have equal and often contradictory impacts on them and their mothering (Cannold, 2005; Miller, 2005; Williamson, 2005).

This research has shown that the transition to new motherhood for contemporary Australian women is simultaneously profoundly joyful and thrilling,

confronting and depressing, and constraining and empowering. Moreover, it was evident that the 10 women who participated in this study were under prepared for the paradoxes and intensity of their journeys. I, and others, posit that successive generations of mothers and a large body of maternal research since the late 70s have been unable to clearly expose and inform young women about the complex realities of mothering.

The inherent complexity of this life-transition does however, defy simple explanation and solution. Regardless, I feel that we need to tell *all* the stories so that future mothers have our knowledge to draw from and build upon. We have buried the knowledge of our mothers and we need to rekindle that passing on of knowledge and combine it with learned wisdom. Moreover, by describing all the aspects of mothering, and the chaos motherhood brings, we make them equally real, valid, valuable and normal. In this way, young women can be strengthened for and feel positive about their mothering careers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Information Sheet/Consent Form (Jan 2004)

The Challenge of Becoming a Mum: Fairytales and Home Truths

INFORMATION SHEET/CONSENT FORM

My name is Lisa Raith. I am currently enrolled in a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) programme at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), and am the mother of a 2 year old son. In my doctoral study (approved by the USQ ethics committee) I have decided to study women's expectations of motherhood and their actual experience of becoming a mother. Some research shows that what women think motherhood will be like, and their experience of the real thing, can be quite different.

From women's stories, we could learn what issues are important for modern Australian women during this transition. By being more aware of women's experiences, we would better understand how becoming a mother effects a woman's life, her view of herself, and the lives of her loved ones. This could help those of us in the caring professions to be more supportive and helpful.

If you are expecting your first baby, will be in approximately your 4th, 5th, or 6th month of pregnancy from Jan to March 2004, and you have not mothered other children through adoption or a blended family, I invite you to participate in this study. You may find it beneficial to be able to talk about your expectations and experiences of motherhood. I am very interested in your experiences, so my role would be to sit and listen and try to understand.

This study will require your participation in the following ways:

1. **Meeting with me individually** during your 4th, 5th, or 6th month of pregnancy to talk about what you think motherhood will be like, and then when your baby is approximately 6 months old, to tell me what motherhood has been like so far. These meetings would take between one and two hours. I would like to take some notes as well as audio-taping your interview. These meetings would be scheduled at a time and place suitable to you, for example at your place.
2. **Participating in two group discussions** with other mothers-to-be/mothers. Like the interviews, one will be conducted during your second trimester and one when your baby is approximately 6 months old. These discussions will centre on issues raised in the individual interviews.
3. **Checking** that I've accurately recorded and interpreted your experiences. After the interview/s and group discussions, I will summarise and interpret your interviews and the discussions. I will then send you the summary of your interviews, the discussions, and my interpretations for you to look at.

If you agree to participate, I can assure you that your privacy will be maintained. Anything you tell me will be kept strictly confidential. I will ask you to choose a fictitious name ('pseudonym') to identify your story, so that when it is published your actual identity will be hidden. I may change other details of your story, such as the town in which you live, to be absolutely certain that no-one could identify you. I will lock all information that I collect (stored in computer and paper files) in a filing cabinet at my home, to which only I have access. Part, or all, of the information you give me will be used in my final research thesis. It may also be used in articles for publication in academic journals, or at conferences.

If you have other concerns that you would like to have addressed before agreeing to enter the study, I would be pleased to talk with you about them. We can add specific conditions to the consent form, if you wish. It is entirely your choice whether you participate in this study or not. If you do decide to participate, you are free to withdraw **at any time**, and I will entirely respect your decision. During interviews, you can choose not to answer some or all of the questions I ask.

If you want further information about this study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the details below. I welcome your questions and comments. Thank you for taking the time to read this sheet and considering my request.

CONSENT

I, _____ agree to participate in the research project being conducted by Lisa Raith from the University of Southern Queensland.

I am aware of the aim of the study, and agree to be interviewed by Lisa before and after the birth of my child (at my convenience) to explore my experiences of motherhood. I have read the information above, and have asked Lisa to explain any details of the study and my participation that I was unsure about.

I agree to participate on the basis that strict confidentiality is maintained in respect to the information that I give Lisa. I am aware that all or parts of my story may be published in a research thesis, but that my name and any other identifying characteristics will be changed to protect my privacy.

By signing this consent form, I indicate my willingness to participate in this study, but reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without any adverse consequences.

Signed _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Any questions with regard to this project may be directed to:

Ms Lisa Raith. PhD Candidate, Department of Nursing, USQ, Telephone: 4635 5211; Email: raith@usq.edu.au.
Dr Cath Rogers-Clark, Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing, USQ, Toowoomba, QLD, 4350. Telephone: 4631 2005; FAX: 4631 1653; Email: rogerscl@usq.edu.au

If you have a concern regarding the implementation of the project, you should contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, USQ, Baker St. Toowoomba or telephone (07) 4631 2956.

Appendix B – Information Sheet/Consent Form (May 2005)

The Challenge of Becoming a Mum: Fairytales and Home Truths

INFORMATION SHEET/CONSENT FORM

My name is Lisa Raith. I am currently enrolled in a PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) programme at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), and am the mother of a 2 year old son. In my doctoral study (approved by the USQ ethics committee) I have decided to study women's expectations of motherhood and their actual experience of becoming a mother. Some research shows that what women think motherhood will be like, and their experience of the real thing, can be quite different.

From women's stories, we could learn what issues are important for modern Australian women during this transition. By being more aware of women's experiences, we would better understand how becoming a mother effects a woman's life, her view of herself, and the lives of her loved ones. This could help those of us in the caring professions to be more supportive and helpful.

If you are expecting your first baby, will be in approximately your 4th, 5th, or 6th month of pregnancy from Jan to March 2005, and you have not mothered other children through adoption or a blended family, I invite you to participate in this study. You may find it beneficial to be able to talk about your expectations and experiences of motherhood. I am very interested in your experiences, so my role would be to sit and listen and try to understand.

This study will require your participation in the following ways:

1. **Meeting with me individually** during your 4th, 5th, or 6th month of pregnancy to talk about what you think motherhood will be like, and then when your baby is approximately 6-8 months old, to tell me what motherhood has been like so far. These meetings would take between one and two hours. I would like to take some notes as well as audio-taping your interview. These meetings would be scheduled at a time and place suitable to you, for example at your place.
2. **Checking** that I've accurately recorded and interpreted your experiences. After the interview/s and group discussions, I will summarise and interpret your interviews and the discussions. I will then send you the summary of your interviews, the discussions, and my interpretations for you to look at.

If you agree to participate, I can assure you that your privacy will be maintained. Anything you tell me will be kept strictly confidential. I will ask you to choose a fictitious name ('pseudonym') to identify your story, so that when it is published your actual identity will be hidden. I may change other details of your story, such as the town in which you live, to be absolutely certain that no-one could identify you. I will lock all information that I collect (stored in computer and paper files) in a filing cabinet at my home, to which only I have access. Part, or all, of the information you give me will be used in my final research thesis. It may also be used in articles for publication in academic journals, or at conferences.

If you have other concerns that you would like to have addressed before agreeing to enter the study, I would be pleased to talk with you about them. We can add specific conditions to the consent form, if you wish. It is entirely your choice whether you participate in this study or not. If you do decide to participate, you are free to withdraw **at any time**, and I will entirely respect your decision. During interviews, you can choose not to answer some or all of the questions I ask.

If you want further information about this study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor using the details below. I welcome your questions and comments. Thank you for taking the time to read this sheet and considering my request.

CONSENT

I, _____ agree to participate in the research project being conducted by Lisa Raith from the University of Southern Queensland.

I am aware of the aim of the study, and agree to be interviewed by Lisa before and after the birth of my child (at my convenience) to explore my experiences of motherhood. I have read the information above, and have asked Lisa to explain any details of the study and my participation that I was unsure about.

I agree to participate on the basis that strict confidentiality is maintained in respect to the information that I give Lisa. I am aware that all or parts of my story may be published in a research thesis, but that my name and any other identifying characteristics will be changed to protect my privacy.

By signing this consent form, I indicate my willingness to participate in this study, but reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without any adverse consequences.

Signed _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Date _____

Any questions with regard to this project may be directed to:Ms Lisa Raith. PhD Candidate, Department of Nursing, USQ, Telephone: 5448 6898; Email: raith@usq.edu.au. Dr Cath Rogers-Clark, Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing, USQ, Toowoomba, QLD, 4350. Telephone: 4631 2005; FAX: 4631 1653; Email: rogerscl@usq.edu.au

If you have a concern regarding the implementation of the project, you should contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, USQ, Baker St. Toowoomba or telephone (07) 4631 2956.

Appendix C – Example of antenatal aide-memoire

Antenatal Interview Guide

Housekeeping:

- Explanation/aims of my study
- Procedure - ante and post-natal interviews, tape-recorded, summarised and returned for comment
- Potential risks and benefits – someone to talk to, clarify thoughts on mothering, bring up past or current issues/difficulties;
- Confidentiality/storage
- Potential uses of information – PhD dissertation, Conferences presentations and journal papers.
- Nil obligation
- Participant questions?

About me:

- Married
- Creative – like to sew, pottery, cook. Love reading fantasy novels.
- Psychology degree.
- New mother of 2 ½ year old - Have personally experienced the ups and downs of being a mum. Started wondering how other women manage so many roles.

Questions

- Tell me a bit about yourself – what you do, your interests.
- How has your pregnancy been, what has it been like being pregnant?
- How are you feeling about the birth of your child?
 - What about after the birth?
- What do you think your life is going to be like in the first weeks/months?
 - Good and bad things?
- What effect will the baby have on your relationships with
 - Spouse
 - Other family
 - Friends
- What effect will the baby have on your career, hobbies, or interests?
- When you visualise yourself as a mother, what pictures or thoughts come to mind?
- What are your main concerns about being a mum?
- What good/enjoyable things do you think will result?

Appendix D – Example of postnatal aide-memoire

Amy

- In your email you said “looking forward to talking to you again as my view of motherhood has really changed” – what did you mean by that?
- What do you think has made it better than you expected? What things have you found difficult or easier than you imagined? Any concerns or worries?
- You were concerned with knowing what to do etc, coping with crying. How are you coping with practicalities of tiredness etc?
- You were concerned about maintaining your own space and hobbies etc. How is that working? Have you managed to get your own time? Regularly? What about couple time?
- Has your baby fitted in to your lives in the way you had hoped?
- In a lot of literature, mothers talk about it being harder than they expected – the practicalities, time to themselves, physical changes, juggling career and home, challenges to their own identity. How do you feel about those things
- When we spoke earlier, you said you had never wanted to be a mum and didn’t know a lot about babies etc. Also about being uptight. I wonder how happy you are with how you are mothering? Do you feel you are being the sort of mother you wanted to be? How? Or are you different? How?
- Do you think you are a good mother?
- Do you feel you have changed as a person?
- What effect do you think being older parents has had, if any?
- Do you think you were really prepared for what it would be like?
- What sort of support/help/advice have you needed and got?
- You were concerned about your husband and him being at home. How has that been? What about shared parenting?
- How is managing work and family? How you thought or have you changed your mind about it all?
- Sometimes mothers find it tough to talk about the negative aspects of being a Mum. Is that ever the case for you? Do you feel able to complain (remember your IVF friends)? Who to?
- In some of the literature I’ve looked at, mothers have talked about feeling guilty about all sorts of choices, or even about some dark or difficult thoughts they’ve had. Can you identify with that at all? How?

Appendix E – Example of member–checking letter (AN)

PO Box 231,
Bli Bli QLD 4560

9 February 2006

Dear

RE: Transition to motherhood – post-natal interview

Hi, how are you and your family? Hopefully you had a great Christmas and New Year – no doubt a very special time with your baby. I'm sure your parents/parents-in-law loved every minute of it. Thanks for advising me of your new details. I am enclosing the narrative from our conversation in May last year.

I hope the narrative is an accurate representation of what you thought at that time. I know that it may be difficult to recall what we discussed. Of course, I have edited or amended some of the wording to make the thoughts flow and the piece be easily read, but hopefully I have managed to retain as much of 'you' as possible. I have also chosen an alias for your partner. If you would prefer another name, we can easily change it. I am hoping you will be able to read the narrative and confirm or challenge any or all of it. If you would like to add to it/delete bits or clarify anything, please feel free. I will then make these changes. I would also be happy to discuss it with you when we next meet. The only thing I would say is that you now may disagree with some of what you said, given your recent experiences. Please try to remember that what you said was how you thought 10 months ago. Also, this may not be the final version of what goes into my thesis. It will be a bit dependent on what comes out in our next discussion, and of course the total length of both pieces.

As to our next discussion, my plan is to try and organise to see you by the end of February. I will ring you next week to see where you are at, and to organise a time for the follow up interview, which I hope we can do by the 28th. So you can think about a time that suits you, my research days are Tuesday through Thursday, 9.30am to 4.30pm, and Friday 9.30am to 2.15pm. If these times don't suit, I can do evenings or weekends.

Look forward to speaking with you soon.

Kind regards

Lisa Raith

Ph: 5448 6898; Email: raith@usq.edu.au

Appendix F - Example of member-checking letter (PN)

PO Box 231,
Bli Bli QLD 4560

27

February 2008

Dear

RE: Transition to motherhood – post-natal transcript

Hi, hope you and your family had a great Christmas. Well, it is another year and I am still not quite finished the PhD. I am hoping to hand in mid April this year. I have been busy writing it, being a mum, doing school stuff and also am involved in a community centre project for Bli Bli. However, the narratives are all done and so I am sending them out for checking as I did with the first ones. Sorry it has taken so long but to be honest I only realised late last year that I had not sent them. Therefore, I am enclosing the transcript from our conversation in March 2005. I appreciate the time this will take you and that you are busy. Perhaps if you could let me know any changes either by phone, email or letter by **28 March 2008**. If you do not return any changes or contact me, I will assume you are happy for me to include the narrative as it is.

I hope it is an accurate representation of what you thought at that time. I know that it will be difficult to recall what we discussed. Of course, I have edited or amended some of the wording to make the thoughts flow and the piece be easily read. I have also chosen an alias for Bryn in keeping with your alias. If you would prefer another, please let me know. Please read the narrative I have constructed and confirm or challenge any or all of it. If you would like to add to it in any way or clarify anything, please feel free by writing in the margins or on extra paper. I will then make these changes. I would also be happy to discuss it with you by telephone. The only thing I would say is that you now may disagree with some of what you said, given the time that has elapsed and your recent experiences. Please remember that what you said was how you thought over 2 years ago. Also, this may not be the final version that goes into my thesis, as I think I will have to shorten them all.

Once I have handed in the PhD, I will be able to send you the analysis of all the stories and my conclusions if you are interested. At this stage I plan to revise the chapters of the PhD into a shorter and easier to read format. I will forward information regarding this once I am at the end of the dissertation.

Thanks again for your time and best wishes for the year.

Kind regards

Lisa Raith

Ph: 5448 6898; Email: raith@usq.edu.au

Appendix G – Summary of Current Government Benefits

The following are the core government payments given to families and caregivers and are sourced from Centrelink *A Guide to Commonwealth Payments 1 January – 19 March 2007* Commonwealth of Australia Canberra 2006 (Sex Discrimination Unit, 2007). Bold type denote payments relevant to all mothers.

Carer Payment – A means tested payment paid under pension conditions to people who because of the demands of their caring role are unable to support themselves through substantial workforce participation. The basic single rate of payment is \$512.10 per fortnight while couples receive \$427.70 each, which is the same as other pensions. These amounts are adjusted twice a year in line with cost of living and wage increases.

Carer Allowance – A non-means tested supplementary payment for people who provide daily care to a person with a disability or medical condition. More than one allowance can be received if two or more people are cared for. The basic rate of payment is \$98.50 per fortnight and may be paid in addition to an income support payment.

Child Care Benefit – This is provided to families using either approved formal child care or informal (registered) child care. This subsidy either reduces fees at a child care service, or can be paid as a lump sum to parents at the end of the year, and only approved care is income tested on family income. A rate up to \$2.96 per hour (up to \$148 per week) is provided for approved care for families with incomes below a threshold of \$98 348 for one child in care, \$106 629 for two children in care and \$121 130 for three children, plus \$20 221 for each child after the third. For registered care up to \$0.497 per hour. Families on low incomes can receive up to \$148 for 50 hours of care a week.

Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB (A)) – Families with dependent children under 21 or full time dependent students aged 21-24 years receive this payment, which is income tested on family income. The benefit cuts out when income reaches \$94 718 for families with one child under 18 years, \$104 317 for two children and \$114 769 for three children. FTB (A) can be paid fortnightly, as a lump sum after the end of the financial year, or as reduced tax withholdings from wages paid to a customer or their partner. The maximum rate for a child under 13 is \$140.84 per fortnight, or \$4 317.95 per year (the annual amount includes the FTB (A) supplement of \$646.05 per child). Different rates apply to older dependent children and to children in approved care organisations.

Family Tax Benefit Part B (FTB (B)) – Single income families, including sole parent families, receive this payment. In two parent families, FTB (B) is income tested on the second (or lower) earner's income only, and payments are reduced by 20 cents for each dollar of income earned over \$4 234. Where the youngest child is under five, the second income earner can earn \$21 572 per year before the payment cuts out. Where the youngest child is over five, the second earner can earn \$16 790 before the payment cuts out. Payments can be paid fortnightly, as a lump sum after the end of the financial year, or as reduced tax withholdings from wages paid to a customer or their partner. The maximum rate of FTB (B) for a child under five years is \$120.96 per fortnight or \$3 467.50 per year, and \$84.28 per fortnight or \$2 511.20 per year for children between five and 15 years (or 16-18 years if a full time student). The annual amounts include the FTB (B) supplement of \$313.90 per family.

Maternity Immunisation Allowance – A lump sum payment of \$227.90 is paid for children aged 18-24 months who are fully immunised.

Maternity Payment – A payment of \$4 100 to families (usually a lump sum) following the birth or adoption of a baby. The payment will increase to \$5 000 from July 2008. In the

2005-2006 Budget, access to this payment was extended to parents who adopt children up to two years of age.

Parenting Payment – A means tested payment to carers of children under 16 years, primarily in single income families (including sole parent families) with low income. Sole parents receive up to \$512.10 per fortnight, while partnered parents receive up to \$379.80 per fortnight.

**(RE)BIRTH OF THE SELF: ORDINARY WOMEN'S
COMPLEX JOURNEYS INTO NEW MOTHERHOOD.**

A Feminist Poststructural Narrative Study

VOLUME II

STORIES OF EARLY MOTHERING

Introduction

This chapter presents stories of the transition to early motherhood as related to me by my 10 participants. The experiences of Meg, Liza, Jenny, Heidi, Lucy, Aphrodite, Jasmine, Amy, Sarah, and Alison were distilled from antenatal interviews when the women were 6-8 months pregnant, and postnatal follow-ups when the babies were 8-10 months old. The transformation of interview transcript into narrative is described fully in Chapter 4: *Method - an Evolution*, of the dissertation.

Using a before and after format, the ante- and postnatal sections for each mother are introduced by a descriptive paragraph through which I provide a sketch of each mother and the context of their interviews. Aside from this introduction, these descriptors are the only overt instances of my voice in this chapter.

The stories generally follow the temporal progression of the interview, unless I felt rearrangement allowed for greater readability. Therefore, subheadings within each section describe the dominant idea of the following subsection, and are designed to provide some structure to free-flowing thought progression. Additionally, I have retained slang, misspellings, and other imperfections to preserve the speakers' voices. Long pauses are identified as such, while . . . indicates deletion of text within or between sentences. Text appearing within [] are insertions to aid understanding and have been drawn from my questions or participant speech from elsewhere; text enclosed by () will indicate emotions or non-verbals such as laughter. Other common grammatical conventions will apply.

Given the transformative nature of the topic, these are not stories in the traditional sense of having a beginning, middle and end. Rather they are narratives-in-progress or journeys of discovery, which by their nature involve side-trips, back-tracking, resolution and uncertainty. They take the reader on an engaging, thought-provoking but tenuous co-journey into new motherhood. As Lucy said,

So if you think of it as a journey you think, well the destination's going to be somewhere good. And, and you're not real sure where you're going but you get there just the same.

PN Interview

Alison

Alison was 27 years old at the time of our first meeting at her small acreage home. I was warmly welcomed by her and partner Peter. During our chat we enjoyed a peaceful rural view. A health professional, Alison had recently stopped work due to tiredness from the pregnancy. As we talked, Alison impressed me as a confident, mature, self-sufficient and practical person. She responded openly and honestly to my queries, but also took time to think through her answers. Alison's manner embodied the post-structuralist ideal of reality being constructed as it is spoken.

a bit of a shock

Bub wasn't planned. Um, we certainly...um we had talked about having children and um getting married and things like that . . . And, it was an interesting time because I'd just moved . . . and where I first started working . . .um I had a very rough time . . .and at the same time I found out I was pregnant, and it was a big shock to start with and I was thinking, "Oh, my God," that I needed to have a drink, I needed to sit down . . . I'd just found out through a pregnancy test . . .minutes before Pete came home . . .heard his car coming up the driveway and I'm like, "Oh, no. Now I'm going to have to tell him." (laugh) . . . So I went outside and he said straight away, "What's wrong?" because I must have been like a ghost (laugh). And I said, "You sit down. I've got something to tell you." And . . .so I told him and he's very easy, loving, very easy going man and um he said, "Oh, that's ok, we'll work something out, you know." And I'm like, "Oh, I'm glad you're so (laugh) so comfortable about it," . . . and then we had a drink and then talked about it a bit more, and. . .um he gave the option to me and um I decided that yeah, it's best that we keep the child and go from there. Bit earlier than we expected, but um we're both really happy and excited about it now, definitely.

I didn't seriously consider aborting. Primarily because I was adopted, I've never really been a keen one for abortion, to start with. Um, Pete is quite a spiritual person too so he was um aware of the karmic affects . . . He told me that, you know, "If you decide to do that, then we really need to talk about a lot of healing in your life afterwards." Um I, yeah I just didn't really think about it that much. I maybe thought of it and then sort of thought, "What am I thinking about?"

. . . I think that there's, if you can't have children there's a reason for that and, I mean, it would be devastating. Like I know, I've talked many times with my

Mum how she went through um what she went through getting me um, and so what I was trying to say is if . . . you end up not having children then life doesn't stop . . .

When I first found out . . . that, phew, blew my mind a bit . . . I just didn't feel that that was the direction my life was taking at the time. I'd just made a change in my life to move up here to be with a wonderful person . . . we were looking forward to establishing a partnership....maybe travelling, little things like that . . . I just thought of, you know, that . . . ad where the guy gets bowled over by the bowling ball after he's had the Fishermen's Friend. That's what it felt like and then my head came back on but it was like, whoa. Yeah, like you know sometimes you do plan your life . . . and all of a sudden something changes again and you think, "Oh, ok. Righty so that's not the direction my life's taking any more." . . . at the end of the day we'll get there, but it will just be with an extra one . . . so that will be a good adventure as well.

he will, to some extent, fit into our lives

. . . the child to me won't interfere with our lives . . . and when I really thought about it . . . I didn't really have an ultimate plan anyway. I had come up here to sort of look into natural therapy a bit more, um to look at further study . . . and I think, I don't think it will slow me down at all. You know, like since um, since I've been pregnant I've looked into natural therapies for children and things like that, so my awareness is broadening already . . . I guess we both believe that bub's happening for a reason. We don't feel that it's going to interfere with our . . . goals and our ultimate dreams. . . we feel that he's chosen us, so therefore he's happy to come along on our journey and, of course, you know, there's going to be change in our lives once the baby comes but overall – I hope I don't seem too naive but . . . (laugh) . . . in the long run I think, yes, if he's fit and healthy and we're fit and healthy as well, then he will, to some extent, fit into our lives . . . um, you know, within reason . . . I don't really know how that's going to go, but . . . I guess I'm being realistic about it too, and um from what I've heard, you fit into the baby's life. You have to work around you know, what sort of temperament that your child has and everything to a certain degree um but, so . . .

. . . It depends . . . I've had girl friends who've had quite disastrous first children or quite um disruptive . . . and then . . . my main girlfriend has got a two week old. She's wanting to wake the baby up, you know (laugh) . . . Sleeps and eats

and is like a doll . . . so yeah it's just a matter of seeing how things go and both of you learning as you go along. Because . . . there's that important time there of getting to know the child and them getting to know you as well, so . . . We're really just looking forward to it now. Just trying to tidy up a few loose ends . . . and see what our plans are next.

a peaceful um birth for both of us

Um, at one stage I thought that it was, you had to get ready, you know . . . have the baby's room ready, you had to have this, you had to have that . . . as well . . . we've looked into doing hypno-birthing and we've just started that this week, so I'd like to be a bit more proficient at it before the baby comes (laugh). Um, but as far as – we're still trying to sort out furniture and get the baby's room ready and all that sort of thing . . . I'm not so stressed about that now because the baby doesn't mind. As long as it's being looked after and loved it doesn't really need a little room to itself and, certainly seeing my friends who aren't really that organised and their babies do alright . . . you know. So, I guess if the baby was born today it probably wouldn't be that much of a hassle . . . I'm trying not to be idealistic about the birth and everything, but it um probably wouldn't be my ideal today (laugh).

I would like yeah to be able to have a natural birth um where the child comes into the world um . . . in a quiet environment where I'm not stressed and he's not stressed and so it's um basically a peaceful, um peaceful time. You know, it's something that we all don't remember, but it's in us somehow. It's in our subconscious . . . and I don't want to be responsible for you know, causing too much harm to him from the beginning. I'm trying to just be as responsible as I can . . . um looking at what's the best for both of us and I guess um probably one of my biggest fears is being torn or something like that as well . . . and through the hypno-birthing being controlled and – not so much controlled but, I'm not like a control freak or anything, I'm quite happy to go with the flow- but just having – I've lost my train of thought of again. God I'm getting hopeless. Um, just having that, the peace of mind you know that the child is passing through and that the natural birthing process is happening the way it should be and the best way for the child and for you as well. I guess that's my ideal if I had to say I had an ideal. Um, saying that...I'm quite happy to have alternatives as well. You know if I need to have a caesarean, I need to have a caesarean. It's not the end of the world. But I just, um one thing I, Pete and I spoke about from the beginning . . . because it is such a natural thing and it should be

something um something that mother and baby go through together – not having something um a group of other people making the decisions for you, that you sort of lose that birthing right almost. And I really feel that that is a big cause of post natal depression when the mother's, perhaps, expectations aren't met during birthing and they are left sore and sorry . . . and bub's you know, distressed and things, then maybe they feel they've failed somehow . . . and I've really thought about it seriously and I've thought, "Well the best way for me to look at that is, to look at how naturally can I do this? . . . "How can I facilitate this birthing process the best way possible so that both bub and I come out of it – we come out as family rejoicing rather than thinking, 'God we could have done better' or 'God this could have been a lot better.'

. . . (laugh) probably my only concern is that bub's healthy, that he's doing ok and certainly um that I just do the best that I can to keep him healthy . . . I mean that's totally not in my control either. I mean, he could be born with something that's out of our control and so be it, we'll . . . Yeah, we will work through that as well. So I probably don't really have any sort of real sort of irrational worries at the moment (laugh) . . . there was one thing that did distress me and I woke up in the middle of the night one night just thinking, "Oh God what if the child um becomes a drug addict or something like that". I just thought, "How ridiculous is that?" you know (laugh).

a change in the dynamic

Yeah um, a child does change your life. You know, um you have to tend to its needs and everything like that and it's becoming a mother and becoming parents.

I guess not having time to myself, being ah, I guess absorbed by having a child. They do change your timetable quite a bit and your sleeping habits and, um depending on how settled they are, what you can do how soon you can go out – not that I go out much, but just little things like going shopping . . . That's how I sort of imagine it. Um, not being able to spend so much time with Pete as well . . . So we're trying to cash in on as much time as we have left (laugh). He's currently not working. . . so that's given us a bit of time to sort out . . . what direction we're heading and where we would like to go in our lives together as a family.

It depends if I have a beautiful child or if I have a, um Pete would say, "Don't put it out there" (laugh) . . . and um I guess too I'm very blessed to have a very

supportive partner, so we've already made um plans to um that it's important that we each have our own space . . . Um, maybe to start with . . . it does take a little while to establish a pattern with your child . . . and then you start to feel a little bit freer. It might even take – some people said it takes the first 12 months . . . I guess too for me I've always been a person who's really believed in self-time. No matter how busy you are, you've really got to make time for yourself. So even though I say I won't have time, I'll probably make it a big priority um because I know it's going to benefit everyone around me, not just myself. Because if you're – if, you know, you're not feeling the best, then you're going to affect the bub . . . and Pete will know that I'm not happy, so the best thing I can do is look after myself. So yes, ah you just do the best that you can in the time at the time.

...Maybe that's why I'm sort of wanting as much time as I can with Pete because I love him so much . . . and um too because I just don't know how much time bub's going to take up in our lives and um you know if he's not well or whatever he will take up more time, so um I don't want to miss out on us. I guess um it will just be a change in the dynamic. We will just become a family rather than a couple. Well we already are a family but, um yeah . . . I don't really know what that's going to be like . . . the thought that just popped into my mind then is that we've both got both of our parents up here. It's my mum and dad's first grandchild and Pete's mum and step-dad just live up the road, so I'm sure they would love to look after bub any time. But that's a way we've said that we could get some couple time. Um, yeah . . . we may not be staying here . . . so um yeah we just have to wait and see what our circumstances as to how we can get couple time or whatever we need. Another thing that Pete's Mum has told us that what really worked in her relationship with Pete's Dad was . . . to have a routine which puts them to bed by 6.30 so you've got a couple of hours together every night um which I think is a fantastic idea because you can stay sane that way...

. . . my Mum has already said she wants to come and stay. She um, she'd like to come home with me when bub first comes home just to help out and things like that. Haven't given her an answer yet (laugh). At the same time I'm probably not going to say no either, and maybe if Pete has to go away for work. . . I'd love to have Mum around for support, definitely not every day, but that's up to her. We'd discuss it. Pete's Mum has certainly said, "Any time you need me at all, just sing out," so yeah, I have no problem with that. I've never been a person to sort of not

ask for help . . . so I don't, won't feel any shame or anything by asking them if it's going to help everyone in the long run . . . my Mum. She wants to help out all the time, so – and Mum's do, most Mums that I've heard anyway, so – I guess I don't really mind, it's just I'd like to be able to come home just for a few days at least to be able to try and settle him myself as well . . . I mean, Mum's been fantastic through the whole pregnancy. Whenever I ask her a question she already knows, she knows the answer and everything straight away, so she's been very supportive that way, and um so she'll always be there no matter what....

Um, I think the family has to come first. I think the family um, oh certainly my parents took that approach, that I was number one. I came first. I saw them sacrifice a lot of things in their life . . . so that I could have things . . . at the end of the day the family should come first, everyone should be happy. I mean, as long as...that made them happy, then maybe that's what suited them, but at the same time um I think, yeah, we all have to come together to yeah work things out like that, yeah.

. . . like I've always said, there's no way I would be a single mum by choice. I've had girlfriends in the past who have...have desperately just wanted to be a mum and would give up any idea of having a partner if they could just be a mum and I've always said, "No ways. I always want to have a family," . . . well, that's an idealist way of looking at a family, but I'd want someone there to support me as such. So I do understand that it could be a lot harder for – I also know that some single mums do really um work that idea that "Oh, single mum. Being a single mum's so hard, ra, ra, ra." But then a lot of the time they're not asking for help either...

Yes, shared parenting - that's how I envisage it. Like I said before, we have talked about certain things, but we haven't really defined everything, but um I think so. He's got – he's um, how do I say it, very much in touch with his feminine side . . . and like he's been quite active with the birthing process as well, so yeah he's just as excited as I am. Probably a little bit more (laugh). So that's good.

some things I can't do

. . . if I get upset, if I'm crying or whatever because of hormone stuff I really try and talk myself out of it quickly because I know it can be distressing bub and everyone else...the more I get distressed the further on in my pregnancy the more I have Braxton Hicks as well, so I've learned that, yeah well obviously my emotion is

affecting the rest of my body, including the baby, so I really need to be as relaxed as I can and that's one of the reasons why I gave up work . . . I was getting so . . . um, not so much emotional, but just tired....I guess that's a part of the whole process I was talking about, about having a peaceful birth is um that, my fear was that I would be so exhausted by the time I have the baby that I won't be able to push the baby out or whatever. And so I thought, 'well, how am I going to combat that?' and that's one way, stopping work and eating right and exercising and doing those things....

Um, I've had to realise that um there probably will be some things I can't do – well, within reason, you can still be a scally wag, but um I guess responsibility in the sense that I wanted to know what was best for the baby to start with . . . for example you can't have cultured cheeses and things like smoked salmon and drinking coffee is not good so we have decaf...there's a million things out there you can't have . . . and to me, by taking on being a Mum unplanned has been a big responsibility too, like as in taking it for what it is and not sort of running away from it, and saying, "Oh, well ok it's happened. What are we going to do about it next? How can we do this responsibly?" And like . . . Just as soon as I knew that we were keeping the baby I looked at my finances and...made a budget so that I can cover my bills and things like that and um put money aside for the baby . . . I guess that's what I mean by responsibility. Um, also bringing up the child . . . teaching him to be responsible as well . . . To be an active part of the community . . . so that he's not still living at home when he's 30 or something like that (laugh).

. . . um the thing that's occurred to me is that I've always been financially independent, so, buy my own house, own car, bla, bla, bla, so for me to sort of sit back and get someone else to do the work for me is probably going to be very hard. . . so I've said to Pete, you know, I don't expect you to work by yourself . . . I guess in the long run I do see myself going back maybe in two or three years, maybe more, um and maybe even in six months I may do the occasional casual shift . . . the beauty of my job is that no matter where we end up I will be able to get some sort of work . . . in a nutshell, I don't mind going back to work.

my idea of being a mum

I don't know [if my mindset has changed]. I guess I've always had people say to me, "You will be a great mum." I remember in high school . . . one of the girls in my class saying, ". . . I can see you having you know, 50 kids and being a

mother.” And I’m like, “What? . . . Thanks, but . . .” (Laugh) I just always took that [as being] I had the mothering hips . . . Maybe I’ve got attributes of what people see . . . mother’s should have. Being kind and gentle, and supportive and understanding . . . and I guess, to me, I’m a pretty easy going sort of a person so becoming a mum, even though it’s not planned, hasn’t really fazed me that much. There has been times when I’ve got a bit stressed but they soon pass...

What a mother should be or . . .? No I don’t really have a picture per se....I guess parents are really their guardians, you know . . . we facilitate the child’s life . . . you know, we do the best that we can and, for me . . . um there’s so many different um stages that a child is going to go through in his life and um just starting from the beginning I would just like to be able to give him as much love as I can and just be a mum loving and supportive . . . You know that that will mean . . . having tough love and disciplining him . . . and teaching him you know, the ways of the world without making him conform too much as well . . . I’d like him to be his own individual person . . . I’d like him to be informed I guess . . . So, his guides, his earthly, I guess, guardian angels . . . that’s my idea of being a mum.

I’ve also heard mums say, “Oh, it doesn’t come with a manual.” So some things you don’t know a lot about and yeah, you do make mistakes. Like my Mum has told me the mistakes she made with me as a child and um she said, “Oh, you’re going to be a much better mother than me,” . . . (laugh) and that’s only because I’ve learned from – or perhaps think I’ve learned from her mistakes. I won’t know, until I start – because she said she used to say things to me that her mother said to her so in the spur of the moment emotional time, when your child’s chucking a tantrum or whatever, I’m thinking well, what’s going to stop me from saying that to my child as well, so, um yeah. I think some of it is maternal and then sometimes you do need Super Nanny as well to help you out. We’ve been...learning a lot from that as well and I think there’s a lot more out there now for parents too you know, there’s Dr Phil, there’s Oprah . . . There’s just so much to read and if you don’t read it, then you know you, not the pressure, but it’s like, ‘there’s so much out there, why haven’t you read it?’ sort of expectation. . . . Again, you sort of just have to balance it out vI personally have been reading it all and then just sort of sifting through vlistening to my heart . . . if that doesn’t sound right, or maybe that’s an idea to try.

. . . um I think today, instead of people going so fast and so furious, like . . . when I lived in Brisbane, I noticed that people just don’t have the time to spend with

their child and when their child acts up they go, “Oh, Dr Phil” or “I need a book”, instead of just spending time with their children. You know, getting home early from work if they can or taking the day off or whatever and I mean, that’s to do with them personally, but that’s something I would do rather than grasping the first book . . . wherever I go I observe parents . . . and I mean, I know their situation is completely different to mine, but I’m just thinking, “Oh, I wouldn’t be doing that with my child” . . . Yeah, at the end of the day a child needs time, so you need to not get yourself so caught up in life I guess.

Yeah, it certainly is work.

There’s so much demand on women these days to, um to work, to be a mum, to be a good mum, to be a good wife, to be, you know good at everything really. To be the super mum, you know, super woman – um, I don’t think maybe society gives us enough um recognition for all the things that we do as well...um we have so much variety in our lives and . . . I don’t think they realise, although how could they not realise when we’re such a pinnacle in society? But maybe they choose not to, because we’re just always there. We’re never going to run away, so . . . I think mothering is definitely important. We need mums and we need fathers too. Um...and I think we need to know how to love. That’s what a lot of people are missing out on . . . and I think mums are an integral part of that, of teaching a child how to love . . . all the cuddles and things...from the beginning.

. . . I think it’s probably harder work over all. Um yeah we have really talked about this and at the stage that Pete and I talked about it Pete was working and um we said that, you know, it’s just as hard work you know, being a mum. It depends what the baby is like as to how that affects...the family dynamic...you know, like I think we’ve got a pretty good outlook on it. I’m just losing my train of thought so quickly . . . (pause) . . . Yeah I basically think, feel that yeah it certainly is work. It can be bloody hard work. You’re probably more tired than your partner coming home. So, because it’s 24 hours, seven days a week whereas you mightn’t get much of a break to start with, whereas your partner comes home, they’re separating themselves from work, coming into a different environment yeah, I think they’ve got to have that understanding there yeah, that dinner is not always going to be on the table, the house isn’t going to be perfect or the baby, yes, might be screaming when they come home. You know (laugh). I remember having a friend...and the baby was screaming and he’s saying, “Why is the baby screaming?”

She's like, "It's a baby" (laugh) . . . So yeah I think it depends on people's awareness as well.

. . . Like, I see the mums at work, they do an incredible lot for their children, you know. One mum . . . she's just become a personal trainer. So she's studied. . . she's still nursing to supplement the family income as well, trying to set up a business, she's got two young girls. The other day she had to like . . . make this genie's outfit for a fancy dress party that she had no idea how to do at the last minute. You know . . . you just have to do a lot and I used to realise how much my Mum did for me as well when I was younger . . . but I just think, "Yeah, Mum's do heaps." But they want to do heaps too I think. . . sometimes they want to be everything as well and if that's the way they want it then that's good. You know? It keeps them out of mischief I guess (laugh).

I know there is beliefs out there that it's (pause) – that mothering is a sacrifice and that it's hard work. I mean, yeah, it is hard work and I mean you can't deny that, but then life is hard work as well, you know. Um, I'm not going to run around saying, "Woe is me, I'm a Mum" (laugh), that sort of thing.

I can't wait to meet him

One of the things that a girlfriend and I were just talking about recently was just meeting them, seeing them for the first time, because you know them because they've been growing inside you for that long . . . and I've got to the point, yeah, where I can't wait to meet him and see what he looks like and just hold him instead of holding him down here all the time. It's getting a bit cramped in there. Um (pause) yeah, I guess the beginning stuff, that's the stuff that's exciting me at the moment, and then as he gets older there will be something else. You know, can't wait for him to go to school or you know what's he going to be like when he grows up? . . . Whose he going to look like, you know? That sort of thing . . .

I caught up with Alison at her new home when son Cheyne was nearly nine months old. As he was sleeping, we were able to have a long, enjoyable chat interrupted only by morning tea from Peter, a shower of rain (nappies on the line) and some loud crows in the trees nearby. Once again, Alison impressed me with her candour and her willingness to talk about the difficulties she had experienced since Cheyne's birth. Occasionally she had trouble finding the words to express her thoughts as she reflected on her experiences. I therefore gained the impression (confirmed by Alison herself) that she had not had a lot of time to think about herself in recent months.

they just had no respect I found.

Um, well [the birth] was interesting. It was good. We decided to do the hypno-birthing . . . It was a very busy night, they didn't expect me in even though we'd rung them . . . they were sort of rushing around and they didn't really listen, I felt. I wasn't listened to. And...we had a birthing plan, a very in-depth one, so obviously they didn't have time to read it and totally disrespected . . . all our wishes. We wanted a quiet, natural environment . . . Like we had . . . the neo-natal baby crash trolley in our room. They'd come barging in, grab it . . . and make all this noise. . . Little things were against us . . . I found labouring in the shower fantastic . . . and then um I needed to go back on the bed and have the monitors put on me and then the monitors weren't responding properly, of course, so they had to go and put one internally on bub's head and (laugh) it's funny, the one thing I did tell my girlfriends . . . "Please check your obstetricians hands (laugh), the size of their hands, because it makes a big difference." It was just so painful having him insert that, like he didn't even warn me.

....And like I wanted to do a major poo for about five hours...Peter kept going out and saying, "Look Alison needs to go to the toilet," and then he went out at one stage and they're actually sitting at the nurses station laughing at me, talking about this, "Oh, hypno-birthing stuff," and they just had no respect I found. So anyway obviously I felt like it was just the three of us, Mum, me and Peter doing this . . . I was very strong about having a natural birth. I ended up having some gas and, yeah, obviously needed to do a big poo . . . Couldn't get into our toilet because someone else was in there having a baby, and then she'd locked herself in the toilet so that was a drama. We went to the major one . . . and tried to go to the toilet. Obviously, it wasn't that I needed to go to the toilet, I was about to push a baby out, you know. So, but nobody was telling me . . .

The doctor came in . . . and he said, “Oh, look you’re fully dilated, you’ve done great. It’s happening.” Like I went into hospital at quarter to 12, I was fully dilated at four, thinking, ‘beauty this baby is going to be born really soon’. Almost five hours later . . . I was obviously looking like the wreck of the Hesperus and he [obstetrician] (laugh) said, “Right, you’re going to have this baby,” and I said, “Please!” . . . like he said, “Alison, you’ve got choices” . . . and I chose, ended up having suction because all I had to do was one more big push and that was what I did. Um, it was interesting. . . but um it was worth it in the end. I was just exhausted . . . I remember the doctor saying, “Your baby is born” and I’m like, “I don’t care, it’s out of me, that’s all that matters” (laugh) . . . Yeah, none of that lovely dovey stuff, but um it was lovely once I first saw him . . . So that was pretty much it basically . . . I was happy that I’d done the natural, pretty much, besides the gas, had a natural birth. Yeah, because basically it was for Cheyne in the end . . .

. . . I did have a few fights with the nurses...I remember one nurse...um she just barged in and said, “I’m going to give you antibiotics” . . . And she was so rude....You know, like she didn’t even introduce herself, nothing . . . And . . . just being a professional myself I thought, you know, you at least go in there with a bit of respect and say, “Hi, my name’s so and so, doctor has asked me to do this.” Well, she just didn’t do any of that and that did not impress me even though I was in the middle of labour. Probably especially (laugh) because I was in the middle of labour. So I just said, “Who are you?” and she said, “My name is Sonia and I’m going to do this.” And I said, “No, you’re not, Sonia” . . . later I was on all fours, and someone was playing with my probe and obviously they were just putting their fingers anywhere they wanted to . . . and I just said, “IS THAT YOU SONIA?” And she said, “Yes, yes, it’s me. I’m so sorry.” And I just thought, ‘ohhh’ . . . I feel . . . we did the best we could and that’s all you can really ask for . . . and [Cheyne] wasn’t distressed either, that was another thing . . . So it would have been nice to have done the hypno-birthing . . . nicer environment for him, but he was, he still came into the world in a peaceful situation.

I guess it’s just motherhood

I was just saying to Peter the other day that it is a lot more exhausting than I imagined. Like it’s hard work. Like it’s not that I didn’t imagine it to be hard work but . . . I do go to bed quite exhausted every day . . . I was quite ill after I had Cheyne as well. I bled for up to 10 weeks afterwards and they thought I might have to . . .

have a D&C. We had money troubles. I had mastitis four times, just things like that. I mean he was a beautiful baby . . . like when I was sick he didn't peep unless he wanted to be breastfed . . . Only cried when there was something really wrong and went to sleep fine, you know woke up every four hours and stuff. That didn't bother me, that's part of the package, but it was just being sick all constantly, all the time, so that really got to me . . . some of my friends who are mums now are saying, "Oh I couldn't have done it sick," you know and I just thought, "Well, maybe I would have coped if I was a bit weller." But I think it really started to play on me mentally as well . . . I remember saying to Peter one night, "Oh, do you think I'm suffering from post-natal depression?" because I just felt like everything was on top of me all the time and like I couldn't really enjoy Cheyne that much and it was a big thing moving [house] with such a small baby . . . and then in the middle of the move my Mum was in hospital having surgery . . . it all sort of happened all at once . . . Things are settling down now . . . but um, but it is, there's still days where I find it really hard work. I really haven't had that much time away from Cheyne either so I find that's starting to get to me mentally as well and like . . . I remember saying you know the best thing you can do is to look after yourself and it really made me think, 'well, I'm looking after Cheyne all the time, I've forgotten about myself,' and I've really had to talk to Peter . . . "Look, this is really what I think I should be doing and I really need your help to do this," and he's been great with that you know. You know, we've set at least one hour or two hours a week where I can just go and do my own thing . . . and then at least you know once a fortnight or something going away for a day, hang out with my mates. . . I think that's going to be really important for me, especially because I'm staying at home, so, yeah, so it takes , I guess to wrap that all up, it is hard work um and nothing can ever prepare you for it, as everyone tells you and I will always tell (laugh) mums-to-be from now on, but um it's very rewarding work especially when, you know, they come up and give you a hug or . . . they smile at you, yeah so...

. . . I mean I, because I was breast feeding too, I just always, just felt that I had to take Cheyne everywhere with me because you know because the bottles were on my body sort of thing (laugh) . . . I really would like him not to ever go on formula. I have very seriously contemplated it though . . . because I would just really like him start sleeping through so I can get a decent night's sleep too, but yeah I think it's more to do with the breast feeding because . . . now that I've expressed a bit

more and have a bit of a stock up now I'm starting to realise, "Well, I can have that little bit more freedom." . . . there's some days where I can cope . . . and it varies too. Like I might have a nap and still feel exhausted because he's only slept for half an hour...and I haven't even got to sleep. So yeah . . . I guess it's just motherhood. That's what I'm sort of getting the picture of is that you know sometimes you will be exhausted and other times you'll be great . . . But I find I'm a really light sleeper too now of course because you have to listen out for them . . . and I used to really enjoy my sleep too before I had Cheyne. I still enjoy it but it's just limited now (laugh).

I get really emotional. I get really, yeah, short tempered and cry a lot and really sort of moody . . . (Pause) I don't know how else to put it. Like that's why I thought I was getting post-natal depression because I was just crying all the time and...you know some days I still have a good cry. I don't feel like I've got post-natal depression now. I just think it's adjusting you know, coping with motherhood and the fact that I really haven't had that much time away from Cheyne since he was born . . . um one thing I did do before . . . is I used to journal quite a bit as well. So that's one thing . . . I'm going to promise myself to start doing again . . . I mean I've talked about the birth and stuff but I really haven't had that much time to think about it or write it down or . . . Yeah, work it through basically . . . I think that's why I've been so upset because I just haven't had time to do that perhaps . . .

Oh, yeah [life] has . . . had to change in the sense of I'm at home now and not working . . . I have to, can't just get up and go like I used to be able to, jump in my car and go. I'd like that to happen some days. Like I just get so frustrated . . . There's so much preparation to get out that door and then if you forget one thing it could be. . . like the end of the day like if you forget [paracetamol] and they're teething . . . and if you forget the dummy then you have to go and buy another . . . so you do have to plan. My life has changed in that regard . . . I really find that I'm looking out for the family now. I (pause), the money that I get now is just not mine, it's for the whole family and the things that I do affect the whole family so that's been a real reality check for me . . . because I want the best for Cheyne obviously like every parent would . . . you can't do everything you'd like to go and do and I mean even that stuff like what I used to do as a single person I don't do any more because I want to be with my family more because obviously I love my family and this is my choice . . . so yeah it has changed my life a fair bit in that regard. I don't feel like I've changed...because when I was a child my family was everything . . . so

now my new family is everything to me. I didn't realise that. In some respects I do [miss who I was]. Like as in I was just thinking it would be just so nice to go and visit my girlfriends, like we can go have a night where we can just go dinner, go to a movie . . . So, but in other respects my life has just changed and I don't really miss it . . . It's not a sacrifice because I've always really wanted children and I guess I knew there would have to be a change. . .

Cheyne has been my sole responsibility while Peter has been trying . . . make our lives more simplistic and . . . it's been a hell of a lot harder to do that and now I'm just getting to the point where I need a break from Cheyne so we're going to have to start sharing those responsibilities around. It just can't, I feel that I can't look after Cheyne all the time now . . . but I'm quite happy to go and do some research or whatever . . . because it's not as, it's just a break, it's making me think about something else besides Cheyne. You know, like obviously that's not a bad thing. Every mother goes through that. Like I remember one woman at work telling me, "Once you come back to work after having children it will become fun it won't be work any more" . . . I remember thinking, "Oh that sounds ludicrous" but I totally understand where she's coming from now because...you can think as an adult and you're not thinking about your child . . . until my maternity leave lapses I probably won't go back to work. I'd be interested to do maybe one shift . . . just to think about something else I guess. That's exciting for me. The concept is really exciting now to be able to go out. I went to the library the other day . . . and it's like, 'wow, I've got a little bit of freedom. What will I do, you know?' Yes, because you haven't got this pram in front of you or the bag or a dummy . . . or when's the next feed or . . . It's like you've lost baggage . . . so to speak.

Yeah, I just had this funny thought, they're just little suckers, you know (laugh) . . . they're so dependent on you and obviously you want to look after them, you love them, they're your own flesh and blood and they're so helpless as well and they're so beautiful and you fall in love with them and you want to be with them, but yeah you do become so absorbed . . . I was talking to one of my single girlfriends the other day and she said, "Oh, wotcha been up to?" And I'm like, "Well, um I'm at home and I'm looking after my baby." I said, "That just sounds so boring, doesn't it." She said, "No, no, no" she said, "What you're doing is a really admirable thing," you know, and I just thought, 'far out, yeah'. I know it is a full-time job and I realised that even before I had him that it would be like this but . . . In a nutshell I

have become really absorbed. It's so pointed to me just realising it now. Mm, yeah . . . I mean just about every waking moment I think of him....even when he's asleep like . . . planning ahead wondering if I've got enough food, do I need to cook anymore food . . . because I've always really pride myself on being really organised as well for him, not just for him, for myself really because you really feel like that's, you need to be organised to have a child as well. You don't need to, it's just sort of forced upon you, you know . . . but I think, well he's only eight months old so I think it's not a bad thing at all. Some people go back to work . . . I've been able to stay at home and that's probably forced me to be more absorbed as well, so – which I really always wanted to do was stay at home as long as I could so, mm.

at the moment I really do feel that [I'm the only one that can really meet his needs] . . . In that sense it's really been my own fault because . . . I'll instinctively just go and pick him up when he falls over . . . and I've had to stop myself now and let Mum pick him up or let Peter . . . without even realising it I've sort of created my own situation I guess. Yeah just because I've been wanting to meet Cheyne's needs . . . I know what he's, how to deal with him the most but I went and stayed with one of my girlfriends last year and her partner could put her breast fed baby to sleep...and I was like, 'oh. What have I done? What have I created?' You know like I didn't mean it to be that way but Peter can't put him to sleep. I'm the only one that can do that . . . I guess I've always put it down to independence as well . . . Like don't want anyone's help at all, can do it by myself, thank you . . .

my family is the most important thing to me now

. . . there's been no couple time. It's just been more family time. We know we're a family now and we just make the most of the time that we have together. I mean when Cheyne goes to bed we spend a bit of time together. We really haven't gone out on dates . . . I guess that's what I mean by couple time . . . we really haven't had that much time to be by ourselves...but, no it hasn't impacted that much. I mean it's been difficult, we've gone through a lot of things . . . Like most people when they get married or whatever usually have a few years to sort out their stuff before they have children. Peter and I didn't really have that. We only just moved in together and then I sort of fell pregnant . . . so now all the time we're doing the catch up thing

we had arguments with...both sets of parents after Cheyne was born . . . and . . . basically at the moment where it stands Peter is not speaking...to my father, and I

have issues, and Peter agrees with me too, about letting Cheyne stay with his family . . . So yeah that's made the situation a bit...more interesting. Difficult in regard to be able to use them as baby sitters. So basically if I want to do that now I have to take Cheyne up to my Mum and Dad's place or I'd prefer Peter's Mum to come here . . . I anticipated it to be a lot easier but we didn't see that stuff going to happen. . . . that was something I was really looking forward to in the sense that I could, I had people I could really rely on. . . . I guess when you think about it they're people that have their own views as well so but what they've got to respect is that it's your child and you want to bring them up . . . They brought [us] up the best way they thought so we want to do the same for Cheyne. . .

I feel like people . . . who haven't had children have no idea, to be honest . . . and it's not that they're not considerate, it's just the little things that obviously are the big things . . . Maybe an example like Peter's brother will ring him up and expect us to go over there for dinner . . . and I always, like I used to try and have a really strict routine with Cheyne especially around bed time . . . and it would always be around that time that they'd invite us around for tea and I used to find that...just a little bit "Oh, they've got no idea." . . . Oh, little things . . . A classic example is [gift shop]. I love [it] and now I can't go there any more because it's not pram friendly basically . . . Most people are generally pretty good, like because I think they're more aware now . . . things like pram car parks . . . I never really realised how good they were until since I've had Cheyne if you can get one . . .

I guess the only thing that would be a recognition day would be Mother's Day . . . it doesn't really matter to me what the world really thinks, it's what my family think . . . and how they respect and love me for who I am and appreciate what I do for them, then that's all that really matters . . . I guess because at the end of the day you do have to look after yourself and your own environment and your own family because there's not enough of that these days so it's really important. It's sort of hitting home to me a bit more now . . . you know the world's not the best place. I mean it is a positive place but there are a lot of people out there that are just looking after themselves . . . My family is the most important thing to me now...

the really lovely things

this morning we went out and watched the sunrise. Like we're up at the crack of dawn . . . So we went to the beach and it was just lovely just watching him

crawl on the sand and interact with nature . . . I really love watching him explore the world and stuff he's never seen before or...when a butterfly has come around him . . . and he will be just so amazed at this thing flapping its wings . . . I really love . . . like his laughter, when he's giggling while we're wrestling or you know having a cuddle, right . . . its just, yeah it's a real, words can't explain the laughter. It's just beautiful. Yeah, it's just so pure that love that they have for you and how much they're enjoying . . .

. . . Oh, there's heaps of good stuff. Chasing him around the house on my all fours as well...sometimes it's annoying when he chases you around the house but it's really nice sometimes 'cos he's such a fast crawler now, he's getting his speed up, it's really lovely and . . . when he can't find you . . . he makes a noise as if to say, "Where are you Mum?" and he will come and find you . . . and it's getting cute now because when I'm on the ground and he's hungry he will come up and slap me on the breast, stuff like that, that's cute. Yes, so they're the really lovely things so, yeah. When he smiles it's very beautiful because his whole face lights up . . . I could talk about him all day (laugh) . . . The whole day can go so quickly um you know sleeps and feeds and yeah. So yeah, so they're the good things.

you don't know everything

. . . I have had days [where I'm really annoyed] but I guess I've never had trouble expressing it. I remember one, I had an absolute shocker of a day and Cheyne was teething and I didn't know . . . Anyway came home and Ros came from next door for some reason and I said, "Oh I've had a crap day. Bla, bla, bla." It just, it all came out and she said, "I'm so glad to hear that someone else has days like that"...and I just thought 'we've been neighbours for ages, how come you didn't feel like you could say that to me'? . . . So we're sharing that more now. I don't know if she does it with the other girls, but yeah . . . because it was just like the relief in her face and her voice when I said that.

You know, you get frustrated with your child. I think it's just a normal reaction to have . . . he's such a crawler . . . he's into everything and he can only do so many laps of this house before he gets frustrated so I guess he passes that frustration on to me because he wants to cling on to me or whatever, so I get frustrated too because I can't do a thing without him clinging on to me like a monkey. A classic example . . . Like he'll come up to me...and he'll literally pull

my skirt off you know what I mean? . . . Like that's how much they just want to be with you, you know, just want to, which is fine but it does get frustrating in that regard. I wouldn't say that's guilt though. I don't feel guilty . . . because I kind of feel like, "Well, what could I have done better in that situation?" I could have seen that Cheyne was frustrated, bored of his environment so I could of gone for a walk instead of trying to do my own stuff because I'm not going to get my own stuff done anyway when he's all wanting to get out (laugh)

I expect, because he's my child I should know sometimes and it's just not always the case so I've had to realise now I mightn't necessarily know and you just go through the same things again. You try one thing, if that doesn't work, try another, try another and then go through it again and then sometimes it will just happen like they'll fall asleep like that or something you do changes their personality and you think, 'what did I actually do? I don't know' . . . Yeah I felt perhaps, especially for a first child, we feel because we're mothers now we've got to know everything but you don't know everything. Oh, there's parts of it that have been natural . . . like breastfeeding to me now is natural, but to start with breastfeeding was hell for me. I was thinking, "Why don't they tell you this goes on." Not everyone goes through it though. I mean I've had girlfriends that picked it up like that . . .

. . . I really feel that they I need to tell you a bit more about parenting and what it's going to be like...Another thing was I really . . . would like the midwives to be a bit more honest with breastfeeding. It's not always, it's not a walk in the park. . . I remember the Community Health Nurse saying to the young girls . . . "Oh the next time . . . we will give you a lot more support for the breastfeeding," and I just thought . . . whatever is right for you and the child. I'm not a believer that everyone has to breastfeed, breast is best. Like if you're suffering your child is going to suffer too you know . . . One of the girls at Playgroup said to me "Oh, if I had of known you could give bottles as well as breastfeed . . ." and I said, "Look just because I'm breastfeeding don't think I'm judging you" . . . "You did what you felt was best at the time for your baby and that's something you should be proud of, not feel guilty . . ." And she's like, "Oh yeah, well thanks." I said, "Maybe you could get more help next time but you just do what you feel is more comfortable for you."

One thing that I've learned as a mother [is] not to judge, not to judge that other person's situation. Like I remember when I was pregnant and stuff saying,

“Oh, I won’t do that . . .” but you don’t know what is their situation . . . Not that I believe in child abuse or anything (laugh), you know what I mean?. . . I always thought I was pretty tolerant, patient person but I’m sort of learning more tolerance in some regards. There’s other things. I do not tolerate stupidity on the roads and stuff any more now because it endangers my family. . . The one thing I’m not really tolerant of is stupid teenagers any more (laugh) . . . I just remembered saying to Peter when Cheyne was very little, “You don’t realise...when you’re that age and you’ve got that lack of responsibility, or you don’t have any responsibility at all, how good it really is until it’s all - until you don’t have it any more.”

Amy

A 39 year old health professional recently returned from living in England, Amy was the oldest of my participants. Chatting at her new home in a rural subdivision, Amy said how she thought hers would be a very different story from my others as the pregnancy was completely unexpected for her and her retired husband. Reserved, but with a self-deprecating sense of humour, Amy spoke succinctly and honestly about her doubts, and the difficulties they anticipated. Endeavouring now to see the positives, she was focusing on the joys others had told her of, as well as the sharing she envisaged family life bringing.

. . . the week after we moved in here we found out I was pregnant. Which was a very big shock because neither of us had planned on having children because my husband is 52 and at the time I was 38. And we just went “Oh my God!”(laughter). And I was on the pill. So we couldn’t believe it happened . . . because I hadn’t been sick and I hadn’t been on antibiotics, I hadn’t missed a pill . . . So we don’t know why. So I’m just one of those one-percenters (laugh).

We went to our first ante-natal class recently and they were all really excited . . . and I said, “Well, we aren’t” (laugh). “We don’t want this”, I said. We are now. I mean, it’s taken us a long time to actually come to the fact where we are excited. But I mean we didn’t tell anybody for about 13 weeks because we were just so shocked ourselves and we just thought, we’ve got to get used to the idea before we tell anybody else because it’s not what we planned. And all we could think of at the time was the negatives. Oh my goodness, I’m going to have to give up work. We’re not going to have any money . . . We’ve just bought this house, we’ve got a mortgage. . . . and then I said to him, well you know. Let’s not look at it that way. We’ve got to change our attitude and we’re going to have this baby. There’s nothing, I mean we did look at . . . aborting. But I said no, I couldn’t do it. So. We thought, right. Well, we’d better make sure that the baby’s healthy, so we had all the tests and everything, yeah. Just to make sure because we thought so late in life. That could be an added, yeah. Problem, if the baby wasn’t born healthy. ‘Cos neither of us thought we could cope.

But, yeah. So, that’s another thing. I’m going to be the breadwinner. I’m going to go back to work after the baby. And he’ll stay at home. Yeah. He’ll just work when I can’t work. Yeah. He is training at the moment. Um, and hopefully he will have a job by April, but at the moment that’s our main problem.

So yes, it did take us an awful, awful long time. I reckon it was like at least three or four months before we actually came to terms with the fact that yes that's what we're having and yes we, our life is going to change and yes we do have to um, change a bit. All my husband could think was, we've bought a high set house, "It's going to fall down the steps" (laughing). I said, "Not for a while yet". I said, "We're alright".

I never thought I had the mothering instinct. I never thought I could be a mother.

I never felt maternal. I thought, well I'll work up until I retire. That is what I'd always thought. We'd never, neither of us, neither of us had ever thought that we would have children. And I mean my sisters and friends and everybody are all having babies at the moment. And, yeah, it's nice to go over and see them and play with them and give them back. And I'd never thought, no, I'd like one of those. Never.

I didn't want to bring a child into this world because I thought that the way it's going and all the war and everything, I just thought it's not a good place to bring a child into. But I guess now that I am, you think about it and you think well, yeah but the war's over there, it's not here. I mean, it is nice to bring a child up in Australia. Um, and I never thought, well I never thought I had the mothering instinct. I never thought I could be a mother. I thought, well you know, that's not, that's not me. I don't think I'd be a good teacher . . . but, people say to me well it comes naturally and I say, well, it doesn't. I don't know whether it does or not, but we'll wait and see . . . To me, the mothering instinct means. . . You just automatically know what to do. Know how to do it. I didn't feel that way at all. Now, well, I suppose you feel love towards the child. You think, well there's something growing in there and that's...that's mine, and that's you know, and it's going to look like me when it comes out. We talk about that you know, "oh it's going to have your horrible nose and". . . (laughing) but yeah, it's going to be part of us. It's going to be something that we've, we've done together. So, yeah.

I do, yeah, feel a bit of a mind shift, yeah. Especially lately all its kicking and everything and you think there's something, there is actually something in there, there is actually something doing something in there . . . And, of course, we're not telling anybody, but we do know what it is and we have given it a name and we are calling it by the name and talking to it, yeah.

. . . to begin with [it felt] unreal because there wasn't anything there. You didn't see anything, you didn't feel anything. And you thought, apart from this blooming morning sickness I'm perfectly alright. And I had morning, noon and night for the first three months. I had it really badly. I thought apart from that I really don't feel pregnant. I mean I do now, the swollen feet and the huge stomach and the kicking all the time and it never stops at night and the leg cramps (laugh). It's wonderful to be pregnant – no it isn't!

I don't know an awful lot at all

I'm not so worried about being a mother. All I want to do is get over the birth . . . and then worry about the rest of it afterwards. 'Cos you don't know what kind of a child you're going to have . . . So you really don't know what to expect. And what's going to happen. I mean you can think about it and say well I'll do this, I'll do that and the other thing, but when it actually comes down to it you really don't know what you're going to do at the time.

I don't know an awful lot at all. The only time I ever have the babies in the surgery is when you're giving them the injections. You weigh them, you measure them, you give them back to Mum. And that's about it....So I don't know an awful lot at all. Only what people have told me . . . Yeah, my sister's given me all her things that she read . . . she gave me two books. She said, "I'm not giving you any more". . . because she said, "Otherwise you get conflicting stories and then you just get all muddled up." . . . And she said that's probably all you need to know really. Yeah. I mean we've been to a parenting class which I didn't actually find very helpful. It didn't really tell me anything that we, I hadn't already read or didn't, hadn't already found out from other people.

All's I want to know is, how long's my labour gonna be? Like, my sister says, don't feel a failure if you have to have drugs. I said, no, I won't. Don't worry.

I worry just, yeah, just coping with the whole thing to begin with. I mean if it cries all the time how are we going to cope? Because at the moment, as I said, I have lots of babies around me but you can give them back when they cry . . . And I have, I haven't had to think about what you do to deal with it . . . And I thought, well you know, if I'm trying to sleep because I've got to go to work and the baby's crying. I mean, what do you do? . . . That's my big concern. Just being able to cope after it's born. Knowing what to do. And I mean everyone says, "Well no-one knows what to

do. It's all trial and error". And you'll get there. You know. But yeah, at 3 a.m. in the morning when you've got this baby that's screamed all night and, thinking what do you, what the heck do I do with it?

I think it probably will affect [work] quite a lot . . . I'm only going back four days a week to begin with to see how we go. And to see how my husband copes at home (laugh). With a baby. And, I told him, the housework. And he says to me, "Yes but, all the mother's keep telling me they don't have time for housework" (laugh). I says, "Well you will". Yeah. But I think it will put a lot more burden on me, more than it will Robin because he's so easy going and, and I mean I've got to have everything perfect. And he won't do the housework the way I want it done . . . I worry about that. I think well, I'll come home and I'll want to do it again. But I'll just have to stop myself and say, no I don't . . . He was [sweeping] the other day and I'm thinking, you've left some dirt in the corner there and...I thought, no, no don't say anything or he won't do it again.

Well I do get very uptight very easily. And I just hope that I can be a relaxed mother because they keep saying you know if you're uptight then the baby's uptight and, but my husband's very calm and relaxed so hopefully, hopefully . . . Yeah we'll balance each other out. But, yes, that is one of my concerns . . . If things don't go right I do get a bit tetchy and a bit upset, so, yeah. I like to be a bit in control of what's happening. Yes. I do. Yep . . . We have thought, my husband can take the baby and I'll go for a walk. Just get out of things for a while. Yeah. But hopefully that won't happen so much because I won't be around the baby so much because I'll be working, so hopefully it'll be easier.

...you just don't know, do you? Don't know 'til it's born because you don't know what type of baby you're going to have. And that's the thing. You can't predict.

I think he's coming round

I think he blamed me to begin with 'cos he said, "You missed your pill it's all your fault." And I said, "Well, you know, I did. Here's the proof you know, you take it every day and it's all numbered." I said, "look, there's no missed ones". Yeah. So it was, it was hard, to begin with. But, yeah, I think he's coming round. 'Cos I mean he, he asks me questions about the baby now and what it's doing and is it kicking and is it you know. And he wouldn't put his hand and feel it before but he does now.

Yeah. So. And...he said to me this morning, "Well we still need to get this, this, and this. We'd better go shopping and get the rest of what we need, and. . ." So he is thinking about it now. Yeah, "Do I have to go to ante-classes? Do I have to be there at the birth?" "Yes you do!" . . . "Can't your mother?" . . . "No!"...And now that we've actually, we had a scan not so long back, just a few weeks back, and you could actually see everything. This is the eyes, and this is the nose and this is the mouth. Well yeah, I think, I think Robin got excited. . . .

I've had dreams about being a mother with a baby, actually. And the baby isn't young. It's older. It's over 6 months old, and I can see myself pushing it in the pram and, yeah, and things like that. And playing with it on the floor. But I can't see myself with a new baby....And I look, walk down the street and you see other mothers and you think, I say to Robin, "That's, that's going to be us in a few weeks", you know. "But I don't want to think about it," he says (laughing). I say "yeah, that'll be you carrying it round in it's little, um, pouch in the front".

I think I'm looking forward to the, the family stuff. Yeah. Well, well my husband keeps saying, "Well, I'll be able to take it here there and everywhere." And, "Oh when it gets a bit older we'll be able to go to the zoo and we'll be able to do this and we'll have to take it up, you know, on the, that steam train because we've got a free pass," and all this sort of stuff....Yeah. So I mean he's obviously been thinking about it and thinking what, you know, what difficulties are going to arise and what he's going to do and, you know. Oh yes. Already we're, which schools are we going to send it to. How are we going to get it to school? Who's going to take it to school? . . . Everything....my husband keeps saying, "you realize I'm going to be 70 when it's, you know, 20! I'm not going to be young. How am I going to take it to this and do that with it and..." I said, "look, we'll cross that road when we come to it".

I know other people. . . in my circle of friends who have had children at my age so yeah, no, it doesn't worry me. I think it probably did worry Robin a bit because he came home [from antenatal class] and said, "They're all a lot younger than we are, aren't they? They're a lot more excited about this than we are. Do you think we should be?" I said "No, it's fine. Everyone's different, you know. Everybody."

you won't be doing this, you won't be doing that

Our lives will, change, definitely. Absolutely. Yes. 'Cos well everyone says, well you won't be going out as much as you do, you won't be doing this, you won't be doing that. And even now, even now before the baby's come along we've, we've stopped doing a lot of the things that we used to do as well. I tried to, about a month ago now, tried to go to a um, concert. I couldn't. I said to him, "That's it, I'm not going to any more concerts," because we had to stand up the whole time, and I got really quite dizzy and faint.

...in England a lot of the couples we went out with didn't have children and had never had children...weren't going to have children. But coming back here. Yes. Quite a few of my friends from here, they're all just having their families now. And they're all about the same age. And it's quite, it's quite amazing actually. Yeah. Because all of my friends have been very independent up until now and they keep telling me how much it actually changes your life....I was talking to one of my friends who's actually just gone back to work but she's waited 10 months. Whereas I'm only going to wait three. And she was telling me how difficult it was and what problems she was having and that the baby wasn't as settled as it had been. Because sometimes it goes to childcare and sometimes it goes to her mother. And she said, you know, and it's not in a routine. ...and I went, oh dear. Yeah.

I've used my sister as a sounding board and she's been very good actually. Yeah. She seems to, to know the right things to say. But I haven't actually talked about it with my friends. I've discussed, you know, problems with your pregnancy and how they deal things like that but not any misgivings I've had, because they've all been so excited because it's what they've wanted. And two of my friends have had real problems and one of them's been on IVF...so she's really, really ecstatic that she's had a baby, so I haven't discussed it with her. Yeah. I felt, I don't know how she would feel or what she would actually say because, you know, being so happy about being a mother and that 'everybody should be a mother', and that it's, you know, 'the most wonderful thing in the world, and you'll just love it' and you know? I felt I couldn't say anything negative, you know.

Like, being a mother is being there 100% of the time. You know, always having someone around you. I mean it does disrupt your life but it can be good and it can be bad. Um I do realize that. And I know how much enjoyment my sisters and

my friends and everybody get out of their children. And, you know, they're always so excited when they do something new and everything like that. And hopefully, I hope that I'm going to feel the same way. I really do, when this baby's born. I don't know. I mean I am, like I said I am starting to get excited and I am hoping that you know, I'll have the same excitement about everything they do and that it isn't a burden and that I don't feel that I've lost my independence....my husband has so many hobbies and things that he likes to do and he said, you know, what's going to happen to all that? And I said, "Well you should still be able to do some of them, you probably won't be able to do as much," but, yeah. And I said, "And when our child gets older you can take them along as well....Other fathers do why, why can't you?" "Well, I suppose I could. Yeah that's true. Yeah I'll have someone to share it with, won't I? . . ." I mean my niece and my nephew, we take them out and we love to see the excitement on their faces when they see something new. So, hopefully.

. . . Yeah. I mean, you've always got to be there for them. It's something you, I mean and that's for the next 20 – 25 years, it's not just now. That's the thing, and that's what worries us because we're so much older. It's alright when you're younger and you've got more energy to be there for them and you know take them here and there...My husband says, you know, "Will I feel like doing that? Will I feel like, you know being interested in their things when I'm you know 60, and they want to..." – "I guess you've just got to wait and see. And if you can't, I suppose I will".

you can't do it on your own as far as I can see.

My parents only live five minutes down the road. And my husband was saying to them yesterday, "The house next door's for sale. You wouldn't like to buy that would you?" My mother's going, "Why do you want us to buy that house?" You know. And then my father connecting, "Oh, I know, yeah, you'll have built-in babysitters, won't you?" And he [husband] went, "Yeah" (laughter). . . (pause) Not that they will, uh, they told us they won't do it all the time. But, yeah. We know they're there if we, if we do want to go out.

Initially, after the baby is born, well, we're actually hoping that Robin won't have actually started his job by then....that he will actually start work after Easter ...but if he doesn't he'll be home and he'll be able to help me, we hope. And with a mother being only around the corner too, and my sister who's just had a baby and I've got three friends who have just had babies as well. 'Cos my sister's two years

younger than me and she said to me, “Oh I’m thinking it’s too old for me to have a baby. I don’t know whether you should”. But she was really excited. I mean she was probably more excited than I was when I told her. “Oh, it’s the most wonderful thing. You’ll just love it”, she said, and she cried. And I went, “oh, mhm.” And I said, “yes well, I’ll probably cry but not for that reason.”

I think you have to share the parenting. I really admire single parents. Especially one at our antenatal classes having twins and doesn’t have a partner. I just thought, I really admire her for doing that....Because one is, is hard enough and you do need, you do need support. And you can’t do it on your own as far as I can see.

And the positives...

(pause) Oh, I don’t know. We were just watching a program last night on child development and all that sort of thing and we were saying, well yes ours will do that one day and, and yes we’ll see its first smile and we’ll see its first you know. Well we hope. As long as we’re not out at work or, or whatever. I was saying to Robin well you’ll probably see that before I will...Isn’t it exciting that, you know.... the baby was something that we had, um, produced together. It was something that was going to be part of both of us, not just the one. Um, the fact that we actually had something there that we could teach, could learn from us, share with us, um, that sort of thing. Um, I don’t know. There’s still plenty of negatives that we can see. But we always try to now, if we come up with a negative, think of a positive

And I think we both are now. . . But everybody around us...they’re so, you know, ‘it’s just wonderful’. And they’re so excited. I mean that it does rub off onto you. Everybody has been really positive about it. And given us a lot of the good aspects about it, you know. Oh, when you see that first smile and when you, you know, say their first word and you know, it’s just wonderful, and...once you have one you’ll want another one. I said, “well, let’s just get the first one over with first”.

[So you’ve come to terms with the whole thing?] Yeah. Yeah, I think so. You’ll probably get a very different story when you ask me again afterwards. A very different story.

Amy’s words were prophetic, but not in the way she intended. Speaking again when Dylan was 9 months old, the neat and tidy lounge room was now dominated by baby accoutrements. As before, Amy struck me as a practical, no-nonsense person, however it was obvious as we chatted that Amy was besotted with her new baby, and he with her as he resisted going to dad during the

interview. She seemed comfortable with her mothering, but her position as sole income earner meant that she was unable to spend as much time as she wanted with the baby. Her one complaint was that she wished she had done it earlier.

. . . we can't imagine life without him now, to be honest. Yeah. I wonder what all the fuss was about and I mean, I do actually. But no, we love 'im to bits and we wouldn't swap 'im for anything. It really has changed our lives and people used to say to us um, "Oh look you won't, once you have them you'll completely change," and I'd say, "Well, I don't know how," but yeah, they're right.

your whole outlook on things changes

I think we had lots of fears about whether we could cope. Whether we would manage...yeah, because I think we felt we were selfish.... But I mean once you hold 'em you just want to protect them, you just want to love 'em, you just think, you know, "I'll do anything for you". And everything changes, it does. Yeah

I probably didn't have a blueprint, but I always had sort of preconceived ideas about what a mother should be like, and you know if you're in a shopping centre you think, 'well I'd never do that if that was my child', or, 'why don't they do this?'. . . And I mean nobody's ever the mother they want to be and they never do things the way they're going to do, and I've often said, "Well I said, I'd never do that, but I am doing that now, and I don't care" (laughs). And it doesn't matter.

...I think it has broadened our outlook on life, and everything. Yeah...I used to be quite offhand [at work], sort of yeah....But now you tend to go "Oh what are, how old are they?" and "Have they got any teeth?"...and, "When did they...?" (laughs.) Things that I never used to even bother about....And now I'm a lot more interested in what's going on. Yeah...especially when you hear things like children being abducted and things like that....now it really hits you, it really does. You think "Oh my god, if that was my child...what would I do?" I mean already now we're looking at schools and all sorts of things like that....that we would never have thought of before....Robin is about to take him to baby music lessons (laughs). . . Yeah...I would have poo-pooed that before – "what a waste of money"....'a load of rubbish' (laughs). And now you do, you think. 'yeah, it's probably good for them'. It's probably just that interaction with other children. You know. And your whole outlook on things changes.

I think I've grown a lot, actually yes, and I have actually learnt a lot, yeah...I think I'm probably, I'm probably a lot more tolerant of children now than I used to

be, and I think a lot of people are like that before, if they don't have children then they don't, well they're not on the same wavelength are they really, and yeah, um. (long pause)...some people say, "Unless I've had a child I'm not, you know, I haven't, I'm not complete"...and I never thought, I never thought that before I actually had a child. I always thought, 'well, you know, if I get run over by a bus tomorrow, I'm happy with what I've done with my life....But now I've had a child I think, 'nuh, not going to let that bus run me over now, I've got this child to look after (laughs) for the next 20 years....My life's not through yet' (laughs).

And I don't think we're as selfish as we were, because you can't be when you've got children, I mean, they always come first. They do. People say, "Oh I'm not going to let a child rule my life" but they do, and it's a nice way, I mean, and you're, I'm happy to do that. Yeah....I mean we love him so much and we just want to give him the best and we want to do what's right for him and be there for him and yeah we're happy to do that. Because my husband and I were just discussing that not so long back, you know, I said, "Do you feel we're not getting out as much?" and he said, "No."...I thought, "Oh that's good". 'Cos it doesn't bother me, not like I thought it would....And we don't want to....It's not the priority that it used to be....I mean I can't wait to get home from work and see what he's been up to for the day, and have I missed out on anything and yeah. But luckily I haven't so far. Not his milestones.

Mm. I think the fact that um a lot of my friends have babies as well, helped. 'Cos if they didn't, and they were sort of single and you know still doing things, I think then you would probably resent a little bit more, because they're all at the same stage and they all can't go out...And you can, you can relate to them because you think, 'well, you know Dylan was sick last week and we couldn't do so and so', so, yeah, that's fine. Because [if] we have any problems, we just ring one of them up and say, you know, "What did you do, or how did you ..." and every one of them will tell you something different that they did (laughs). And then you just think, 'well what's going to work for me?' and you do whatever suits you. You sort of just work your way...(laughs). And then you have those options.

...so, yeah, and you do meet other people and you do become part of the community. Yeah. Because we're trying to do things locally so that we meet local people, yeah, that we can probably get together again with and our children can sort of make friends with, and that sort of thing.

We just take Dylan with us

I think [our couple relationship] has been different. Yeah. Um I think we probably don't, well we do talk, yes we do talk, I can't say we don't, but we mainly talk about Dylan (laughs). And in some ways it's brought us closer together. Yeah. I think so, yeah....Yeah. Because we share, and we've got a common sort of goal now, and yeah. Whereas we used to do a lot of things on our own and...separately, now we do a lot more things together and a lot more things together with Dylan.

...well actually I thought Robin was quite a selfish sort of a person, but when, just watching him with Dylan, I mean he's absolutely fantastic, he really is....All his friends kept saying, "Oh he just loves children; he'll be really good with children." And I thought, 'oh, I don't know'....So I've sort of seen a whole new side of Robin that I didn't know sort of existed. Yeah.

...we still do [have our own time]. Robin still goes off to his transport things once a month and he went off to one of his concerts the other week, and I still sort of nip out shopping with a friend or something. I mean we don't – I don't – do it near as much as I used to. Once a month, once every two months maybe, but yeah we have been out, and we have been out a couple of times together as well, without Dylan, not that my mother's very keen to look after him though (laughs)....And I mean we still go out because we have a circle of friends who we have dinner parties with...and we just take Dylan with us, and we take his Porta-cot and he just pops in that and goes to sleep....I mean we tend to have them more round here because it's easier for us than dragging all the things everywhere else. But no, it hasn't stopped us doing that.

We try to stick to a routine with Dylan but I mean, like I said to Robin if one or two nights he gets to bed a bit later or something 'cos we're doing something, I said it doesn't have to be in the routine every single day like my sister seems to think her that children do....So, yeah, we're a little bit flexible. Well you have to be, especially when I'm doing shift work as well....

sometimes I do wish I had a little bit more time at home

...when Dylan was three months old I went back to work at the hospital and I've also started work...at a doctor's surgery. So I'm basically doing full time....I did find it a little bit stressful to begin with because Robin didn't do a lot around the house, but he does now and I leave him little notes every day...just a couple.... I

mean he does the washing now, and the ironing and that sort of thing, and he'll run the vacuum over the floors and things, so it does help. Yeah. Because basically all he was doing was looking after Dylan. Yes, and playing. And I said, "You know, there's a bit more to it than that..." (laughs)...sometimes I think I still do [bear most of the housework burden]. And I do get a little bit on my high horse and say "Look, you know, you didn't so and so and I think you should do a bit more". But generally, it seems to be working, yeah. We seem to be managing and coping and things seems to get done, and if they don't get done, well – does it really matter? And it doesn't. At the end of the day. And I've got to keep telling myself that. Yeah.

Surprisingly enough, I thought that a lot more things would be an issue than they were....I mean I didn't know how I would cope going back to work and leaving him and I mean I do find it hard but I actually, in some ways, actually like to get out and mix with other adults for a little while, but I always love coming back to him. And you get to talk about other things other than babies, and yeah. Because when you go to your mothers' group all you talk about is babies and then when you get to your sister, she's got kids all you talk about is babies so yeah it's nice to actually get somewhere you know, they're not all talking about babies all the time.

But Dylan's happy enough to see me when I come home – very clingy. . . won't leave me alone....sometimes I do wish I had a little bit more time at home, but on the whole, no, it seems to be working alright....The fact that I'm the only one that's earning money can be um...you think, 'oh my god, I've got to work a couple of extra shifts so that we can pay these bills and then I'm not going to be home to see Dylan, and you're here all the time, you'll get to see him and I won't'....But...well that's what we decided before we had him and we knew that it was going to be like this and you know we'll just weather it and hopefully when Dylan starts to go to school maybe Robin will go back to work and I won't have to work as much, so, yeah. It is [a drag]....That's just the way it is, yeah.

Yeah [it would be nice to go somewhere] without having this big baby bag slung over me back. I've got a little back pack that I take everywhere. Takes a lot more planning, because you've got to make sure you've got enough formula for him and enough feeds and enough, yeah. And we'll get in the car and, "Have you got enough nappies, Amy, how many nappies have you got? How many bibs have you got? How many. . . (laughs)". Which you never had to think about before – like, you just pick up your handbag and you go.

really, really tiring

But now you think, ‘well, we’ve got to do such and such tomorrow and it’s going to take me this long to get ready and it’s going to take me, so, you know, well, we’ll just get up this much earlier and we’ll just do this and do that’, and you do, you just factor it in....It does make you tired. I mean even though, like I say, you’re still getting what 7 hours sleep, maybe 8 hours sleep, if I’m lucky?.. you are [tired], because you’re on the go a lot more than you used to be. You can’t [just stop]. The minute I come in the door – you know, Oh mummy, mummy...he wants to play...All you want to do when you get home, sometimes, is just sit for half an hour and just relax, and you don’t get that chance. And it is, you think, ‘cos you know, you’re driving home and you’re thinking, ‘I’m tired, I’ve had a really busy day and I’ve not sat down all day’, and you think, ‘oh, when I get home he’s going to want me and he’s going to want this and he’s going to want me to bath him and...’ (laughs). And you do, you think, ‘ohh’ but you do it, because you get in there and you see his little smiling face and you think, ‘Oh yeah, come here, come on, we’ll have a bit of a tumble on the floor and we’ll play with your toys, and hopefully you’ll go to bed at 7 o’clock and then I’ll get to relax’ (laughs).

I think the thing that got me when I first had Dylan was...how actually physically tired you are and you just, you know, 3 o’clock in the morning you just – when you’re trying to breast-feed and you’re physically just about falling asleep and you’re thinking, ‘ooh I knew it was going to be hard, but you know, aw’ And I mean he was good because he used to go straight back off to sleep after he’d had his breastfeed, so there was no problem there but still you had to, every 4 hours you have to be getting up, actually feeding him, and it was just really, really tiring. I don’t think I was actually prepared for that. I mean, people said, “Oh look, you’ll be like a walking zombie,” but you don’t actually realise it till it actually happens how actually physically tired you get. And then you’ve got the next day to look forward to...you’ve still got all the washing to do and all the....Yeah, but I think on the whole I’ve been very lucky because I have had Robin around, so he has been able to do a lot more than some of my friends....I’ve got a friend who’s gone back working full time, and she doesn’t get the support from her husband – he does hardly anything, and she....has to do all the housework and still got the child...

And just getting over the actual birth, which was traumatic, and I mean I was really worried about labour and everything, and it was 16 ½ hours of (laughs) not

very nice. But once that was over, I thought, ‘oh well I can handle anything now (laughs)....it took us a long time to get back into having sex. . . A lot [of tiredness] on my part, and I think on Robin’ part was fear that, ‘she’s going to get pregnant again. We’ve already got one, we don’t want another one’.

Sometimes I wish I’d done this sooner, actually, rather than later, because I do find Dylan quite tiring, actually, just running around with him and even just running around the house....And you sort of stop and you think, ‘hah, if only I was a bit younger, I think I’d manage this a bit more’.

But I don’t know, because then you’ve got a lot more experiences and a lot more things to bring your child, so I guess it balances itself out...I mean, having had Dylan later in life has actually allowed me to do a lot more of things that I wanted to do, so I actually feel a lot more settled in the fact that even if I hadn’t had Dylan I still felt that I had managed to do what I wanted to do with my life, and I had managed to see the places I’d wanted to see, so I think that helps as well. ‘Cos I know some people think, ‘Oh, this child’s stopped me doing this, and stopped me doing that’. Well, I’ve already had that opportunity and that chance to do all those things so I haven’t got that resentment, which I think sometimes it does turn into.

I don’t tend to tell them the negative things

....But yeah, I have got someone if there’s anything that’s bothering me or anything I’m upset about or he’s done or that I’m not happy with. I usually talk to my mother about that, yeah....I don’t tend to tell the other mums....the negative things. Yeah. I only tell them the good things, basically, like they tell me, yeah. Because they don’t talk about it, I guess I don’t talk about it. I don’t know why we don’t, but we don’t. We only like to tell people about all the good things, don’t we....although I suppose my sister does: “Oh yes I’ve had a horrible sleepless night” and I think to myself, ‘well, I don’t know what that’s like’, because I haven’t had many so, I guess, and she has them night after night after night....And you don’t like to hear things like that. You don’t want to hear people’s negatives....and I think it’s probably the same thing with your child. They don’t want to hear all the negatives, they only want to hear the good things. And I’m probably conscious of that....I think that, you know, they would be judging you and saying, “oh, you’re not a very good mother because you didn’t handle that situation very well,” or...“you didn’t know what to do,” so you don’t tell them, because you don’t want them to judge you....

You know, your mother's your mother, you can tell her anything. And she'll come back and say, "Ah don't be so stupid," or you know, "Of course that's what's going to happen, you know, they're a baby, of course they're going to do that! . . ." She'll tell you straight....and you think, "Oh, well maybe I am over-reacting about that. You know, maybe it doesn't matter that there's finger marks on the TV and you can't see through the television because he's there, standing up there fingering it all. And like...mum goes, "What's the big deal?" (laughs). I can laugh about it now but I couldn't do it weeks ago. Yeah. You just think "Oh not again."

I had a lot of support

I think it probably is [natural], actually. You do a lot of things without thinking about it, without – you just do it....And you've probably read a lot of things and you've probably talked to a lot of people and so you have those sorts of ideas in the back of your mind. . . And I still, yes, I still do get uptight (laughs). And I think, 'Oh, why won't he go to sleep?' or 'why won't he...' you know...and Robin goes, "Look just relax. He's not going to go to sleep unless you relax, because you're uptight he'll get uptight"....I do tend to think everything's a drama....Because Dylan never cries. He's always really happy baby, really smiley baby, so when he does cry, or you have the one night when he doesn't sleep, you get really 'Oh, there must be something really wrong, oh I don't know what to do, ooh'.

The fact that he is such a good baby has probably made it a lot easier. Yeah. And the fact that he's done everything he's supposed to do at the right times, and he sleeps through the night. I think that has made it a lot easier. Because...we both go to a mothers' group, when I can't go Robin takes him. So, finding out that their babies still aren't sleeping, 9 and 10 months old, through the night. And we just think, well it does make a big difference having that sleep at night....you can cope the next day. I mean he doesn't sleep during the day, so you can't get a lot done during the day, but that's all right.

And I think having Robin here a lot of the time as well is good because I say "Look, you take him and I'll go and do whatever needs doing"....I mean Robin probably knows more about it than I do, you know, so I say to him, "Well look, I don't know what to feed him now and I don't know when we should change this and when we should start him on solids and when we should do this" and he says, "Oh look it's all in there and lets and just have a read of it and it's just ..." You know, he

reads anything and everything and I say, “I haven’t got all day to sit at home and read,” (laughs).

I [breastfed] for the first 3 months. And then I just um partially breastfed and partially bottle while I went back to work, ‘cos I was expressing at work. So yeah, he had about 5 months. Yeah. They [work] were very good actually....But I only did it for a couple of months, then decided ‘ Oh, look, I’ve had enough of this’. It is [tiring]. Yeah. And I just went, ‘I think we’ll just – he’s half on the bottle, we may as well just fully put him on it’. He was happy with that.. . . It didn’t seem to make any difference because when I first started breast-feeding I had a lot of problems with cracked nipples and things like that so...I think it was fairly early on that we started adding formula. And he’s been happy with whatever, bottle, breast, formula....And now he takes the cup, so (laughs). . .

I do [feel more confident about myself as a mother] now, yeah. It was a really big concern before he was born, but yeah....Yeah. I don’t know what it is but it just seems to come naturally. Well actually I was very lucky because I had a lot of support. ‘Cos my sister actually did come and stay, and give us a bit of a hand...she was here for about a week....Very good. [helpful] Yeah. It was just her being here. She didn’t actually do a lot for him. She let me do it, but you know, if I needed it, I knew she was there. And my mother was also only at the end of the phone. Not that – mum’s ideas were very different from my sister’s, actually. Very different. I usually go, “yeah, yeah, mum” and then go and do my own thing anyway....Yeah. ...And I’ve actually got another friend who’s just rung me up and said that she’s expecting– it was something that they’d never planned either, her or her partner. So she’s in a bit of a shock. So I said, “I know exactly what you’re going through.”

....the mothers’ group I go to – they are all younger than I am, they’re like 19, 20...and their outlook on mothering is a lot different to ours. Yeah. Just the way they treat their children, I think. Um, one of them is very rough....And she goes, “Well, this is the way I was brought up and you know” and “it’s good for them to be thrown over the shoulder”...and then they fall off and land on their head and she goes, “Oh they’ll be right,” you know, and I think, ‘don’t really know about that’. But yeah....I mean I notice the difference between what my mother used to do, or tells us she used to do, to what I do, and even what the 19 year-old does. And I think, well, we’ve all got different ideas on how to bring our children up. And I

mean that's fine. If they're happy with that and that's the way they want to do it, well, yeah.

I do think [society generally is supportive of mothers]. I know the government's not very supportive and says mothers must go back out to work when their child's 5 and all that sort of thing if they're single parents, and um, there's not enough childcare places, and that was one of the reasons why Robin didn't go back to work was because childcare doesn't start before 7 o'clock in the morning and I start at 6.30 and Robin would have started at 20 past 6....so I mean there are things in your way of um . . . but you find ways around them. But generally I think yeah, most people are very supportive, actually. I didn't realise how supportive people were until you actually become a mother. And how interested people are in your children....Yeah, strangers, it's amazing in the shopping centre, 'cos Dylan smiles at them and they go, "Oh, isn't he lovely," and they come up and start talking to him...

...It's all so wonderful at the moment, because every day he does something new and you just think, 'wow. This little person' and look he is actually turning into a little person, he's not a baby any more....And it's all so wonderful. But my friends keep saying, "Well wait till he gets to the terrible twos, and wait till he does this, and wait till he does..." (laughs) And I think "Aw".

Aphrodite

I first interviewed Aphrodite at the new home she and her husband had recently moved into to be closer to family. An articulate, self-assured professional, Aphrodite seems to have a straightforward and no-nonsense view of the world. An avid reader (anywhere, anytime) and watcher of Big Brother, her somewhat zany sense of humour surfaced throughout the interview. She spoke candidly about her positive and negative expectations of motherhood. Unequivocal about maintaining her career, Aphrodite also emphasised the importance of her own new family unit as well as her ties with her family of origin.

life still has to go on

The first probably 11 weeks were terrible. ...I wasn't vomiting or anything, but just feeling terrible, and, because you don't sort of tell people 'til you're more advanced, you have to keep soldiering on at work and not tell people things. Um, after that it's been just very easy and hasn't really interfered with life at all except my clothes don't fit at all anymore and I'm fat. So it's been just pretty straight forward and yeah....I don't feel any different at all except now you've got this thing wriggling around inside of you and you think that in 10 weeks time or sooner it's going to be out there and then life will change drastically.... We don't do any different things, I probably exercise less. I used to go to the gym a lot...I don't do that now 'cos I can't bounce. But I don't feel any different. I look in the mirror and I'm shocked sometimes to see that I look different I suppose.

I don't know how I thought I'd feel. I had a friend who was pregnant before me and I asked if she was like off balance or her centre of gravity was different and she would say no and I'd think, surely it's gotta be, but it doesn't, you just sort of, your mind and body probably copes with it and you just have to get on with life....but yeah it's probably easier so far than I thought it would be....I probably thought maybe when you get to 30 it would be tougher on your body, or...I thought it would interfere, you'd feel pregnant all the time. But you just forget about it I think yeah (pause). So it's all just normal, just normal life. I'm expected to...cook and clean and do everything you do before and work's exactly the same so people don't make concessions or don't feel they have to anymore I don't think so, which is good.

...when you get bigger and your movements are starting to be affected and that's where it starts to interfere a little bit I think...I lost my brain a little bit but not as much as some people do. . . Nicco may have different things to say about that. I

forget things more and I do like to have a good memory. Yeah and I don't think it'll get any better but I'm quite happy at this, I could cope with this phase, this standard of memory for the rest of my life (laugh). It's terrible.

I'm a big reader, and, but I read anywhere, like I would read at the traffic lights and I read waiting in the car to pick Nicco up or sitting on the toilet or, so, I'm sure I'll still snatch 2 minutes of time to do that. Um,...I think I'll probably look to do extra things maybe after the baby comes along but I don't think it would crush what I do at the moment. Because I figure, I mean we used to go to the gym a lot and that type of thing but I'm happy to go for walks and push a pram and do it that way. So, it would just have to adapt into life in that direction I think. Yeah.. . . But it just depends, I mean we spend a lot of time with friends and family, and the baby'll just come along, yeah. We might leave it there afterwards (laugh), no. Yeah, but I think life will just plod along yeah,

It'll change, I think, um, just having an extra person to consider and have to take with you and not just be able to go somewhere without planning ahead. Um, and just having the added responsibility I think. But also I think the baby's got to just fit into your life...Because it's still like your life and they're just added in extra to start with I think. So, I can say that now but that may be very different in a few months time. I've seen other people struggle and sit at home and listen for the baby crying all the time and I would hope that we can just go out and do things and go back to work...Financially I think we'll have to have me go back to work. 'Cos I can earn a lot more money than Nicco.... I'm sure it will [interrupt our life], much more than I expect it to but life still has to go on and if I don't work and we can't afford like the nicer things in life then no-one's going to be particularly happy I don't think. So.

I would think I would get bored sitting at home all day with just a baby to talk to (laugh). Which is terrible but I need a bit of mental stimulation and yeah so we'll take it from there and see how it goes. I mean at work you're a different person to what you are at home and people expect different things of you and...well I'm not expected to vacuum the floor and that type of thing so, yeah it's a different role. And I've had 8 years working in this job where you're held quite highly as far as your opinion and that goes and, and it's something at least you know how to do it properly so, if you're failing at home then at least you can go there and somebody goes, "oh you're doing it right" (laugh). I would be more than happy to be a housewife or be a mother if, not if we could afford it because we could if we had to I think. But I think

if you go outside the home for stimulation then you would bring that home to your husband and family. Yeah, 'cos otherwise you'd sit at home and fester, yeah and it's nice to get paid while you go out and do something.

I hope it doesn't change us as far as like, pull us apart. I would expect it to put you together but I'm sure that doesn't always happen when you're up at 3am and everyone's cranky and crying and tired and that type of thing. But I think we were friends way before anything else happened that you would probably go back to that situation more when the baby comes along and then take the opportunity when you can just to be together, but it will change it I'm sure, but you would have to work hard for it not to and I hope we've got time to do that (laugh). So I mean we've got lots of family that we can rely on so we don't lose ourselves and we can go off and do things by ourselves hopefully and friends yeah. So that's why we moved back...so we had lots of support...Other people who've got families and kids and that type of thing which makes it much nicer yeah.

Mum's funny she, she doesn't come across as a sentimental sort of person but I think she is deep down....she makes comments from time to time and you know that she's excited about it...I think it would just be an extension of what we have rather than anything different. And with my sister again we're really close and I can't see it making it any different it's just, we'll just be me and then the baby and we just come as a package now. So I think they will be exactly the same.

I expect to be able to do it

I can't actually see the baby in the house like I know it will be here but.... And I probably can't even hear it being here. I can probably smell it more than anything, I walk into the room that's still a mess and I expect it to smell like a baby's room and it doesn't, it just smells like a room with boxes in it. So, no I can't see the baby in this house at all. ...I'm hoping it's 15 kilo baby and then I'll be back to normal weight but I don't think that'll happen either (laughter). But I don't even think about what it looks like or, I probably think of what we're going to look like walking down the path with my new stroller rather than anything else (laugh). 'Cos I walk down there and you see the mothers pushing it and I think, 'oh that'll be me' and that's really where I picture the baby most, in the stroller walking along the path. I don't picture it lying in the cot or anything, it's weird. So I don't know why that is, I probably spent too much time dreaming about freaky things like it being a monkey

baby or (laughter) covered in hair I don't know. Apparently when you give birth they come out wearing a nappy and a singlet anyway according to the antenatal classes. Yeah right!

I think a good mother is one that is probably calm and just takes in the situations as they happen and react accordingly but don't, don't lose control or lose sight of the significance of the situation like they just take it in their stride and, and if something goes wrong it goes wrong and you just can't lose control...I think that's probably the key. I'm a bit of a control freak so that will be hard and I don't normally have a lot of patience at home but I'm sure I'll have to develop some, yeah. But you just have to take it as it comes. . . . But I mean you just have to learn from your mistakes and I've spent a bit of time round babies but [Nicco] hasn't spent anytime so he's worried about dropping the baby. And I mean that's his biggest fear and I'm sure you get over it after the first week or so. You just get used to them and that's yeah, that's all you can do.

I expect to be a relaxed mother. Yeah, I expect to be able to do it. And I'll be shocked if I'm the sort of person who becomes the nervous, neurotic sort of mother. Because I don't expect that's how it will be but it could be because I've seen like the reverse, people you think who would be anxious and worried and they're just calm parents and...I hope I can do it as I think I should do it. But you don't know 'til it happens I suppose and...so you can't plan. But I expect just to be able to manage because that's, well that's how I am normally so it's just another thing that you do so....There'll be times when you lose control or whatever but I do that in normal life and you just get over it...

I don't ever remember Mum being an uptight parent. She was a strict parent but there wasn't, it was always fair I think and that's what I would expect to be here. I don't remember, she never lost her cool or, our home on her part was quite constant so and I think kids remember stuff like that so it's important even as little kids just to have consistency and that type of thing and just be relaxed about it. I hope I am afterwards I'm sure I will be but you don't know. So, in like 8 months time I may have no hair or something, I've ripped it all out or yeah, or maybe like 3,000 kilos sitting on the lounge 'cos all I do is watch Oprah or (laughs) yeah.

...it'll be different but I'm sure it will be better as far as emotional fulfilment or whatever goes yeah. I'd hate to be the sort of mother who had postnatal

depression, or...like you get home and a few days later you go all funny 'cos of hormones. But I'd hate to sort of see the baby and go, 'well it was really nice knowing you but we'll send you back now'. But I don't know, I wanted to have kids all my life and I thought I'd, I'd have kids maybe when you're 23 or 24...but thinking now I wouldn't want to have had kids that early because I think it's tough enough emotionally now to put yourself second or third or fourth wherever you come down the track. But I'm sure, I mean...you get delight out of having a baby and I mean they don't have to be good all the time and that, but just the joy that they would bring or offer or the little things that they do.

So, and I like someone to entertain me something else to keep me occupied, I get bored very easily if I'm not entertained. I'm not the sort of person who will sit at home, we won't be sitting here, the baby and I, looking at each other going what are we gonna do to now because we'll have to be doing something. Whereas Nicco's quite happy to, he could sit home for a week by himself and not talk to anyone and be more than happy but 3 hours and I'm going crazy. So, it'll keep me occupied I'm sure and I mean I'm sure all parents love their kids but you've gotta just, I'd wanna make sure that developmentally they grow properly and you stimulate them, play the right games and spend time with them and that type of thing yeah. 'Cos I mean at work I...children in grade 2 and they don't know letters of the alphabet, I look at the parents and I go, 'but why don't they?' And...I would be, not disappointed if I had, not a dumb child, but a, a not delayed even but a child who just wasn't particularly clever or bright. But I mean in saying that you can't determine that but I would do everything at home to encourage that to develop so that when they got to school. . . you need to take responsibility for your own children I think...so yeah I think that's important. I wouldn't have cue cards out at the age of 3 teaching them maths sums and stuff like that but yeah, you've gotta help yourself in life and yeah.

you only learn how to do a job by practising at it

What if it cries and I don't know what to do with it? I had a dream that we didn't know what sex the baby was 'til 2 days after because we forgot to change its nappy (laughs). We just thought, 'oh um, that's terrible.' I've had lots of nightmares lately, baby nightmares. I don't know, not being good at it I suppose, because I'm probably a high achiever and if you hit something that you can't control then not that you would feel a failure but you wouldn't feel as in control of the situation but, and I

look at other people and I say, 'oh well they should do this or they should do that' and I wouldn't tell them but I'm sure people will think the same thing about us...

I mean, you only learn how to do a job by practising at it and reading about it, I've probably researched having a baby quite a bit because that's how I've gone through my life, like with uni and stuff like that so I've tried to read as much as I can about it but I've also found out where all the places are that if you don't know the answer you can find it and I'm happy to ask somebody who's more experienced for their opinion. If I take it that's great if I don't that's fine as well but I'd be more than willing for other people to offer. People who know what they're on about and I'd be willing to listen and try it out definitely.

I'll probably have to stop making lists after the baby's born though, I think for a while, because I get disappointed when things don't get crossed off the list, so if you don't make the list in the first thing then you're right....My house is going to be messy. I probably won't eat very well, I think it'll be busy, I'm hoping Nicco will take at least 3 weeks off work. And Mum's gonna take a few weeks off work so I think it'll be more after everyone goes back to work that it will be a bit of a shock. So I don't know what it's going to be like, think it will be tricky and I hope people don't just drop around unannounced because that would upset me a lot (laugh). If they wanna come around that's fine but they need to call and plan a time because I'm sure we'll just be trying to jump into bed at any point and have a 2 minute sleep or so....I think we'll be getting used to it all by ourselves so much that it will take a while, but I will not knock back any help from anybody who offers it. Even if it's food or Mum wants to come and do the ironing and sweep the floor that will be more than fine. 'cos I know she wouldn't take over or anything, she would only ever do what we asked her to do.

Mum has no opinion, like she's offered no, 'you should do this or you should do that' at all...Nicco's mother thinks I should scrub my nipples with a toothbrush to make them hard . . . and I told her that I didn't think it'd be a good idea (laugh). But people have been very comment free so far, so and if they did and I didn't like it I'd say, "well thanks very much but we'll see how we go"....if Mum's got something to say she'll say it and then she knows that I'll think about it. And I'll probably agree with her 'cos she only says the important things (laugh) and then I'll come around to her way of thinking but she's been very comment free so far. Yep, no criticism.... Other than she did offer to wash cloth nappies all the time for us if we chose to go

that way. So, that's, that's her only concern I think. They've been very good actually, thank goodness.

I think Nicco's excited but he's probably more concerned about his parenting abilities and like if the baby cries what do you do and not, not whether he can cope but more the learning process I think. But he's seen a friend of his who has a 6 week old baby go from knowing nothing to being able to do it....I think it's just again, fear of the unknown and he's not had friends who've had kids before...so he's not come into contact with babies very much. But he would be more than happy to change the dirty nappy and get up...and he's emptying the cat's litter in, in anticipation of changing nappies (laugh). So yeah, I think, I think he'll be fine though.

...lack of sleep (laughs). It's gonna happen....people tell me you just get used to it like I'm used to having at the moment probably 9 hours. No and I mean I like my sleep but I'm not the sort of person who's doesn't function without it but lately I've slept a lot. It'll probably shock me more the interrupted sleeps so if you got 5 hours all in once that would be fine but 5 hours spread over 12 hours or something probably won't make me happy. But if I'm not at work then it probably won't be as big an issue for me as opposed to Nicco. If he goes back to work, I will try and be the one who sleeps less at night. But in saying that, I'll also hope somebody wants to help during the day so then I can sleep a little bit. Because I think if you don't have enough sleep you get cranky and then you get mad and then you're not helping anybody so yeah.

Whoever can do it I think is what it'll come down to, like whoever can do one thing and the other defrosts some food and put it on the table...And I think things'll suffer 'cos I like to have a neat house and that type of thing. I'm not worried about having a messy house but not having 10 tonnes of washing to do and that type of thing. But that's what happens and you can't worry about stuff like that as long as you're all warm and fed and happy that's fine the washing'll be there tomorrow and the day after, the day after that. Unless Mum comes and does it then we'll be right (laugh). Yeah but, we'll just, I would expect we would just share things and when he goes back to work, I will probably take a bigger share because he's taking on his share of going back to work, it will just, so that's how we run our lives at the moment so I don't think it will change much that way. It's just an extra job factor built into it now yeah. So we'll see (laugh). It will work fine, I'm sure

just having, like, money to fall back on

My concern would be what if we run out of money. Rather than, I'm sure I could do all the baby things, but what happens if something happens and we go to pay a bill and we don't have the money or there's a doctors bill or that type of thing. I think that is probably more my concern and I will do everything I can to ensure that, I mean how much is enough money to have as a back up you just don't know.... And not that you think, 'oh I won't have enough money to buy the nappies or the food,' that's not the issue, and I know we could always borrow money if we had to, but what if I was sick and couldn't go back to work that's, that's probably more my concern...

...we don't want all the fancy, this type of thing and that type of thing, and it's more just to maintain living I think....but if we get to the point where you gotta drop down to the lower socio-economic thing I think that would be more my fear. That's partly why we moved back here as well because things were, not cheaper, but we could reduce our mortgage and reduce the repayments and that type of thing. And I mean you don't have to have those things [like morning tea at cafes] you can just as easily meet somebody in a park and take some coffee or whatever but it would be more, yeah just the extra little things....that's not a concern but yeah just having, like, money to fall back on in the bank.

I'm not good with pain

Oh fear absolutely, giving birth. It doesn't worry me, but I'm not good with pain so that part worries me. Afterwards I'm not worried about how that will go because that could be all learnt and taught...but it either happens, well it happens regardless you, you can't stop it (laugh) and whilst you can make decisions, I don't think ultimately you do make the decisions. I think you're encouraged to think that you make the decisions but you don't so. I try not to think about it because someone will tell you on the day what to do and what, what's going to happen anyway so. There's...no point wasting worry energy on things you can't change or fix. I can learn all there is to know about it to make the informed decision if I'm given that option but I think ultimately it's out of your hands regardless.

I think you have to [trust the medical] because they've done it a million times and I've never done it and I expect people to do that to me at work, but I've also chosen my doctors based on what I think their skills are so I feel quite comfortable in

allowing them to make the decisions because ultimately they're wanting to do the best for you, they're not out to sabotage you and if something does go wrong people have done everything they can....they're gonna give you the options and tell you what you should do and then you can choose either way but I'm sure I would listen to their, their thoughts rather than, if you had a gut instinct I'm sure I would discuss that, but I'll probably in too much pain to listen so yeah. Scares me, that's the scary part but I only think about it from time to time and a thing flashes through my head and I think, 'oh no don't think about it' because you can't, you can't prevent it or change it or [even prepare for it]. They showed this massage thingy [in ante-natal classes] and I go, 'well why do that because it's they're either going to cut you in half or your gonna rip in half or something anyway.'

[the birth is]...just a means to an end yeah. 'Cos I'm sure you forget about it because people don't seem to, they remember what happens but they don't quite remember I'm sure the pain associated with it, so. I'm sure your brain selectively dulls it out. I'm hoping that will happen. Yeah. You get this forgetting hormone released in the brain afterwards ...and it's sort of almost at the point now where you're just going, 'oh I wish it would just hurry up.' Then you think, 'oh I've got so much to do before then that if it hurries up I'm in a lot of trouble' 'cos all I can take is pyjamas to the hospital (laughter). But yeah I think it's more that afterwards part, what you get afterwards. So just come on and get out and then we can play and then it'll be over and then we can just start getting on with life.

Asleep when I arrived, 8 month old Alex passed us on his way out for a walk with his father. Aphrodite's cooing response as he left revealed how besotted she was with her new baby, a fact she unashamedly admitted to. Although she spoke frankly about some of the difficulties she had had, I sensed that she viewed these as a normal part of the new life that she had, and would, cope with. Motherhood appeared to have had no real surprises for Aphrodite and although she appeared to miss being free to socialise whenever and wherever, was happily resigned to the totality with which the baby had taken over their lives.

I think physically we were prepared you know. You had the nappies and you had all this and that but, ah, I don't know. I don't think mentally I was prepared even though you've got all that time to do it, it was still a shock. We came home and we sat him in the thing and I said, "There's a baby in there and he belongs to us. What are we going to do with him now?" And we just sat and looked at each other and

then I went, "Oh, I'd better go and buy some groceries." (Laugh). . . So, I don't know....No, it wasn't what I thought it would be but I don't know if I knew what it would be like. But its, its different, definitely. Yeah.

he runs our life completely/ we just slot in when he likes us to slot in.

We have no life. No, we do have a life, we have Alex's life and then our lives fit around his. Somehow I thought his life would fit into ours but that doesn't work like that at all. Um, I think the emphasis is obviously on him. We are just, we come second and third, if that, at this rate. Dad came up the other day and he said, "I had three reasons to come up;" one to see my sister, one to see Alex and to bring Mum's cousin up. And I went, "excellent, didn't want to see me or anything?" ...Um, but, yeah, he certainly runs our lives completely. And I've not had a sleep in for eight months and one week. And I don't think we ever will. Which is devastating to me. So, I mean he's such a good baby but he's still is very demanding and everything we do is for him. We do a few things for ourselves but not many. Only when he's being super good. So that's probably how it's changed most.

Because ...if I want to go somewhere and if I want to do it at this time if Alex's asleep or if he's cranky, we just don't go and we just re-organise everything. But the one thing I'm still on time even if it takes me three hours to organise to get somewhere on time. I hate being late. So that's the one thing, I organise things to fit in with times that I know that he will be able to go out. So, no, he runs our life completely. He's made his own life and we just slot in when he likes us to slot in.

...things like going out to have a drink or going somewhere after work, it just doesn't happen. So we just come home and we're sitting here watching telly going, isn't life exciting, because we don't go out at night during the week because we have to take him and it's no good....I think he thrives on routine. So I would rather him be in bed and if we wanted to go out the weekend or something, then we can. But, if there's a special occasion we would not, not go because we would just take him with us....We, we've only probably been out alone a couple of times I suppose. But that's alright. We're getting back there, I think. Yeah....We weren't always like going out and doing stuff so we probably haven't missed that side of it as a couple and if we wanted to we could easily do it. Um, and just to get Mum to babysit. But, you, I, I only like asking so many times for her to look after Alex. There might be another time where I really need her to do it and I'd hate to wear out his welcome, which I'm

sure I wouldn't....we are extremely lucky that we get a lot of extra help because my aunty looks after him when I go to work and if she can't Mum will take half a day off....And if we wanted to go out for dinner then we could. Just at the end of the day we're so buggered that it's easier not to go out for dinner. Because he goes to bed at about 6:30 and he's asleep so we do have a number of hours at night.

Well, there's no other way. I don't think it would work any other way so we just do what we do and I'm lucky that I can go to work and leave him for a few hours a week which is nice. Only because I can go and just be a normal person and make adult decisions and talk to other adult humans. But, um, no I'm not resentful at all because we chose to have him and this is the way he likes to interact with us. He's got a good temper on him and he knows what's right and wrong and he plays us like anything (laugh)....he's got a very strong personality...and I sort of think, 'oh, well I hope when you grow up you're not going to be the child lying on the floor in the supermarket screaming' and the other mothers going, 'wouldn't you do something with her son, pick him up or something.' But um, yeah, or no, it was like I've loved him like the second I saw him definitely. From that very moment but, um, yeah. It changes I think. Sort of as he becomes a little grown up you sort of treat him more as a little grown up....I think the love's changed from, 'aren't you a precious little baby' to 'you're a cute little thing', but no we've, Nicco as well I think, just loved straight away. Yeah, Yeah, definitely. So.

I'm doing the best I can so that's all that you can do

...I feel confident. I think I might...I feel guilty that I think, 'is there more, like is there other feelings that you should have?' Like I don't have all those lovey dovey to sit at home being a happy little mother feeling....I sort of think, oh well, here's Alex, I've fed him and, yep, what are we going to do now? And I don't know whether other babies just lie there quite happily but he wants to be entertained continuously. But I'm that sort of person...so I think he's very much like that....I think I'm a good mother in, yes I feed him and I look after him and I developmentally, like we read books and we play and all that sort of thing but if a good mother is one who is just completely happy to be at home and that, and then I don't think I would be. But then I think that I'm doing the best I can so that's all that you can do. Because there's no, I've got this book and it's about like your baby 0 to 5 years and it's like a roster, when they're nine months old, from 2 'til 4:30 they will

be sleeping. And I thought, 'hang on maybe I have got a naughty baby, or maybe I'm not doing the right thing,' but he just does his own thing, so

I have moments where I think, 'oh my God, I'm sick of doing this,' and think, 'can somebody just come and take him for ten minutes and I can go and read a book.' But I don't think that I'm doing anything wrong. We took him to the physio because he doesn't sit up yet, and like he's weak in his back muscles and that she gave us some exercises and I thought, isn't that terrible, like I could have been doing this, these little exercises for ages and oh, it's terrible, he mightn't be able to sit up and then he won't be able to crawl and be developmentally delayed....But, yeah, I, no I think you do what you can do and, yeah. And I, we go and see a baby nurse. . . she's excellent and, and even just sort of stupid questions I go up with a list of ten questions and we would go through those and she's just very blunt and normal and she's got grown-up kids so she's very helpful. I like her. I've been to a couple, and I've found a few of them were quite Nazi-like in their parenting or their looking-after-baby thoughts.

Oh, in the beginning, I, I breastfed him for 12 days and it wasn't a success and he wasn't feeding and I didn't like it and I was traumatised by it and I went and saw this woman and I just wanted her to say to me, put him on the bottle. But she was going on about all this stuff and I left feeling worse, and then we took him to the paediatrician and he just goes, feed him formula. He said, "all my children were fed formula and they were fine," and, he said, "if you're not happy doing it, don't do it. Because you'll only make him upset"....Yeah. I think you probably know the answer to the question when you ask it. About, because that was probably an emotional thing as well as an information thing. And that's what I wanted her to tell me and she didn't tell me the right thing. So I went 'til, I found someone who did. And a friend of mine said to me, "I really wanted to tell you just to do that," and I said, "well why didn't you?"....I said, "just in future, you've got three children, you've had more experience, if you think I'm doing something that you could help with a different suggestion, and do it. And if I don't want to listen, that's fine." So. Yeah.

[in hospital]...there was so many different nurses and they all had their own opinions and none of them seemed to match. So, and I was in there for six or seven days, but, yeah, I didn't leave feeling confident I don't think. And I probably could have [breastfed] if I'd persevered. Maybe improved at it. Or it, become more successful but I wasn't, I didn't want to do it....but before I had him I was happy to

do it but if I did it again I wouldn't breastfeed....maybe for the first two days or whatever is good, but I would take formula and bottles to the hospital. Because it just takes out one of the unknowns in the equation. Like you go, why's he crying...he's had 80 mls of milk, so no, he's got food in his belly. Yeah, that's probably what I didn't like about it. Yeah. And I've seen people sit there for like an hour and feed their babies and I don't have time to do that. Isn't that terrible? But, yeah, I don't know how I'd feed him four times a day then. And go to work, and do all that, so it gave me a lot more freedom. Definitely....I tried to express milk and it wouldn't work and then I'm trying to do that but feed and sleep and it was impossible. I don't know how people would do it. So, yeah, it'd be really tough....And not that I would always take the easy option but it was no, it wasn't detrimental to Alex so, yeah.... And once I made the decision, that was it. I didn't ever think, 'oh God I'm terrible. He's not going to get antibodies from breast milk,' and no, once I'd made it I was much more relieved. So, it was a big, that was a big decision though. Yeah.

mothers are always, do the extra part

I don't know if I had like a plan. I certainly, I don't know, I don't sit at home and feel, 'oh I'm so content I've got a baby and I'm a wife and I'm a mother and I'm a housewife.' And I think that's revolting. I'm glad I've got Alex and I'm glad of all that but there's more to life than just cooking biscuits and sitting at home with a kid.... But, um, I, yeah, I don't know. I don't think I had any idea what it would be like. But it is far, far, not even more responsibility, but extremely demanding just of time. Because you have all your time is taken up by him. And Nicco's excellent, probably better than a lot of people I'm sure, but I still think that it should be fifty/fifty completely. And I think, 'you go to work but that's great because I work all day as well. So when you come home, you take him'. Even, because when he comes home he bathes Alex, that's his job because that's the way it works. Then I get crabby because last night he didn't get home until seven and I had to bath Alex and that annoys me. Because it's the one job I hate doingIt may be [fifty/fifty]. (pause) Oh, no, I don't think it is. But it's probably a better percentage than a lot of people have. Much better than my Mum had. She probably had 95 to 5. So, but I expect it, it's his son as well...

....some weeks he'll say I'm going to go and do this and I go hang on, no you can't, you've already done something this week so he does have to be reminded but he, I only have to say it and he's only too willing to do what he has to do which is

good. And he gets up to him at night and I pretend I'm asleep...But I figure that it all evens out when I spend two nights completely awake with him once in a while so, and that's fine. But I arrange my sleeping around Alex. I'll go to bed at 8:30 whereas he'll stay up 'til 10:30 and I figure, well, that's your choice. You lose out....But I think mothers are always, do the extra part. But that's just life, so...

...I'm going to a conference in two weeks time and I was really hoping, I just wanted to go by myself but, no, we're all going as a family because Nicco cannot miss out on anything....It would've been nice just to go alone but that's okay. I've had one night away, just myself. I had to go to a Christmas meeting...I left at three in the afternoon and I was home by 7:30 the next morning. But, it was the nicest night. It was lovely. So. But that took a lot of organising....Yes.... if we left it to Nicco there would be no food in the fridge to feed Alex, so I plan it. Yeah. He would never think, oh we've run out of formula, let's go and buy some formula. . . He would buy them if I asked him but he doesn't think....I organise everything.... So, I could never just say look, I've got to go away for three days. You and Alex hang out...But that's okay. That's obviously my choice because I've taken on that role. Definitely.

Doing mother

Um, it's more difficult to run a house. Like to have dinner cooked and be organized for that sort of thing. Um, if Nicco doesn't come home straight from work to help me then we don't eat 'til 8 o'clock or something because you've just only got two hands and from 5 o'clock to 6:30 is when Alex has a bath and his food and a bottle so he just comes first in that situation so it's probably harder to do things by myself....I don't think any of it's easier. I've got more time probably to go and do jobs for me because we both go but that's probably all. I'm not tied to work. Yeah. So, but I don't think anything else is easier. No, not at all.

Oh, yes, its very stressful, I think. Because if he's screaming and I want to go out and I've got to put the pram in the boot I just think let's go for a walk instead because at least it's got less steps involved. And probably my goal is to make him happy...sometimes whatever is easier for him is easiest for me. So, but it's stressful, ...he's had an ear infection this week so he's been absolutely feral and I said to Nicco on Wednesday morning, "If you go to work, when you come home one of us will be dead. So, you'll have to stay home for a little, for a couple of hours," because we spent two sleepless nights up with him all night....So, yeah, we choose the path

of least resistance. Even if it's not the path of choice originally. But sometimes we just have to go and do what you have to do. And then sometimes we suffer for that when we get home if it's, if I've been disorganised, or if he's been woken up to go out and (interrupted by baby going for a walk)...

I probably get about an hour, ten of a morning now. Which makes a difference because then I can have a shower and get organised and all that, and I can sit down for 15 minutes and watch telly or something. So that's good. But, yeah, it's tough. Tough to find [time], it's tougher now than when he was a little baby because he slept a lot more. So. I thought that was tough when he was say eight or ten weeks but it just gets tougher and tougher and tougher. From a demanding of your time point of view. And I'm sure it gets even tougher. 'Cos he can't sit up or crawl yet. So he's still in the same spot where I leave him....so he's a bit crabby for that reason as well, I think. Yeah. Because he wants to be able to sit up and play I think...and he's just frustrated, so. Yeah. We go out and about a lot. He likes to go to the shops and look at lights so, we go shopping often (laugh). And I'm a people person...so at least we can talk to other people. But we do sometimes [stay at home] because it's easier. If he's crabby or something....probably every fortnight we go out and play with other adults and babies but probably the rest of the time it's just Alex and I, I suppose.

In the first few months it was very sad and all I read was Woman's Day. But now yep, yeah, I read everywhere....So, no I do get some time to read again now which is great. Um, normally I don't read when I take him for a walk but I was desperate the other day....he was super crabby so we went down to the park and I wanted to put him to sleep and he was crying and screaming and we were walking up and down and up and down the path and I was standing there reading while I was walking and I think people walked past and thought I was a bad mother because I couldn't even be bothered to take my child for a walk but I wanted to tell them we'd already walked 45 minutes that morning, this was a second walk to put him to sleep. But, that's alright. He eventually did fall asleep so we sat in the park and I read my Woman's Day and he sat and slept in the outdoor light which was quite nice for him. And then we crept home still sleeping and I walked in the door and he woke up and cried again. So. But he did have an ear infection, so he was excused.

...I don't think I'm neurotic. I'm probably, and not that I'm not relaxed but I think there are some things that just make you up tight. And that you worry about,

so...like when he's been sick and he, we're lying there at three a.m. and he's screaming and I'm going, 'for God's sake, just shut up!' And I can see why people would shake a baby and, for babies who are really naughty and he's a good baby but, um, I think we're quite relaxed though. We don't stress out and we're not panickers and we don't have him at the doctor every drop of the hat but Nicco's a bit of a worry...Alex had a temperature and Nicco goes, 'he's burning up, he's burning up.' And I go, 'he's a bit hot, I don't think he's on fire though.' So he is a bit dramatic.

But mum with Alex, like she's, 'oh shush, Alex, you'll be right, get over it.' And I said, "were you a tough mummy to us too?" and she goes, "yes," and I go, "oh well, we're alright."....my aunty's a soft touch, like if he cries she'll pick him up and say don't worry, I'll rock you to sleep but Mum would say, 'no, Alex, go to sleep.' But it is good to see how they deal with him. It's like, I don't know how old he was, maybe 10 weeks or something and he wouldn't go to sleep and Mum came over one day and she put him on his side and put his arm out in the front and said, "now go to sleep," and he did. And we put him on his side after that and he went to sleep.... people know different things...and it's like with anything you watch people do things you pick up how they do it so, yeah, that's helpful. And if he's being crabby, the other day I'd had him all day when he was sick and we just went out to Mum's work and sat out there for an hour and everyone out there nursed him and carried him around, so. 'Cos now, I probably don't have a lot of friends here who don't work and the ones who don't have their own kids so sometimes it's nice to go somewhere that don't have kids. So that they will take your child....I like it when they do that. Some mothers mightn't like handing their kids over but, yeah. And he'll go to almost anybody. Definitely. But I think they need to have that development as well. So.

I've always thought, you know, I want to have a baby and that's great and now I've got one. And I'll probably have another one. But I don't think it's, no, it is fulfilling, but it's not that all-encompassing, warmthness where you think, 'oh I've got a baby, it's so lovely.' I'm, our lives were quite fulfilled before and if we hadn't had him I would not have, not felt unfulfilled, but that there might have been more. But having had him I don't think, he's added a new perspective, but he's not responsible for all the happiness in our life. He's a huge part but he's just changed where we get our enjoyment from, I think. Yeah, Yeah. But I don't think he's, well he's the reason we're here and not the be all and end all but most of it. But, yeah, and we'd never give him back but I don't think I feel enlightened or fulfilled by the

experience. It's just something you do. And maybe when he's asleep and I'm lying in bed about to go to sleep I think, 'oh isn't life nice and I'm happy,' and that's great. And you get up the next morning and it all starts again. And that's okay (laugh).

[paid] work's the easy part

I work two afternoons and some Saturdays. But I went back when he was six weeks old. So. Oh, no, the work's the easy part. Yes, definitely. So I would work more if we had other babysitters but I probably choose not to put him in day care only because, maybe when he's a little bit older, but I just can't imagine them giving him the same attention....But I'm really lucky that I've got someone to look after him who, first of all we don't pay, so I can work for the money I get paid, and on Saturdays Nicco looks after him so, which is great because then I don't have to be organised. I can just leave the house. Which is even nicer. But I would be absolutely insane if I didn't go to work. I look forward to it a lot. So, yeah.

[Stimulation] Oh, definitely. And I look at, I wonder what people do at home all day with babies because come Thursday I've run out of things to play. And then we get, like Thursday and Friday's okay and then Saturday and Sunday Nicco's home and then Monday we start again. But maybe when he's up and about it will be different. But I run out of activities to do with him. So, I don't know....but there's only so much Play School you can watch in one day.

But when I'm at work I miss him. And I come home and think, oh I've missed you. And I mean that's good for our relationship because I can come home and be refreshed and see him, yeah, in a different light. And he's keen. I'm, I'm sure he's keen to have time away from me as well and spend it with other people so I think it's good for us and...I couldn't work full time, um, but, because I want to be obviously the person who cares for him most but I would work some more hours if I could, but maybe down the track a little bit if that's possible.

And I can go to work and...even if I'm sitting testing somebody I can still drink my coffee when I want to. So people are demanding of my time there but they can wait two seconds. So, yeah, I, I enjoy work a lot and I couldn't not be there. Definitely. So, yeah, it's a real break for me....like if he's lying there screaming, screaming and I wanted to do something that would take longer than a few seconds then I'll just pick him up and do it. Because when he was sick during the week it was too hard. He was crying all the time. I went to the toilet with him in my arms.

Thinking, 'what am I doing?' That was just easier because, yeah. So. But it's nice to just drive to work and you're the only one in the car. And you get there and you just get out and shut the door and you don't unclip, and come on in, and gather thirty thousand things. So it's probably reminiscent of what life was like before Alex. So. But then I think, 'oh, he'll be like in pre-school before I know it' and then I'll have all this time and not that I'm wishing it away but it will be gone too soon anyway.

Yes, yes, definitely [enjoying being a mother]. I wouldn't have it any other way. No, it's not all flowers, definitely. But it's, the positives outweigh the negatives. If it didn't I think you'd be in trouble, but they do. Some day's it comes close but, the majority the positives far outweigh the negatives. So.

Heidi

When I arrived at 26 yr old Heidi's neat and tidy home, I commented on her lovely wedding photos and we chatted about the recent event. She struck me as a creative person who liked things to be 'just so', and had clear cut expectations about how she saw things happening after the birth. Laughing easily throughout the interview, Heidi seemed to be a self-contained, modest person, who was happy to be pregnant, but was keen to resume part-time paid work in the retail industry after the birth.

I'm 28 weeks and it's...been exciting, yes, just watching myself grow and, yeah, just seeing how I progress throughout the time and watching him, or feeling him wiggle is just amazing, so yes. You know, I say to my husband oh, feel this, and it's like, yes, it's bizarre, yes. It's a little boy...he was very obvious on the scan, (laughter)...we didn't mind, so long as it was healthy and everything was fine, so, so far it looks good. So yeah, but um, it's (sigh), I think it's going to be a huge change for us, you know we often still stand back and think, 'what have we done (laugh)?'

...But um, you know, my husband's really excited and you know, he sort of says, "I want him born now, can't wait" (laugh). And I said, "Oh, you will." So, yes. But no, other than that, it's really good....I've only, you know, just started showing, so hardly anyone knew, so. It was good. Had to tell people, "Yes, I'm this far," you know, and "Really?" They still don't believe me. But yes, um yeah, it's been good. So

just going that next stage.

We did want kids, sort of as soon as we got married, 'cos we've been together for over seven years and...um, you know, and we're just basically soul mates, you know. We started out as good friends...and we sort of always thought well, you know, we want one or two kids, so you know, I didn't want to be too old, um and I got told because of my history that I may not have kids, or it might take a little bit longer, so we sort of thought well, we'll start trying and see what happens, and it happened straight away (laughter). So it was like, ooh, this is a shock....we were like, wow this is exciting!... and um, you know, we're established so it wasn't as if we were trying to buy a house...or you know, trying to get our relationship together as well, it was just, you know, okay, this baby's come along and we're ready.

We feel that we're mature enough now and we can handle the next step I suppose in life.....you know, we've gone through the stages of finishing school,

finding our careers, you know going out partying and all that sort of stuff and you tend to sort of quieten down after a while....you know, we've gone to the stage where we want to go the next step now, like we bought the house, we bought the car, you know, we feel like we need something else in our lives, and um yeah, so....Um, there's another friends that's due two weeks before me, and they're in a similar situation to us...and so it's sort of exciting going through that stage with somebody else as well....be nice to have our own little family

it's going to be a big step

I think [it will be a change], because we've been together as a couple for so long and we're used to doing our individual things and you know...having quiet nights, or going out, or going away, you know...we're going to have to realise well we've got a little bub here and we're going to be housebound and have to look after him and you know, which will be fine, you know...and that's why we didn't want to have kids until we were ready....And um, um I suppose we're both very tidy people, so we know it's going to be huge shock with having a baby in the house (laugh)and lots of toys everywhere...I'm getting myself ready for that, so, yes, and just having something to look after, you know, like a cat is easy, just throw 'em outside or feed them and they're gone, they look after themselves. But yeah, this baby is sort of a 24 hour, seven day every, you know, constantly, so it's, yeah in that sense it's going to be a bit of a shock, you know, just sort of having someone there and knowing that they rely on you, solely and...you know, no-one else is sort of there to really do what you have to do, it's your job, so. Yeah so it's going to be a big step (sigh).

...one [friend] in particular...she's still at home and she said that she'd help me, and um...I know that I can contact people at work or, you know, some of the child health nurses and things like that, and...like my Mum...if I was desperate she could come up here for a few days. Um, you know, I'm sure my husband's parents would sort of do the same, you know, if it was that desperate. But on a daily basis, um I'm a very independent person so I think, I like to struggle on my own and just see if I can cope, you know, with it, but you know, I'm certainly probably not, I wouldn't be too shy to sort of ring up a friend a say, "What do I do?" (laugh)"This baby's crying and I don't know what to do, you know, I can't make it stop" (laughter)....Probably I'd rely more on myself or one or two friends that...have just recently been through it...they've got it more up to date than what grandparents do....so much information, people just give you heaps, and you're like aw,

(laugh)...I suppose you can take some and then leave some...what you sort of feel is right for you, so yeah, just see how it goes.

...but then I think putting it into practice, you know, and it's simple things, like I've just bought like, you know, your bottle steriliser thing, and I was reading all the instructions on that and I thought yes, this sounds all right, but how am I going to, you know, like, hold the baby in one hand? . . . so, yes I just think, 'oh, should I do a bit of practice first?'...(laugh). And information like, you know, about breastfeeding and that's a big thing for me as well, because you don't know until bub's born, if you can or not, and I'm hoping I can...like sometimes they say that some babies don't suck properly...and some just don't take to the boob, and others take to it really well, or you know you might...not produce enough milk, so you know, you've sort of got all those things in your head, and I try not to worry too much, 'cos I think well, I won't know until this happens, but it's still niggling at you, um. And just simple things like, you know, we went grocery shopping yesterday and I think, 'how am I going to do this with a baby?', (laugh)...and I think, 'god those mothers are good when they've got this screaming kid and they can still go'...so yeah.

...I just know that it's going to make big changes and, yeah, I know it's not, it's never going to be the same again and people have always said that to you, and I think they try and scare you a bit. You know, as soon as you're pregnant, 'oh no turning back now, that's it, you know, twenty years gone', it's like yep thanks, you're really encouraging. And they wonder why girls don't have babies these days! But yeah, so with that I just think, oh well, we'll cope....Take it as it comes and you know, I know there's gonna to be things that we're going to have to battle with.... And I mean you always hope...that your baby's going to be healthy, and things but you just never know, really. You always think, 'oh you don't want a baby with reflux', or you know intolerance and things, and, yeah, just take it as it comes...

The friends who have got babies, we'll be able to understand what they've gone through and what they're going through, and I suppose we'll have a bit more respect for them....The people that don't have, you know, the kids, I sort of think well, they're going to have to adapt to us, you know, and I'm not just going to throw my kid to a babysitter because you know all these other people want to go out...I'd rather put our family first, and if they don't like it, well see you later sort of thing.

I just hope that I can be a mother that's approachable and that's just there.

I don't think bub will interfere...unlike my husband, I don't have huge hobbies and things, I'm just more of a homely person and, um...I love to sort of work in the garden and things like that, and I think that'll be fun to get bub out there and you know, when he's a bit older you can sort of show him...between a plant and a weed...so yeah, just general things....a part of our lives and yes, and like I'm sort of viewing, once bub has come home and we've sort of got into a routine and pattern, I'd like to go for a walk and get out and you know, not just being stuck in front of the telly all day and um, you know, being able to sort of go up to different places...just get some fresh air myself, but also get bub out there and just sort of see what life's like, sort of.

...I think I might be a strict mother. I don't know, but I was sort of brought up a little bit of strict, and I sort of turned out all right, but I was also brought up that I could make my own mind up, they didn't push me into doing anything, so I'm hoping for me as a mother to be like that to my child. And sort of having rules, but you know sort of being lenient, but I don't want to be a pushover....I just hope they, that I'm there for the child and, um...you know, that they feel comfortable with me. So um, in that sort of sense I suppose a mother, you know, mother's role in just keeping them safe.

...and having fun with them as well and not being a stick in the mud and sort of like, 'oh no I'm going to do that'...you know, you've got to look, I think, back on yourself and think okay, what was I like when I was ten years old, or what was I like when I was fifteen...and work out, well okay they're just going through a stage and they do grow out of it, hopefully, and yeah, take it from there. When they're little...you teach them things that, the way that you want them to grow up in life, so just down to the basics of putting their toys away, you know, and the respect for other people's places, and you know, you don't, I suppose nobody ever wishes [for] a kid that you know, goes to someone's place and trashes the place, and no-one wants you over because your kid runs riot all the time (laugh). So I just hope that I can be that sort of mother that you know, has a good kid that will just do stuff but in reality you just don't know (laugh)....But, I just hope that I can be a mother that's approachable and that's just there. So, mm.

...I'm not sure how Mark's going to deal with [his hobby]....I can't tell him what to do or what not to do, he's got to work that out for himself. I feel, that yes, I feel that if I tell him to do something, he might resent me, or might resent the baby. . I mean he's so excited about the baby that he might think, 'oh look I'm only going to do five hours of the hobby today, because I want to get home, you know, to bub'. He has often said to me, "Oh I can't wait to go to the park...play on the swings"....so I'm hoping that by the time it all happens, that he will be you know, still thinking that and not thinking that this bub's interrupting my hobbies and my social life....But yes, it's certainly up to him, and he knows how I feel...like he'll have to stay home and maybe give up some of his spare time, because I want my career still, and my career's going to be...after hours...But as bub gets bigger as well, he'll be able to um show him what he does and. . . Yes, involve him with different things....

I'd like to keep my finger in the pie, as they say

Yes, I'd like to go back [to paid work], just casually, afterwards. I'm hoping, if bub is okay and you know everything's fine, and I've discussed it with my husband that after you know, six to ten weeks, I'd like to...just do a Thursday night or Saturday morning where he can look after bub, because um I've seen many of my friends who had one or two kids and they've fully just gone motherhood, which is, nothing against that, and I'd love to do that if we could afford it, but you know, they're struggling now that their kids have gone to school, they can't find work because they're not qualified for anything and they've just been out of work too long, and now they're my age, and they're having trouble...so I'd like to keep my finger in the pie, as they say....you know, my husband's happy with that, so he said yep, go for it, 'cos ...I said, "this is a big step for me". He can still go to work...and back to sort of normal, but yeah, and I'm sort of at home with this bub and, you know, like it's a big sort of culture change for me....And plus also we can't really afford to have me off work, you know, as a luxury thing, because it's just, it, these days you can't, you know....and I don't want to stick my child in day-care every day while I work full time, and you know, I've discussed it with other girls and they say, well, half your wage goes to day-care...what's the use in working all the time, if you could be at home with your bub.

Fair enough, when they're a bit older I'd like to you know get them interacted with other kids and you know I'm all for that, but when they're really tiny you don't want to miss out on, you know, their first step or their first word and things like that,

so you know, I'd like one of us to be at least with the baby, you know, at all times...and all the grandparents, they all still work, some of them aren't here, you know, so you just think, oh well, you've got to do this by yourself basically, so yeah.

the men have to get in there and do it as well, you know

...I've sort of thought...like it's not just going to be attention on me, solely, it's going to be the baby as well and you know I have seen relationships sort of break up...you know, people think that the child takes up too much time, or the wife isn't getting enough attention. . . yeah, I've sort of thought about it and I sort of think well, I think it's going to be okay, because we're both wanting this child and our relationship is established....But again, you just don't know until bub comes along and things happen, and because it's a little boy as well, obviously the father's going to try and take on a bigger role because they want to show him the manly things, you know, like how to hammer a nail and you know, the motorbikes and all that...so I realise that will happen, but I hope that you know I can sort of have a role in there as well, you know, and show him other sides of things, like I don't want him to be a, you know, chauvinist male, because we're both not like that, and my husband and I both share responsibilities, so I want the bub to grow up like that.....like a woman just doesn't sit in the kitchen and cook all day and wash their clothes, you know and tidy the house, like the men have to get in there and do it as well, like this equal relationship business, none of this you know, the man outside and the woman inside sort of thing....with all that I'm hoping that yes, our relationship will be okay, you know, with doing all that sort of things and balancing the bub.

we've talked about it, and, you know, he's willing to help me and, I mean he's, he's just been great through the pregnancy as well...and he often says, like, I'm a very independent person so I, you know, probably do more things than I should when I'm pregnant, and he often says to me, "Slow down, don't do that"...I don't want any sort of expectations, because I don't want to disappoint myself or the baby or my husband, so I'd rather just sort of see how it comes. Um, you know I'm a great believer in, if it's meant to be, it's meant to be sort of thing...

I don't want to wreck my body

Not thinking about it [labour] (laugh). No, yes, it's sort of, I'm in denial at the moment, I just sort of think oh gosh, like...I was walking the other day and it was like a stitch on one side...and my husband said what are you going to be like in

labour? I said, "I don't want to think about it!" (laugh). But I know it's going to be a huge thing and I mean, again, you don't know if you're going to be a five hour labour or you know a ten hour labour, and um, with bub they said in his scans his head was two weeks bigger than the rest of his body, um...so I think, I'm not sure, but I think they'll tell me, like when I'm getting closer and closer whether or not they'll give me a caesarean or I'm going naturally, so yeah, in that sense it sort of worries me, like what's going to happen there, 'cos I don't, I don't want to wreck my body, you know...I sort of think 'oh, how's this baby going to come out?'

And people always give you horror stories about both. Um and...I've heard sometimes they can let you go too long, or they can um you know let you tear and things like that, and other times they stitch up too much. I mean, but then I hear good stories...and I've seen too many horror mothers come in...you know another lady came into work the other day and said that she's got constant haemorrhoids, you know, and her baby's ten months old and she can't get rid of them, and she said she's never having a kid again, and this has just turned her off, totally. And I think that's bad, because I think she's resenting the child a bit more, so I sort of think oh, I don't want to do that... 'oh, I don't want to wreck my body', because you know you're still only young and you don't want to, you know, live the rest of your life having too many problems, and you still want to be attractive, you know...

And I'm sort of grateful that in my profession that I can see that side of things ...like I'm not going into this blind and like, I've got, you know one of the ladies I worked with, she said, "Oh don't be like me," she said, "When I was pregnant and stuff," she said, "I thought it was all glitz and glamour, the baby comes out, I just feed it and it falls asleep,"...And she got depression out of it...so I try and keep myself in reality. I know that it's going to be tough, I know that my body's going to change and you know, and (sigh) like...you know everyone still comments that, "oh you don't look like you've put on anything,"....well I know I haven't put on too much weight so I'm not going to have to lose, you know I'm not going to have to concentrate on every part of my body when bub's born. . . You just like to go back to zhjoonk, like shrink it all back in, it won't happen.

I interviewed Heidi at her new home when Josh was 8 months old. As he played happily around our feet, I distracted him to allow Heidi space to talk. Her difficult labour and the physical problems she was still suffering appeared to have made the early months post-birth a challenging time. She came across as less assured than previously, and spoke reflectively and candidly about the complexities of life with a new baby.

Yes [I am enjoying being a Mum]. Very much so....the fact that I can actually stay at home and watch my baby grow. And the little things that he does every day that I'd miss if I was back at work. And, um, and the fact that, um, I can, like I enjoy doing household things now, you know, like I enjoy being the Mum, and cooking dinner and, um, actually having time to think about dinner and do that sort of thing....And I enjoy meeting like other mothers during the day as well, and also, um, you know catching up with people that you normally wouldn't....But I mean it's not all sort of great. Sometimes, you know some days are really hard like depending on how bub is...especially when he's teething and things like that. Um, like he might be a bit grizzly or clingy all day, so you can't even go out of the room without him sort of wanting you or crying. Um, also you just, you know, you can't sort of get anywhere on time....And...you can't do anything yourself that day. You know, if you wanted to get the washing done or...um, maybe the ironing or something, it's just impossible...[At the end of those days I feel] pretty exhausted. And I just feel like...it's an unproductive day. Um, but I try and...think you know, I don't have to get everything done every day....and if, um...by the time he goes to bed at night then I try and sort of do a few things....But, um, otherwise I just sit there with my husband and we just talk about the day so, or I go to bed early, so, yeah.

Sometimes you do get a little bit lonely. Um, and, you just think, 'I wish someone would pop over or come and talk to me'....sometimes you end up talking to yourself. Just, just to keep yourself entertained. So, my poor husband sort of gets all, all the day's worth of things that I want to talk about, you know at five o'clock in the afternoon. Um, but, no it's been good. Yeah....But...like if I'm feeling like that I will try and do something about, it um, if I can, like I'll try and ring somebody or you know get, get my mother-in-law or somebody to come over....Yeah, or I just go out shopping or something.

Um, no it's what I expected. And, um, it's just getting used to a routine again...Yeah, um, I mean when you're at work you start at 8:30 and come home at 5

and then cook tea...but now you sort of structure your day different depending on bub here...Yes, no, it's been good. It's a good change so.

It was, yeah. Undescribable

It was a 13 hour labour, and, um, it was pretty exhausting....I had to keep drinking cold water to keep the baby awake in my tummy...consequently that meant going to the toilet all the time which was hard because I was in so much pain. Um, and then the last half an hour was frustrating because, um, my husband said that he could see the head coming but then I'd sort of be exhausted and sort of stop pushing for a minute and then the head would go back in and so you know that was a constant battle. . . And then once the head did come out, um, the baby ended up having his thumb in his mouth with his right-hand elbow out as well. So that sort of ripped me. The whole right hand side which was very painful at the time, um, and I was only on gas the whole time. They wouldn't give me anything else. So, um...they started cleaning up the baby and then they concentrated on me, and then, apparently you've got varicose veins down there. So they all busted so I was um bleeding quite a lot so they were worried that I was going to haemorrhage....Um, then on top of that they also had to stitch, stitch me up down there and the poor doctor, she couldn't see a thing...but she did a really good job....And then just that, just exhaustion from, it was like running a marathon. It was, yeah. Undescribable.

Like my husband tried to give me a shower, and afterwards, and I just couldn't stand up....I could hardly move. And even like when I was in hospital, um, I had a lot of trouble moving with my right leg and um just could hardly sort of walk.Um, and then you know being at home it was even more exhausting because it was having all the home things to do but also having to deal with the baby and I just couldn't get up. I couldn't walk and Yeah, I was in bed most of the time. Yeah, first two or three weeks.

...that's another thing, I got haemorrhoids which most people do I think when they have a natural birth...I'd never had them before so I didn't know what they were. Um, so on top of my leg being very painful...like your bum and leg were sore.Lying down was the most comfortable position for me. And if I wanted to sit down...then I had to have, like a nice cushion on my bum. You know, it's a horrible thing to talk about but everyone goes through it I think and, um, but some people just don't admit to it. I've still got pain or weakness in my right leg. Like sometimes if I

move my leg or twist it the wrong way and I feel this sharp pain go up my leg, um and because I've put more weight on my left-hand leg now my left-hand leg is a lot sorer as well. Um, and just starting back at the gym...I've realized that my right-hand leg really doesn't have a lot of strength in it any more, um, so I'm a bit hesitant about going back and doing all that labour stuff again. You know, with wrecking my body. . .

They had a nurse come around for the first two weeks, um, and they just helped with the feeding side of things, and, um, to make sure that the baby's pooing and weeing properly...um, once I went back to the nurse at the, um, at the hospital...but they just referred me to my own doctor. Um, they were sort of concerned because there was a lot of swelling there for quite a long time afterwardsthat maybe something else had busted or, um, or there was something else in there but my doctor couldn't sort of find anything wrong. It was just a matter of healing...but my leg has never been the same and, I don't know...my doctor, he just shrugs it off and says, "Oh well it's just the muscle," and, but I don't think it should have gone on for this long. Which I'm a bit annoyed about. Like I don't want to have to put up with this pain for the rest of my life just because of having a baby. So, yeah....I think, well I don't want to be a cripple, you know I'm only young. I don't want to be 50 and have all these problems just because I had a baby at mid-20's....And its also hard just finding the time. Like some days its good and other days my leg's bad. But I think exercising it and getting it working and stronger, yeah.

No. [I'm not ready to have another one]. When that memory of the labour goes away. No, I want...um for the first one to be a little bit older like, say, three or four, so they're, they're toilet trained, they can eat normal food, um, and they can sort of help me out a bit as well with the new bub. Because...I don't think I could handle two. Like a new born crying and having to feed every two hours and then him running around. . .

And that's another reason why I don't want to have another baby for a while. Because, I, um, I've got to get my body back into shape. Um, I don't feel resentment against my baby, um, I mean you do have those days when you think, 'Oh, if only I didn't have a baby,' but you know that he's a great little baby so you try not to, you know, harp on that.. . . Um, yeah, and just try and, um, to be a bit selfish in the sense that I've just got to look after myself for a few months. . . But, you know, it, it's been, in another sense I was a little bit depressed as well because none of my clothes

didn't like, fit me any more because up the top, you know your breasts just enlarge, they don't go down, as people like to tell you, even after you've stopped breast feeding. ...Um, and I had to go up a size and things so that was, um, a bit of a culture shock and then you know, husband's sort of saying, "Oh, ah what are you throwing out them for. You can't fit into them any more?" It's like, "No"....you know, your hips move, everything sort of expands out. nothing goes back where its supposed to be....So, um yeah, it's still a bit of an issue for me like...I've had to totally change my style because what I used to wear doesn't suit me any more, so's its like, 'oh my God, who am I'? It's sort of like a, um, a personality change oh like I, you know...what am I supposed to wear? So. Um, yeah, it has, that, that's been a challenge for me....I'm still the same person but I look a bit different.

...I think no one else, no guys would look at me now because I've got a baby and my husband says, "oh no they'll look at you, you know you're, you're a, what do they say, yummy mummy"....Yeah, in a sexual way....but with my husband, I'm getting there. Um, you know, learning that he's accepted me. You know, what I am I mean he was there with the labour...and knew what was going on and, you know.

a big change in my life

No, it has, has been a big change....especially because I am just at home now...and I've got someone you know 24/7 to sort of look after. So, um, it has, has made a big change in my life. Um, also in my husband's, but he's gotten to get back to work and get back to his routine so it, it's, you know, just a little bit different for him. But for me...it's a different sort of responsibility having a baby all the time. Watching them and, um, you know making sure that they're fed and changed and things like that. Just, it's a different lifestyle really that you just get into. Yeah, once [my husband] went back to work I had to just start like, okay got to do this, you know, sterilize bottles and I've got to make milk for the day and you know got to make sure everything's right, so, yeah.

...I think the first month especially I was, um, sort of a little bit upset like, probably a little bit depressed I suppose, but not extreme. But just sort of like, 'oh my God, what have I done', sort of thing. And, um, it was just sort of a shock really, of having this little, the baby, I suppose being there and, um, wanting me, like, and that, that was quite bizarre as well....you know....But, it slowly grows on you and then and then you slowly realize, well this is my life now.

I was [breastfeeding] at the beginning....The first two weeks, um, was extremely hard. He just wasn't getting enough. I was upset all the time...I was quite sick as well...so, um, one of the nurses, um, that come to the home, she sort of suggested putting him on the, um, formula. Totally different baby. Um, from three months he slept right through, at night which is a Godsend. So. And then I started, you know, getting my life back on track. And, um, you know, feeling normal again, feeling human.

And, but I also realized that it wasn't just me. Everyone goes through that. Um, and nobody tells you that....Like I would just cry at the drop of a hat sort of thing, you know something wouldn't go right so I'd just cry. And, um, that was, oh, I thought I was breaking down. I mean, um, but, I, I eventually sort, got through I think just from talking and reading and um and just looking at bub and thinking well this is what I got and he is the greatest thing, so, yeah.

...I just tried to deal with it in my own mind. . . I spoke to my family and...and my mother-in-law. She was really good. Um, she understood and she could certainly help me out a little bit. And also she gave me books to read and things like that. Um, I [mentioned it] to one girl, only because I knew her um a bit more personally. . . and she was sort of going through a similar thing.....Yeah, and I've learnt, I've had, I'm still learning to do that....yeah, just focus on myself a lot more and, you know, I spoke to the other girls and they were, they were sort of doing a similar thing so I thought, 'oh good, it's not just me'.

...I mean, I suppose it's a big thing for I think mothers to admit that they're upset. And you wouldn't tell a general person, "Oh god, I'm really upset today or depressed or, um, I can't handle this". You try and just put on a brave face for the general public and you say, "Oh no, I'm fine. Nothing is wrong," and so they think that you're coping with it. But you know, at home, then you sort of break down, but yeah. I think getting myself back on track just watching bub grow and yeah, just, just learning to deal with it and thinking, 'well, this is it now. I can't turn back' so.

Um, I mean he's a great baby, he, he's not whingy. I couldn't ask for a better baby in that sense....Um, yeah. So. Um, and I mean I just love him to bits now. I, I feel naked without him. You know, if I have to go to the shops and my husband's at home it's like 'oh, where is he' sort of thing.

You have to experience it

Um...You can't, you can't tell somebody that's not a mother or explain it to somebody who's not a mother....You have to experience it. It's not something in life that you can sort of show or demonstrate because everyone is, every baby is different....

I was prepared in a physical sense. Like as in, I mean, like you know, I had all the nappies and had the baby room done...Um, but, mentally it probably took ah at least a month after to really grasp you know, yeah, that I've got a baby now and um, I think it, it would have been a lot easier if my labour was easier....and, um, also not breast feeding you know, I mean...I didn't feel like I was a full woman not breast feeding and all that. And a lot of people, you know put you down for not breast feeding. So that guilt sort of holds you down.

I, during the week I try and do a lot of things by myself so on the weekends if, if we do do stuff I know that I can handle it....I mean even starting to do the grocery shopping with him, um, which is a big thing. Because before, I would have had to wait 'til my husband got home....um, you know, just simple things like you can't just sort of race to a grocery store, you actually have to get him, get the baby out of the car, and cart him in and then, um yeah, you've only got one arm so you've got to make sure you've got your money in a pocket. You know...It, it's, you have to really sit there and plan everything. So, yeah. That's something I've learnt. Yeah.

Yeah, yeah [it has been a real mind shift]. Definitely. I've really had to work on myself with it and say, yep, this is it now. This is going to me for probably the next ten years at least. I have to do this, so, yeah. Well, not have to I, I've chosen to do this. So, yeah. ...I think I talked about it in the first thing that I wouldn't be putting him in child care. And I still stand by that. I mean, just the things he does every day. There's no way I'd want someone else to see that first before me....Yes, I realise, well that's my job. It, it's weird explaining it to girls that haven't had babies yet because they just think, 'oh you sit at home all day'. You know, oh, what fun, like. Yes but my job's 24/7. Like, like especially at my work because they're all young girls and they, um, they just go out and party on Friday and Saturday night and they'll come in on Saturday and go, 'oh yeah had a big night last night', or...they'll say to me like, "Oh gee, you've had it good all week haven't you?" You know, you just sit at home all day...So, I think...people that don't have kids have a

totally different concept of mothers being at home....no you don't just sit around having coffee all day. It would certainly be nice....[When they say that sort of thing] I feel like they've kicked, kicked me in the guts sort of. Like it's a real insult to me. You know...like I probably take it a bit too personally and think, well, is that what they think of me? . . .

...I've learnt in the last few months to have confidence in myself again. So, um, those sort of people I just shrug off or just sort of say, "Well sorry, but you have no idea". And, until you have kids come back to me then and let me know what it's like. . . And, yeah I explained to them "Well, hey look when I come home from work at 5 o'clock it's alright for you girls you can sit down and have a drink and relax". I said, "I've got to go home and sterilize bottles and make dinner, wash up, um, you know, put the bub to bed, if he goes to bed on time. Um, and then maybe have 8 hours sleep and get up at 6 o'clock on Sunday"....But they'll learn one day. I think I used to think the same things before....But I never used to say it. You know. . . . But it's just, he's been really good babe. He's just a joy to have around all day. He's such a happy little baby.

....Yes, so in that sense I'm feeling more confident in myself and I can do things again. Um, which took a little while but I'm back on track and, and also just going to work gives me a lot more confidence that I can do something else besides being a mother again. So that was a big thing.

my day off

I'm [working] on a Saturday, um, I call that daddy day. Bub and Dad have the day, full day together. Um, it's not too bad....Um, you know there's been a few funny incidents that's happened on a Saturday that I've found out about and I just shake my head. . . But that's, you know, that's a learning curve and, you know um, but, you know, some days, some Saturday's are really good. Everything's done when I get home. Other Saturdays, you know I, I come home...I've been all day at work and...It's, you know....I've got to do this, I've got to do that and it just doesn't stop. Um, I sort of, like on a Friday sometimes I try and keep ahead of myself so on a Saturday if nothing gets done well, nothing gets done and, you know. And sometimes it's not my husband's fault and sometimes they just go out all day and he gets preoccupied and, um, men don't think of those sort of things to do. So. I mean I

have, in, um, the last few weeks I've pulled him up and sort of said, hey, um, please try and do this for me. Um. But, um, yeah, it, it's been good.

I'm very exhausted on, on a Sunday 'cos I'm on my feet all day. I only get half an hour for lunch....Um, but, I, I enjoy the work so and the girls are really nice to work with so it, um, it's not a hard day in that sense.

I don't resent work, going out to work because I, I told my husband um that I was going back and he just said, "Whenever you're ready"....so it was only a few months after bub was born that I went back. But I just felt I needed that, um, time at work again....And it's sort of like my, my day out. You know, even though its work, like I, I joke with people and say well that, that's my day off....Like, any other time I really don't get time off with bub...he's always there or I can only duck out for half an hour or an hour, so I think it's just a mother thing where you just feel you just have to be there and protect him. . .

Being mum

I suppose because I'm a mother now and like I'm just a bit more protective, especially with the baby and just a bit more cautious about things. Um, you know, like an example is going shopping by myself...you know you hear stories of women getting attacked or babies getting snatched....Yeah. Um, but other than that I don't think I've really changed, like my personality or anything like that. I probably just, you know...I'm very, um, aware now of things. Um, like if we go to someone's house I'm, I've got to constantly keep an eye on the baby and see what's around and make sure he doesn't get into things and, um, so in that sense I suppose....not um concentrating on someone that's talking to me. You know, the full time. Yeah, I've got half on the baby and half on the person.... And I, I'm used to having a cold tea and cold lunch and all that purely because, um, I'm running around. So, yeah. . . like the baby's just constantly distracting you when, when you want to focus...Yeah, it gets a bit frustrating sometimes. Even like something on the television like a news break...they're like ra, ra, ra. You know.

I think I'm what I thought I would be....I'm probably like the stricter one in the relationship sort of thing and you know daddy's more the fun person because he comes home and plays games with him. And I, you know I've got to be with the baby to say no during the day or take things off him that he can't really have. So. Um, but I, I try not to be too much of a grouch with him. Like I don't want to be

so...Yes. Um, I am [confident in what I do]. Um, because I don't have a lot of, um, like parents and stuff telling, 'oh you shouldn't do this or you shouldn't do that'.... I've, I've read up on a lot of things as well so I just sort of try to put some of those into practice and also just try, um, you know, work out what he's like and how bub reacts to things.

we've formed a little baby group...and that's been really good because once a week we catch up and we talk about what everyone's up to...and so we can, not compare, but talk about, oh well, have you tried this yet or what about this, and so that's a really good support to know that you're doing things right or, um...you get the new ideas from them. Also, I see a baby nurse about once a month and get bub weighed and you know talk about any problems that I have....So, yeah, there's sort of been like a network of people really that support me and help me through.

Um, husband, fantastic.

Um, husband, fantastic. He's been a really good support. He was home for a few weeks when I had him and, um, yeah we sort of worked into a routine....We took turns in [feeding]. Um, I was usually the one, 'cos my husband's a pretty deep sleeper and so I was usually, "come on, lets wake up". I might go and make the bottle but then he'd sit up and feed him. So. But um, yeah, no in that sense he was really good. Like for the first week I really couldn't walk much so he had to get up and do a lot of things and the nurse showed him a lot of things...how to make the formula, and, bub had to be in, like the cloth nappies....because we had a few problems with him. . . So, um, I really couldn't ask for anything better...

....my husband makes sure when he comes home [from work] that he gives him, gives bub a bath and has a play time with him, and um depending on how he feels, like some nights he's just really exhausted so he doesn't...but then next morning he'll um put him in the shower. . . So. Um, yeah, [shared parenting's] been, it's, it's been okay. (Pause) I mean obviously I feel like I'm doing more of the parenting because I'm home all day. Um, but I think my husband tries to do as much as he can. And that's why I like Saturday's because my husband can understand what I go through during the week, and it's not all just fun and games....You know, you have to do things. And if you don't, well then the whole house falls apart sort of thing. Not that my husband's demanding, but he thinks because I'm home all day, well I should have the tea ready sort of thing which is fair enough. Um, some nights I

won't, but he doesn't get upset about that....I mean he grew up in that sort of family where, um, it was traditional for the mother to cook the dinner and you know have the house clean. . . It's like he expects a lot of that as well but he will get in on the weekends and you know help.

...he's realised he's got to spend more time with the family. Um...like, 'oh, um, you know, I'll go for a ride this afternoon but I'll spend Sunday with you', and, um, so it, he's been pretty good....um, in the band it was like all the other guys...they didn't have wives or um babies or anything like that so they didn't understand....and they've sort of said, um, you know, let's cool it down a bit. So, they're not out all hours like they used to be and thank goodness. I mean it certainly has changed from, 'cos we've got three of us now....like once, um, bub's gone to bed then we spend time together. Um, whether it just be sitting in front of the TV or reading in bed sort of thing....And we make Sundays like our family day and we always make sure we do something like go to the park and just spend time together. So, we both sort of try and make an effort in, you know in keeping the relationship going and so. But mind you like, we haven't been to a restaurant or been to the movies or anything like that yet, um because we don't want to leave him yet.

...probably with the mother-in-law and my mother I'd feel comfortable leaving him....the mothers, I think, because it's just the mother instinct...bub's going through a stage now where he is very clingy and if mummy or daddy aren't in the room then...he'll start to cry....Yeah, so, um, in that sense that's why we sort of haven't left him with anyone, and we don't, we don't want to be that sort of parent where we just lob him onto everyone....We feel, if, if bub can't come then you know, then we're not sort of going...

Um, like Mark, he says to me, you know, 'oh give me attention', or um 'hey, I'm here still', you know. Yeah. ...I try not to, um, devote fully on the baby but it's hard sometimes. You know...like adults know better, they, they can do their own thing but babies, you just have to be there for them all the time, so. Yeah, I think, um, yeah I was worried about myself but it's my husband more I think. I mean my husband does give me attention and, um, he sort of tries to split his time you know with both of us...

...it's just been very enjoyable having the baby and as he gets older, I've been enjoying it more and more. So, yeah, it's a totally different lifestyle and I, I like

it, so. I've just learnt that this is, this is my life now. Yeah, come to terms with it all, that, okay, this is what I have to do now. Um, this is my job, so, yeah.

Jasmine

Jasmine, at 30, had not long returned from working and travelling overseas with her husband. Her outgoing nature made our chat easy work, and as we talked it became clear that social interactions were a vital part of her life. As well as liking to keep physically fit, Jasmine spoke about her interest in emotional and spiritual well being as well as her connection with family and the wider community. A great advertisement for glowing, pregnant beauty, she was upbeat and full of joy about the baby and their future family life.

Yeah, I'm really looking forward to it [the baby]....and now that I'm showing a belly and everyone notices I'm pregnant it's really good. Like I feel, I feel great and I like to watch the belly grow, you know and I love, I just love the whole feeling. Of being pregnant.

...I find people treat me special like you know people will do things for you...like just carrying a chair. . . You know strangers sort of ask you when you're due, and "ah, congratulations, good luck with the baby" and you sort of think, 'oh thanks' you know. Um, yeah...you get lots of attention (laughter)....And my husband, he also I notice like is a bit more attentive....and that's a nice feeling - he's sort of appreciating me on a different level now....It's like, 'you're doing such a great job growing that baby', and I'm going, 'well I'm just living', like I'm not really doing much just you know, something's in there growing. I don't feel like I'm doing anything extra. Just eating as healthily as I can...Um, I'm making a bit of an effort to make sure I exercise a bit more. Well I'm doing the special pregnancy exercise class...to make sure I didn't do the wrong exercises. . . everyone recommended swimming, so...I do that once or twice a week and, and then, um, try to get out walking. Yeah, making sure I do, 'cos I, now I'm thinking it's not just for me, it's for the baby as well. So, yeah, and eating...trying to, yeah, do the healthy fruit and veg thing a bit more. ...like if I, you know, have a lot of sugary fatty stuff or whatever, um. . . you sort of feel, I, I at least get the guilts about yeah that was a bit selfish 'cos it's not just my body any more? You know, I'm sharing this body?...which is, ah, it's good in a way because it makes you think well, I should really treat my body like that no matter what. Whether there's another being in there or not.

It's all part of the circle of life

...I've been wanting, been feeling the feminine urge to reproduce since I was about 23, so, and that actually really came on strong...when we were first together.

Which isn't a surprise, really, meeting the person that you just think, yes, you know, this is the one. And I would like to have a family with this person....and I think it's one of the most important things you can ever do in life, um. And I think it's also um really important for why we're actually on the planet and I'm a great believer in well, it's just so natural. It's part of why we're here really. We're just like animals...

. . . you know, if I had met a man who didn't want kids, well it would never have worked. That was definitely something that I think also leads you into finding a partnership and being able to commit to something like a marriage, is your strong underlying belief in family and sharing love and your life with a family group.I had a great family and you know...seeing the love between my Mum and Dad and their strong marriage and their, yeah...the whole experience of having a great loving family has made me want that as well.

I'm not that religious but....It's a spiritual sort of thing to believe...It's, it's all part of the circle of life and, yeah. And that feels great. I feel already more connected, I think, to other mothers and other people in a sense that well I'm, I've now joined this other circle. And I, I'm producing life and it's growing in me and, and yeah, you know, it's just an amazing feeling.

I don't think I'd feel fulfilled in life if I couldn't have a baby, um, and that's, you know, that's a pretty intense sort of thing because...you know there are lots of women, lots of couples who can't...I feel so sad for them. And I feel so lucky that this has happened and that, you know, I mean, let's, you know hope that everything goes well...for me it would be devastating if...if something happened to the child....So I just feel blessed....I have a lot of love to give...I think well, you know, my kids are going to be very much loved probably from both of us, just smothered in love but that's what they need. And, um, yeah it's just having a little baby I think also, just emotional fulfilment, it's spiritual, it's physical fulfilment, it's everything. I, I know it's not going to be easy. You know, like I know that...there'll be tough times and frustrations but, yeah, I'm very positive about being a Mum.

I feel confident that I will be a good Mum

...you don't know what a child's going to be like, you know....their character, and their sleeping pattern, everything. So you can't really plan things according to textbooks. Just because every kid's going to be so different. And, um. You can just have the basic ideas about what you think motherhood will be like or

what, how you think you'll raise your kids, but, yeah. Um, I think you've got to be flexible. Definitely. And go with the flow. Yeah.

Like I believe if you have a positive approach then it's a good way to um go into something new. Um, without too many worries and concerns....I don't want to be a really anxious Mum. ...Um, I sort of want to become a calm mother. I'm reading a book right now its called "Buddhism for Mothers" ...it's really good. Like I'm not a Buddhist but I just...that's helping me to sort of see how motherhood is something that, yeah, you've got to stay positive about....you know, they all talk about sleep deprivation, that's one concern I have. Um, 'cos I love my sleep....they were suggesting to look at it like, this is something that's a journey. And, yes you might miss out on a lot more sleep...and yes, you might get frustrated and tired and whatever but you've got to look at it sort of like a spiritual path, motherhood, and just take it as it comes and....that baby's teaching you things about yourself, about the mother-child connection, about life in general...and you've got to just try to be as calm as you can and accept that they're not going to stay screaming or crying babies forever and it's just part of the process. Yeah....That's how I want to approach it.

...I mean it is a huge thing. Um, and there are times where it feels slightly overwhelming like, wow, this is going to be like the biggest change in my life sort of thing. Um, and you, but the thing is you can't have any idea exactly how massive that change is going to be, like you know, you start to think, 'oh well, it's, it's everything in my life'. Responsibility is one thing that's, you know, that, that really hits home. You realize I'm, I'm going to be responsible for this little being. And that can be slightly daunting in, in that you want to do a good job. You want to look after it well. Will you know how to look after it? Even simple little things like....what to dress them in. And what would be too hot and too cold....you think...you'll know at the time but then when you stop and go, well you never had to do that before and this little being is so delicate and fragile that, yeah, it is slightly scary to think well, you're in charge and things can go wrong with them and you've got to try to respond and hope that you have the instincts to let you know if something's really wrong with them....yeah...it's a huge thing and, yeah....You just want a healthy, happy kid really in the end, don't you?

And another sort of scary thing of course...too is the actual birth. And yeah, I can't say, oh yeah, I'm all, bring it on. I'm pretending to be...like I'm trying to think. Okay, no, take it positively 'cos I've also heard women that are anxious about birth

also end up having more problems....Harder, longer births and more complicatedSo I'm just trying to, yeah, relax my mind on that one...my attitude is, well if all those other women out there in the world can do it, then I can do it. You know. And it's, it's rare, for things to go wrong. I mean, yes, it can happen, but more times than not, things don't go wrong. It's very natural, women, if it wasn't natural and something that was meant to happen we wouldn't have the population we do and we wouldn't go, have gone this way for so many years with women giving birth. And then you think about the ones who, in different cultures, don't have the hospitals you know, and don't have all the help you've got....really there's nothing to fret about So, yeah, I'm trying to keep positive on the whole birth thing, (laugh). I know the pain, it's the pain factor, yeah. But I'd definitely prefer a natural birth, you know, with pain, and experience what that's like. Um, rather than a caesarean...

Yeah. But also one little concern I have thought about, is being at home just with a baby and not a lot of adult contact that's definitely something 'cos I, even when I'm at home I don't get called for work I do get lonely during the day so I know I'm going to have to find myself a play group and...try to meet other Mums.... So, but...you should probably just enjoy that time...that special time with you and the baby at home. I'm looking forward to it. Um, I, I was even saying to my husband ...you know, if we have two kids, which is what we plan, um, like my Mum, like she had six years off with me and my brother, so I, I kind of liked that idea. I don't like the idea of putting them into day care a lot. Um, like, I like the idea of the...social aspect for the child but, yeah, not too much in the first few years of life. I think it's good to be with the Mum.

...being a Mum has a lot of sort of social, ah, perceptions. You know, the perfect Mum, and what that means, and what's expected of you as a Mum and I think it'd be easy to let yourself worry too much...am I bringing my kids up the right way...are they safe? and I don't want to, you know, be too over protective and, yeah, I just sort of, I feel like, you know, I have the basic instincts. . . Um, that I feel confident that I will be a good Mum. I don't, I don't worry, um, you know, am I going to be a good Mum? I sort of feel inside that I was meant to be a Mum.... because too I'm a teacher I think that helps because you learn a lot about kids and their responses and discipline. . . I just feel that if you believe in yourself, that you're a good person, you know, you have strong values...then you will be able to show your kids and teach them. . . Like he, we lived with people who had children

and...we saw a lot of parenting that we really didn't quite agree with. You know, some mums say some pretty you know, pretty terrible sort of situations where you think, oh no.. . . Geoff doesn't have the confidence that he'll know exactly what to say whereas I just think, ah, it's not a problem. You just, you go with your heart. So. Yeah, I'm, I'm not worried at all. Like, I think if I was really rich financially...I probably would want to have a lot [of kids], you know. But...you can ask me when the first one's like seven months (laugh). I might have changed my mind.

....I think it will all come a lot more naturally to him [Geoff] once, once it happens....Like, I think, you know, they've just got to believe in themselves and I think there'll be no problem....Um, and...I think it's just important that you talk a lot as a couple and he'll do that and...I think it's good to always support each other with the issue of kids....I don't think it'd work if you just had total different mind sets about they way you're bringing them up. So, yeah, just lots of talk.

You just do, do what you can.

I've been reading a little bit, um, a couple of books on you know, motherhood and babies and they do have some good suggestions and they do sort of warn you which is great. You do need to be warned. Uh, I think I would probably just go with some of those suggestions and see what works for me and, um, with sleep, you talk to other mothers who, yeah, have had a lot of problems with it who they say it's amazing what you can get through anyway even without the sleep, you still survive, and you still, you get through it even if you walk around like a zombie. ...you just do, do what you can. You've got to try to grab your naps when they baby does sleep of course.....I'd look to my partner for support and um even if that meant sort of when he got home from work or something, looked after the baby while I had a quick nap or weekends. I definitely um have learnt from my friend's experience who said that even on weekends her husband wasn't sort of offering to get up with the babyUm, but yeah, I guess it's not always assumed by the partner....You've really got to tell your partner what you need and yeah, I, I think I'd be, there'd be no holding back....And I think exercise. They all recommend to keep you sane and healthy. . . I, I'm really into the idea of going for walks with the baby in the pram. I see a lot of Mums, yeah, out there and not, not let it stop you um doing things like, you know, even going up to the shops or whatever to get something. I think if I get too confined inside that mentally that won't help me either. So if I'm tired, cranky, confined, yeah, I, I won't be happy I'll have to try to force myself to, yeah, get outside with the baby.

...That's another thing the books say too. Try to get help and, yeah.. . . especially when you first get back from hospital. Um, my husband's going to have a week off and then, you know, we'll just get used to the adjusting thing. The whole new world, together. Um, then if I need, find I still need help from, my Mum would be the first to call, and then his Mum, and, yeah....if it was, you know, a really, if it was an emergency and Geoff...could probably manage to come home because he's just ten minutes up the road which is great. But if he couldn't, um, I don't know.. . . I've thought about that too, how am I going to exercise and swim? Sure you can take your baby swimming, but if I want to do my laps, you know. So I, I'd use the crèche. . . Even just an hour of that time to yourself, no baby, that might be really all you need in a day....There's help groups too, I think you can call if you're getting emotional.

...[my friends] already have given me lots of advice and tips...but that's the thing, you find out, well you can hear all this advice but you'll just pick out the bits that you like the sound of and, you know, find your own way in the end. But, yeah, I've got friends I can call on....That's one thing that I thought...oh it'd be nice for us to move to our home town to be closer to our parents....For more of a support network. 'Cos I like seeing friends and stuff you know on a daily sort of basis. . . we've only lived here about a year so we haven't made any strong friendships.... Yeah. Definitely, friends and family. Good support.

Everything will start revolving around this little being

...Um, well already [our couple relationship] it's been really beautiful. Like, I think once the baby's there, yeah, everything is definitely going to change a bit in that, you know, all of a sudden we, we are parents, we're having to deal with it and we're having to take turns at looking after it and our time that we're used to having to ourselves, or as a couple, it's all going to be dedicated on this one little being and everything will start revolving around this little being. So that'll be interesting to see, um, I think he'll be pretty good with it because he'll be the one who's not at home all day so, um, getting home from work I think he'll be pretty excited to see the baby....And, um, you know, then on weekends we'll be able to do the little family things together which will be nice. Already we've got off to a great start in that we wanted this baby, and we planned for it and you know it's all happened. . . Um, some of the most beautiful moments...that we've ever felt together is when like I'll be just sitting there or lying there and the baby will kick and he'll put his hand on my belly

and we'll sit there together feeling it move, just look at each other in just amazement or wonder and think, wow, we made something in there, and it's just, you can't describe that feeling. You know, as a couple it's just the most unique thing you can do and the most intense bond you can have together. So I think, yeah, it's, I think we're going to really enjoy parenthood and I'm not, you know, I'm not trying to kid myself that there won't be hard times but you know I think we're going to be great. ...Um, one little, I guess you always find a little bit of concern that you might get too, um, focused on the child and then not have your couple time. Which is one thing we've said. We've got to make sure that we make time for each other as well. And some people say, "Oh well, you just can't....you say that, but the baby just sucks up all your time". But I don't know, I'm a bit sceptical there I think well, surely even if you get your parents to baby sit maybe once a month or something or whatever, at least then you'd make sure you have some of that alone couple time. I think it's important. Yeah. And I guess to be frank....a lot of people say to you, "Oh yeah, that's it, sex life out the window". ...So that's a slight a concern where you think, 'ah, well, that'd be awful', you know....You think, how can that be possible? That you wouldn't, you know, that it wouldn't be something that you make sure you find time to do,...so, um, I'm determined that yes we'll, we definitely have to find some intimacy time....Yeah. And if the baby disagrees...well we'll have to do the babysitting thing and go off to a hotel or something....Like if he got home from work, and didn't even kiss me hello or say how was your day but went straight to the baby, well then I'd be, 'hello, I'm here too'. I'd definitely say, you know, 'Let's share this attention around, but um I'm going to make a conscious effort to always, yeah, ask him how his day was, or ask him how he feels about things, um. ...You have to make sure you actually put in an effort with each other.

Yeah. Um, I mean I think everyone needs a bit of self time. Uh, and I definitely think my husband would support me on that. . . Whether it's reading or going for a swim or a walk or something. Um, even if I just got a little bit of that self time on the weekends or whatever. ...like the times where he'd get home from workand he's already said you know that he'll do the bath...And, um, and that's a bit of self time even then when they give the bath and you're in, I like cooking so. . . might give me that...little break. ...I think also it wouldn't feel like self time if the baby was screaming and crying 'cos you're still not getting that break away from not just the sight, but the sound....But, yeah....Like I said, I more get lonely, like I'm a

real people person. So if I have a day at home...my highlight of my day might be going grocery shopping and talking to the cashier...

...when we weren't pregnant we still would make the effort to go visit our friends who had babies....that gives you an idea of, yeah, what it might be like for you. And...we didn't quite realise what a mission it was just to get two children out of the house, into the car. All the things they needed just to go up to a shop, two shops, and back home. It was this huge mission, you know...it's like, wow....You can see why people don't sort of travel as much ...just because getting out to the shops is that big a deal. ...Yeah, I'm hoping that it doesn't you know stop any friendships or anything. I think if people are important to you in your life it doesn't matter if they've got kids or not. You know. You put in the attention and effort...

We both love travel and we'd like to see as much of the world as we can so, yeah, that's, that's one main thing that we know, we're starting to get the nesting instinct and...always thought one day we'd like to have a home in Australia....Um, but we never put that into a direct goal...'cos there's always been that well, can we juggle both, you know, financially, owing a home and travelling? So, yeah, the question of kids does come into it, yeah, 'cos a lot of people tell you....how they limit you. But it's all about your attitude. . . It's possible. When you go travelling you see people with kids and the little backpacks....you know I'm pretty impressed when I see that....They just, just keep going, do what you want to do and, yeah.

...because it's our first are we are really like open because we have no idea really what to expect....You might feel like you want to be around your family you know, um, to give them some time to see their little grandchild too...I think it would be a bit sad to take off with a new born baby...well, ours would probably kill us, you know (laugh).....we're very close with our families so we probably feel that was a bit selfish, to sort of rush away and not give them some time. But they'd understand like they know how much we want to travel....That's the only little thing that would stop us more from, from going with kids too much, is you want them to be involved.

I'm now becoming someone I wasn't.

....I've had a few pretty powerful dreams. And most of the dreams, the powerful concepts in it were change, um, massive change coming....my mind is like preparing itself even in sleep for this big change. And there's lots of symbolic little things in the dreams that, um, yeah....for example there was, there was a fast flowing

river...and I got carried downstream and I wasn't being hurt but I ended up at cliffs and a bay....somehow I got out of the river on to some rocks and just stood there and there were these two whales and there's a bit of a connection there like I'm always saying, 'Oh, I'll be a beached whale,' you know...these two whales playing in the bay and it was just wow! It was one of those moments, it was so real and the whales were coming up and, you know blowing out the spout and slapping their tails on the water...And, um, that's sort of how I feel about the whole thing too is just wow! Yeah, about motherhood and you know the ability to reproduce and just everything.

...Sometimes they're scary but that's also because change is a scary thing. ...for example one dream...there were poisonous snakes in it. Um, and having to dodge these snakes and they were close and um just really scary stuff ...I talked to my Dad about it later...about how snakes um represent the unconscious and something coming through and that's to do with change too and, and like you know it's not necessarily a negative thing....I know that, you know, these dreams are basically all just part of me, um, coming to the realisation that I'm entering a new phase of being and my whole mindset has got to adjust...with the, the big change. Um, I'm now joining, you know, the ranks of other mothers. I'm now becoming someone I wasn't. And that's forever. And so...yeah, your conscious/unconscious is going through massive overhaul just about who you are and what you are and, yeah. Becoming someone else and extending your, your personality and, yeah. It's interesting.

Poppy was 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ months old when I met up with Jasmine at her home. I was again struck by her warmth and openness as we chatted over morning tea. While Poppy played and 'talked' at our feet, Jasmine spoke happily about her new role and appeared to be extremely assured and contented in her mothering. Her introspective nature and positive outlook meant that she had been able to identify and act upon issues that were causing her distress. Still planning to live and work overseas, Jasmine was excited to tell me she was pregnant again.

It's all that I could have expected and more, really

Yep. Yeah, love it [being a mother}. Um. Yeah, actually, I'm pregnant again (laughs)....Motherhood's amazing, it's great....you know, when you're pregnant you think, 'Oh yeah, it's going to be great' and, but you just still don't quite have any idea just how incredible the incredible things are...for me I feel really lucky because I think my positive view of motherhood its um, mainly, well a lot of it's positive because she's been so wonderful....sleeps really well and who's not really grizzly all

day, who hasn't had any those sort of big problems. . . um, 'cos sleep does totally affect your life....I mean I did have to get up once in the night to feed her, um, when she was a newborn and...now she sleeps...about 12 hours straight. She's been doing that for months. So. Really, yeah, I think that helps me get in a positive frame of mind and...it's amazing, just being a mum. It's all that I could have expected and more, really. Yeah....sometimes there's moments of frustration but, if every little tiny sort of frustration there's a hundredfold positive moments, you know.

Just the love. You know, just that, little, they're little bundles of love and um when you look at them and they you know, they look up at you and smile at you just melts your heart and it's just there's nothing like that feeling and you know it's just, it's really fulfilling, yeah, emotionally fulfilling, yeah, it's like, it's beautiful for my husband and I like just to look at her and watch her grow and just say, "Wow, we made this little thing"....you can't imagine them crawling, walking, talking, all that sort of thing....But yeah, and then when you see it, it blows you away, even though you see other babies do it...it still blows you away....Yeah, so, ah, it's just, yeah it's incredible.

I think they're just amazing little miracles....like I'm really interested in psychology and um being able to first-hand watch every step of human consciousness and awareness developing...just their minds opening up like a flower, you know, just absorbing more and more and more every day, and...figuring out what's going on and, you know, it's, yeah. You never get bored – I never get bored anyway. I guess the only moments I've had where I've felt slightly like, um you know, close to bored, is just when I've had weeks where I haven't seen many people... 'Cos yeah, I am a social person...About 2 times a week, I need some adult interaction....I see my husband at the end of the day and that's fine but it's a big day, it's a long day without seeing other people, and also for, well it is, it's intellectual stimulation too, you know. You do, you get, your brain gets a little bit on the baby side of things and you're talking to them all day and you're in baby mode so, it doesn't challenge your thinking and you do need to, yeah, talk to other people, even reading, um.... 'cos I decided that's something I can do to help intellectually to keep my brain going....but yeah finding the time to do it.

I've made lots of friends. I'm the organiser of the mum's group....It was just a hospital group....You wait 'til the baby [is] six weeks, and you meet once a week and talk about the newborns and that was brilliant....You got to ask all the questions

you needed to ask, you got to hear from other mums about their experiences....There were about 15 at the start and then it went down to about 10 or so um regulars so it's nice. There's usually about 6 of us there and yeah, that's been fantastic. We've had a barbecue where all the dads met as well. . . We're going to have another barbecue again, 'cos we want to keep the dads involved because sometimes they can get a bit left out and yeah. Even though they don't, it's not like us mums – they talk about sports and you know, that's fine...whereas us mums we're always discussing the babies....We try to talk about other things as well but it always goes back to babies...are they at similar stages, and someone might have a good tip about something so yeah. I would die without that, I really would. I'd probably go a bit crazy, because yeah, you do, you need it, and I think other cultures (laugh at baby) um that have...bigger family networks...even tribes you know where other women, they'd all pass the babies around and help out, and yeah. I think that's important...

it's worth it having a baby

I've made, made it a priority to go walking and I went back to gym, um, I've been going to yoga once a week. That's really helped as well because that's actually my very special me time where I actually get...completely away, where Geoff...gets in the door, I quickly say "Hi, bye"....It wouldn't have been as easy if he wasn't so helpful and supportive....um, yeah, and I feel so good when I just have that one night a week. I am, I'm going to have another night a week as well....so I think I'll be starting to swim laps. That's always good when you're pregnant....But yeah, we're really excited about number two. We were a bit surprised that we got pregnant again so quickly, like...we discussed it and we didn't mind having two kids pretty close in age...it was only yeah, a couple of months, (laughs) once I stopped breast-feeding...

I had a really nice flat belly before I was pregnant, and...when I was pregnant, I loved, you know, the big round belly and I always knew it might be hard to get that flat belly back, um, but yeah, that's something you have to sort of realise well, you're going to have to put a bit of effort in to get it back and I still haven't got that back, and now I'm pregnant again....physically, yeah, it was nice actually, breast-feeding...because when you've got small boobs to actually like have boobs that fill up a little bit it was quite nice and um, I enjoyed that change. But yeah, the weight gain, over breast-feeding...Like I was still eating good fruit and veg, but I was also just, my snacks were a lot more frequent because I was feeding every two hours....so I worked really hard to get that down again, and I just got it back to

normal, then I got pregnant again. But that's fine. I mean...I might not ever get my same body shape back but, I can work at it, and if you really care about how you look and being healthy and fit, then you will, you'll put in the effort....because I mean, when you look at your baby, you think...even if my body shape does change, it's worth it having a baby, you know, all the good things you get. So, it's not that big a trade, really.

it's really important to jump into the role of motherhood

I feel like I'm still me and I haven't changed that much, but on the other hand, I've become a mother and that's a huge change. Yeah, I've always felt I've had it in me to be a mother, but now it's working and it's coming to light and ah you really do have to change a bit because you're learning all the time how to be a mother, so yeah it's a big change in your lifestyle, in your thinking...Yeah, but you, you know, your base personality, you still feel the same....I think I'd be more cranky and irritable and frustrated if I wasn't getting all that great sleep...so, I still feel like me, I still feel quite normal. And yeah, I feel like I've grown and learning more about myself and my reactions and responses to my child....I always felt I was patient, but this teaches you a different kind of patience, so, you know, um, to deal with everyday, things that can get a bit mundane or monotonous, such as, like...I thought when she started eating solids, I sort of thought it would be more fun and "oh cool, you know, she's eating, and wow, she's finding all these new tastes and this is interesting". But it hasn't been quite as positive as what I thought...she's sort of, "oh OK, I'll eat if you really want me to" but she sometimes kicks up a stink and you've prepared this really nice sort of meal for her...I cook her fresh stuff and I put in a bit of effort and I freeze it into the cubes and everything. Um, but yeah....I sort of, the whole 3 times a day, at least, sometimes more, of going through that ritual, having to clean up a massive mess and a messy baby after every time, that was getting like a little bit monotonous to me and it's like 'ohh' but you can't, I sort of stopped and thought, 'if I just, you know, remember, it's not going to last forever'.....Um, I've decided too, sometimes I can be slow at house chores...because I'm a bit of a perfectionist....So I'm finding...well, if I've missed a speck or something, too bad....if I just go quicker then I have more time for myself and I can get more done....That's something I've sort of learnt lately about myself and my approach, so, yeah. I know she'll continue to teach me stuff, you know, forever....I think that's a

really beautiful thing, that you're on a learning path for the rest of your life with this little being. They're learning and you're learning.

...But I'm really enjoying being at home, and yeah, not worrying about money, um, me earning money. It's work, it's just unpaid work. So, yeah, I'm not missing teaching at all. Um, not really. Sometimes, I'll see classes and teachers but um...and I'll think, 'ah yeah, that's a nice feeling' if they're all sort of listening. I was thinking last night actually um, when you're at home a lot yeah and you're in this new situation as a mother and not getting the social element from career and everything, um, you do sort of become aware, it's good for self-analysis and reflection... 'cos when you're doing chores, of course, mentally you're not stimulated so you think a lot about things, so. Um, yeah, it's made me become quite aware of balance, of finding balance in my life...you know, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, occupational, relationships, physical, all those....so yeah the balance, I think, is the key to being a happy mum....It's important for everyone...but particularly when your whole situation like changes. . . um, I think now with the new baby coming I won't even mind like even if I have to quit, you know...yeah, it'd be hard at first I think to let go of my teaching position which has always sat there waiting for me....but I've just sort of thought, 'look, having kids is probably the most important thing you'll do in your life'....but yeah....it's a job that you can always go back to, so I'm really happy about career-wise how that works with being a mother....some women I think would feel very, yeah, put out that their career's sort of come to an end and they might not be able to get back in very easily because of kids...you know.

...it has it has made me stop and realise...how important it is just to stop and look at your children...and really getting to know your child and what they need and want, and...even though they can't talk, listening to them...You, know, babies can tell you so much just by a look or a sound, or whatever they've learned to do, like she blows raspberries when she's not happy about something....I think it'd be a shame if you had a child and you didn't stop and take the time....and not really connect with them, and you wouldn't really be learning about what life is about with them and what this whole change in life's about and how important they are and how important family is....Um, yeah, it's really important to jump into the role of motherhood as much as you can, you know....It's amazing, I find I can spend hours just gazing at her and talking with her and playing, and now she's old enough to play games, I crawl around the house on my hands and knees all the time and play hide

and seek and peekaboo and like, you've got to get down on their level, I reckon, and enjoy it, for all that it is, because they're not going to be like this for very long. And it feels primitive too, in a way. I feel the most like an animal I've ever felt, you know...going through that whole thing with the birth and labour of just leaving dignity at the door, basically, to breast-feeding, to yeah getting down and rolling around the floor with them. Yeah. And it feels so right, it feels like it's all part of nature...that's the way that it's meant to be.

I know there's a lot of pressure in society to be a good mother. There is. I'm pretty open, I say it like it is, yeah. And you know, even to my mum, like you know, I might have a little whinge to her....and she won't mind, but she'll just remind me just quickly at the end you know, "Ah yeah, but it's all worth it," and I'll go, "Yeah, of course it is." For example, Poppy went through a big frustration stage...so she'd whinge a lot all day at me and look at me like it was my fault or something...and that was a bit frustrating so I mean, I yeah I don't feel like you shouldn't complain. I have friends too, who we all realise the importance of talking about how you feel...and you always remember ah, you know, that's just a little frustration. But if you don't talk about it, it'll get bottled up inside, and that's not going to help you.

Do I look at the world differently? Aah, I think yes, in some ways, because I'm feeling like I have different aspects of my personality coming out...and now I feel more connected to other people with kids, and other mothers and...I notice parents a lot more....I guess I'm always watching to see you know, if what's happening with my baby is happening with theirs, or watching their behaviours to see what might come at different ages...things I don't like, seeing parents hitting kids in shops and things, yelling at them, happy children, sad children, just, yeah. I guess I do look at the world a little bit differently. And I feel really proud, I feel really proud when the world responds differently to me because I have a child. In some ways, um, I mean, I love it, I really do love it, that people want to talk to her and give her attention....And it's like ah, you feel like they're not just smiling at her, they're smiling at both of us, you know. So that's nice, but I have to admit, a couple of times I've felt like, 'oh, what am I? Chopped liver?' because you know the way people are just more interested in your baby...and they won't really listen sometimes to what you're saying....even your family....They just are so enamoured with her and transfixed by her...you can't blame people for that. If they did it all the time, well you might go hey, look I'm a person here too....at the start, Geoff would come

home a couple of times and go and kiss her first, and I'd go, "Hey", you know. . . "Look, can you please kiss me first?" I don't know what it was, it was my little thing I had, where no matter what, I wanted him to give her attention, love, and everything but I wanted to be remembered first....and um, then she gets her kiss, and I feel better then....I don't know if that's being silly or what, but I guess...every human wants attention. And I'm a big attention freak, really....So she and I compete a bit, but we don't get jealous of each other really, like. We just want love, we just both like giving and sharing the love, you know.

a family thing, too

Um, we haven't had a lot of [couple-time]...Um, because our parents aren't right here, um, it's been yeah, a bit tough....also 'cos you don't really want to be away from your baby much....it took a bit to...even just leave her with the parents for an hour, like we went for a walk....Um. And then we've only had 2 nights out together without her in 8 months, so, but that's something, you know, at least it's not um zero nights. Yeah...one was a date last weekend actually...Um, that was beautiful....But, ah, it is important and yeah we're going to try, you know, every now and then, get one of the lots of parents to let us get out for a date....And I feel more that they know her well now, her routine, that I can trust them with her....But, they're very helpful, they're very keen to babysit (laughs). They'd be fighting about who gets to babysit if we let them....like yeah, people, some of the girls whose parents are here and they talk about how, oh yeah, their parents watch them, mind them all the time for them, like sometimes I get some twangs of jealousy...but really, I'm lucky to have them even in the same country, you know, some people don't. . .

Um, intimacy, like, you do, you do realise how hard it can be and what people mean when they say 'sex goes out the window' because you actually do have to put in quite an effort to put some time aside for intimacy....I find I have to prioritise ok, at least one day a week I'm going to save some energy for him and yeah, make sure I don't burn myself out. Because I do a lot with her. I take her out walking. I take her swimming, I make sure I get out of the house a lot with her...and – I do the groceries with her by myself. Like I cart all the groceries up the 3 flights of stairs by myself, you know. Like, I do, I get a bit worn out, so. I find in the week, if I get to Thursday...and if I haven't had that time...with him...it makes me get a bit cranky and irritable and you've just got to remember what you need to help make you happy, yeah, and for him too, he has needs and um yeah. So we have been

putting in an effort, but we've still got to like think about it, make it a priority, yeah....You can't just spontaneously, you know, all the time um, just say "OK", you know, "let's go into the bedroom" sort of thing....but that's OK if it's not as spontaneous any more... 'cos we've got friends who've said, "We just, we don't have time together any more at all," and I just didn't want to go down that path....And. . . I'm sick of eating dinners watching television, because that's another time where I can have him all to myself and...we talk and catch up on our days and you know, um, just so tempting when you're tired and you want to eat, just to watch the telly...

...we've been a bit more adventurous – like we took her on a crocodile tour....And I was a bit nervous about that, actually, I had these visions of, 'oh, what if the boat sank and a croc was chasing us and I had to swim with her to the shore', and like, as a mum, you start to think, you're just so protective, you just want them to be safe....but people do crazier things you know, than that, with kids, like cycling and skiing with them in backpacks and all sorts of stuff so, yeah. Um, I always thought well, we won't let kids stop us having fun and travelling and having adventures, so it was good, it was good for us to take her...Um, to show ourselves that, yeah, yeah. And that, yes, it's slightly harder sometimes, but it's manageable. And another thing is we're thinking of going to Canada. We've made that a goal for a couple of years' time, because the new baby's coming. So yeah...we thought OK, it's a challenge to save with babies, but we think if we're careful and do a strict budget, we'll probably get there in a couple of years....The grandparents aren't really taking it very well, of course. His mum cried, and looked at Poppy cuddling her and crying 'cos she just couldn't imagine us taking her away from her...and I know that will be my hardest thing is, yeah, the grandparents not seeing her as much, because it's a beautiful thing when you see them together, it, they're so happy....You feel guilty in a way, but then you've got to live your life for you. . .

I guess it's all about finding balance with your partner

Oh yeah, there's a bit of working out to do, of your roles, and the timing of everything, and what would best suit the baby, um, but we've sorted it out now.... Geoff's been really good. At the start we had a small problem on grocery day...we were getting too frazzled, we were trying to take her, and do it together....she'd cry a bit and people would look at us....we wouldn't let her cry the whole time, but it, it just sort of got to the point where then we'd get home and groceries had to be put away, the dinner had to be prepared, she had to get her bath and bed and...um, we

just decided 'right, that doesn't work' and it's better if yeah, I go by myself...once she got old enough to sort of um be interested herself in everything around her, that made it easier for me, and it was good to get her out....so, yeah, even though I still have to keep her entertained and bring some toys and give her a biscuit to eat...um, it works out better now, but yeah....it is a bit of a mission, but yeah you do get used to it. That's, just, it becomes life.

We were sort of having problems because I sort of had to ask Geoff and say, "Well, look, there's this many things to be done. You've got to help do this and this." And I guess sometimes yeah it does get to the point where you kind of wish your partner would just look and see and actually offer to help...because he'd be drawn to the TV or something and I'd be, "Hello?" you know....he will help when he's asked and you know, won't complain too much...So we've had a few things like that....But no, we've got our routines down pretty well now....I think with the new baby too coming, he's going to have to do it more. . . 'cos I um, I sort of take on the whole household as my job, because he works hard, and, you know, he comes home he needs a break or I've managed to get a little break here or there say in the day, um...but I can imagine with a new baby and a little one 15 months old, he's going to have to wash up probably every night and not get to do his music as much. I think he might struggle a little bit with that, but in general I think he'll be good and realise 'yeah, it's needed'. The more kids you have, the less time you get to yourself. So yeah. There's a lot to do. And he plays sport, too...he has 3 afternoons a week after work....But yeah, he's good, like if I ever need help cleaning on the weekends or something or if we've got visitors coming....he helps out. Yeah, which is great. I think some men probably wouldn't even do that, you know, and would expect the woman to do everything....I always you know, make sure I let him know "I'm going to do this, this and this and this, so could you just do this one thing?" Um, to make sure he knows I am doing a lot, so your one thing, you know, would be helpful.

I was watching this TV show actually the other day and they were saying that someone researched women at home looking after kids, running the house, and they actually said the effort and time and energy that you put into that being at home doing that stuff is equivalent of 2 fulltime jobs (laughs). And I'm thinking, "Yeah, actually, that does sound right." But um, I guess it's all about finding balance with your partner...trying to go, "OK, well, if I've had an easier day"...swimming or something and, um, you know, obviously not a grocery day...then I'll feel like, okay

he's probably put a lot more energy in today than me so I'll do a bit more....Um, but definitely, it's a fulltime job, and it is work, just a different kind of work, you know. And it's not, I wouldn't say it's easy, being a mum, but I wouldn't say it's terribly difficult. Ah, it's just, yeah, a certain type of patience that you need, and I know he would probably have a lot harder time...if he was at home with her all day. He tells me, "I wouldn't have the patience"....Um, I can imagine if you had a lot of kids it'd be a whole lot more effort and energy and time and mess. Um, so really, with one, I feel like she's pretty easy. Um, yeah, but yeah, it tires you out...you could easily stay at home all day and conserve energy...but I think it's important to get them outside and socialise them with the world in general. She gets at least 5 people talking to her any time we go out, you know people just love her. And she loves it ...you know, she really brightens people's days up....it's worth the effort, I think.

that love you feel for your child will get you through anything

Breast-feeding was a lot harder than I thought, um, and I know that's a common thing....But yeah, that was a bit disappointing for me....What happened was, um, I ended up having...an emergency caesarean. That was a bit disappointing too, because I did want to have a natural birth. Um, and you just learn, things just, you can't plan it, you know, it's all unpredictable. You go with the flow, and I knew that if I had to have a caesar, fine.... Um, but it was just, yeah, failure to progress, they call it...hours and hours and hours [it] still wasn't happening as quickly as they like it so it gets to a point where they say, "Right, do a caesarean," so um, and you know, at that stage it was like "Yep, just want to meet this baby. Go ahead". So, um, then it took 5 days for my milk to come in, so that was quite a challenge in hospital....they all say 'couple of days' your milk comes in and you latch them on. But yeah....we were getting a bit of colostrum out but by then, by hand, but then um we had to top her up with formula because they were a bit worried she needed some sustenance so that was disappointing too because then...she got used to the formula and it was just pouring into her mouth easily and then she didn't want to learn....and she, we had all these different midwives roughly shoving her on....And it wasn't a pleasant experience. . . One lady managed it after 20 minutes of her protesting...and it was like 'OK, cool, so she can do it. It's just she just wants to protest'. 'Cos you just, that's something that you've got to win with. If you can be patient and um just keep at it for a bit at the start, um yeah...it's fantastic breast feeding, you know. I always wanted to breast feed, and I knew that that milk was best (didn't I, yes).

Yeah, and um, finally I learned to do it myself...and I went home that day that I worked it out...you think, something that is natural for their survival you wouldn't think a baby would put up such a fuss. And in the end I won. Like I told her, "I'm going to win this battle"...because it's for your own good....but then we had a problem with her weight, because she'd get really drunk on the milk and fall asleep, and so she wouldn't drink much....So I just let her sleep, 'cos I thought 'Well, I guess she needs her sleep'. And...they were a bit worried, so I took her to a paediatrician, um.

...that's another thing that bugged me. 'Cos I met about 12 midwives, all different opinions....and you know, that's tough when you don't know what you're doing. So one lady had said to me..."Wake her up at 3...or 2 in the morning, to feed her, cos she's too skinny", and you know, she wasn't on the chart, the proper normal weight thing. And so I took that advice and that was silly, 'cos that trained her to wake up in the night, and really...You want them to learn to sleep through. So the paediatrician....he said, "It's fine. If they have a huge sleep they might wake up hungrier and then they might drink more." So yeah, you learn as you go, so I'll know a lot more for the next baby....And in the end she um...she went through a growth spurt and was really hungry...and that was something too, that was hard because I didn't know – I thought there was still milk there 'cos there seemed to be....yeah, the doc again, said "Just top her up a bit with formula. See if she wants some", 'cos I didn't want to have to go to formula but if it meant to keep my baby happy, then fine....then the breast-feeding slowly faded out....At first you feel like, 'aw this is better milk than that milk, you know, you should want this milk", but yeah, when they're ready, you know, they let you know, they pull off, they don't want it. So 7 months. I was pretty proud 'cos I was going to try for a year...so that was good enough for me.

So yeah....yeah, we haven't really had any problems. Oh one little problem with her breathing – she had a little problem there with reflux and milk coming up and then she stopped, kinda stopped breathing and had troubles one day – that freaked me out. She didn't stop for very long, but it was enough to make me to go, "Oh no, am I going to have to resuscitate or something?" and yeah. They call it the laryngeal malacia where supporting structures of the larynx aren't matured enough yet...so that was one little health thing that I had to deal with, and...you know it did worry me because it wouldn't, she'd be upset 'cos she was having problems

breathing and she'd look at me like "Help me mummy" and I couldn't do anything. Yeah, so...it seems to have gone....They say it can last a month, it can last a year, you just don't know....I don't like her being on medicine, so I just experimented with stopping the medicine. If it came back, I'd start it up again....Yeah.

Yeah I do [feel confident]. Um, you just have to believe that your instincts will kick in when they're needed to kick in....Um, yeah, I mean, you read books as well...You're not going to know everything anyway; you're always going to have to learn things. I'm lucky because she hasn't been sick yet...there was just one time when she um, got a bit of a temperature, and that did make me a bit panicky, ...actually, it was our kind of fault, because we dressed her too hotly after a warm bath and um, and yeah, she'd start screaming and then we realised "oh she's hot".... and um, can imagine with sick babies, like yeah, it would be a bit distressing and you just hope that you stay calm and patient...Um, but yeah, you've just gotta think, you deal with it as you go. My husband I think is a lot more confident now 'cos yeah, he's realised "OK, we can do this" and he's seen that it's not that hard, all you've got to do is love them, give them attention, feed them, clean them, you know...that's easy enough. He's fantastic with her, I mean, he loves her to bits, so I think he just didn't realise that that love you feel for your child will get you through anything like, you know, if you care about them, you'll look after them properly, yeah.

Jenny

At 23, Jenny was my youngest participant and was still working in the personal grooming industry at the time of our interview. Relaxed, happy, friendly and fun-loving, Jenny seemed to be comfortable with herself, laughing and chatting easily throughout the interview. To save money, she and her partner were living in a small, but comfortable, granny flat under her parents' home. Her parents appeared to be supportive of the unplanned pregnancy.

Finding out just knowing

I found out on a Monday night. On the Saturday night before I did go to the pub, and I just wrote myself off, for no reason at all, I don't even drink, I just sat here with one of my mates.... And I just did it. Something must have been saying I can't do it ever again. And I smoked before, and the day that I found out, all through work, I just craved cigarettes. For some unknown reason I just couldn't have enough. And then found out that night. But yes. It was a shock. I had no idea I was pregnant. We were joking about it, because my tummy got all bloated. I drank too much bourbon and coke...and we were walking around going oooh, yeah, I'm pregnant, crack up, ha-ha. Two days later, bob's-your-uncle, I was (laugh)....Must be something in your head, says, you know, this isn't right, maybe you shouldn't.

Not how I thought

I wasn't well for the first good couple of months. Um, it's okay now, but yeah, I haven't enjoyed it at the moment, I'm starting to now, but before I wasn't. Everyone gives you the, well everyone that I've spoken to, gives you the impression that it's going to be, you know, a lot easier than what I thought it was....so yeah, it was just, everything I sort of always thought it would be, like cruisy sort of basically, it wasn't that, I got real sick, so (laugh). ...you hear about it and you think oh yeah, it won't happen to me, but when it does you're, oh my goodness. ...well, my doctor knew that I was getting sick, but he just sort of patted me on the back and said well, this is what happens (laugh). Mm. You try and tell people that you're okay. I know at work, it's easy just to say, "Oh yeah, I'm right", when you're not at all. It's very hard. I've always been that sort of a person, if I'm sick I won't let anyone, like everybody know...And I took a lot of that on when I was sick, I never told Pete, and then it sort of all built up, and he couldn't understand it then. So. . . You think oh yeah, no problems, but you don't realise how snappy you can get (laugh). Um 'cos it

does, it gets, he can't fix it, and...I tried so hard to fix everything and, yeah, it does, it plays on you and it does cause a lot of problems, but, oh, you get through it.

Ready..... or not?

Um. I had [a hormone] implant and I was on and off the pill, trying to find all different ways of using birth control....And I think it was only about two months...and we sort of said well if it happens, it happens. We've been together that long now, if it come to it, it wouldn't worry us. So, it wasn't a shock, but it was, you know (laugh)...

It's scary, 'cos, well when I first found out I was pregnant, I cried for about probably, oh a good couple of hours. I thought oh, I'm not ready to be my mum. My mum's my mum and I don't want to be a mum and all that sort of stuff, but I mean you get, you get used to the idea....I wasn't ready. To start off with I think it was just the responsibility of, you know, you're going to bring this child into your life and you're going to be there for it forever. And you just, I don't know, I sort of doubted myself...that I couldn't do as good a job as what Mum could do. Yeah, it was hard. But I mean I'm getting used to it now, like thank god you've got nine or ten months to work it out (laugh). But um, like, I've always wanted to be a mum, I've always couldn't wait, sort of set your whole life out, you're going to do this and do that, so I've always wanted to be, but then when it actually happens, you're like, oh my goodness, it's here, so yeah.. . . At the moment it's still pretty surreal. It's gonna happen, but it's just, you think, like sometimes I still even forget that I'm even pregnant. I wake up and go, oh that's right, you know?

So, but yeah your whole body changes, emotionally and physically, the emotion part I wasn't ready for, mentally it was a ...a big thing. Oh, one part, I was so selfish, I've never been a selfish person, but I did feel very selfish. I was like, oh this has taken everything away from me, my time sort of thing, and I wasn't going out, I was staying here 'cos I was so sick, yeah. So, I did, I really, at one stage I just thought I can't do it, why am I doing it? But, then when you get better, it's all worth it (laugh). You start enjoying it a bit better. Mm. I'm stoked now, I can't wait, yep. Really looking forward to it. (laugh). Well everything in the nursery and stuff is ready. I don't know, mentally I'm probably more ready now, 'cos I've stopped being so sick and I've sort of stopped thinking about me. We've started our antenatal classes so it's all sort of, reality's here, it's coming.

Being mum and being there

My mum, she's just been, she's like one of my idols, I can just sit there going I don't know how you put up with half the stuff you put up with, and keep us all together, basically. So. . . She's got a lot of patience (laugh), a lot more than what I probably have. I don't know, she's just always there, she's not pushy, yes, like she doesn't interfere. Mum sort of well, leaves it to you and then if something happens she's always there for you....you hear of other people's families that just don't, don't have what we've got, and you think well...I wonder if I'm going to turn out like those other families.

I suppose every mother is really a good mother in most ways, it's just some of the things they do....But I mean you see some, like, X, she's just shocking. She'll palm her kid off to everyone else but herself, and won't take that responsibility of being a good mum and being there for it, you know. She's got another little baby now, so the other one's too hard, that sort of a thing. And that, to me, is not being a good mother, at all. So, there's always fears, you know, be a good mum. Whereas some of them just don't care, what they do, where they are, all that sort of stuff, what they eat....Like even I know that's not right....just their behaviour, really, in front of their child.... You go and do some of the stuff that I've seen some people pull off, and there's no wonder their kids turn out like that, so, I think having my mum like she is, has sort of rubbed off on me, like, and so I've learned from her. And I'll sort of try and pass it on. That way. So, fingers crossed. Not everyone's perfect.

When I found out, I thought, oh my god, I drank. Probably didn't hurt it, because I probably didn't drink that much, but....Like, I was, yes, I did, I felt guilty. . . And I just, that's when I went, I'm going to be a bad mother, look what I've just done, and it's not even here yet. But, I mean I got over it. Pete sat there going, its okay darling, it's all right, you know...And I think that whole, me going to the pub and me smoking that many cigarettes really, just a big mind job....Ever since then I've quit, and haven't touched a sip of alcohol, so yes. So, yeah, no I did, I felt terrible.

I've seen other family members, um, the whole time they were pregnant. Just really abusive to their bodies. And fair enough they've always turned out having really great super-duper kids, but...I don't want that for my baby....well I won't do it. I'm not going to let it happen.

Growing up and becoming a family

We moved home twelve months ago to pay all our bills off. We did that, and set out what we've wanted to achieve, so I'm stoked, yes....whereas when I first fell pregnant we were scared . . . So, I feel prepared. Very. More prepared now than I ever have ever been. And sort of looking more to the future instead of going, oh no we're going backwards. No I feel real good. Really can't wait.

Looking forward to having us. I'll always have Mum and Dad, and have my family, and we're really close, so that will probably never change, but yes, we'll have our own little family to look after.... (laugh). It played a big thing with Pete, he's like, this is our child, we want to have our life, still be here [with Jenny's parents], but we don't want them to interfere, and that's where Mum's being great, she's sort of like, well back off and wait until you come and ask me. Yes, no I can't wait to now, like at this point, get it home. Just want it to all happen now, so find out what it is...and start that sort of, that new life. That's what I'm really looking forward to.

I've always been very home, family and home orientated. Like this is more important than friends. He was more, oh my mates first, and then home....And now he's actually turned. One of my mates...she's found she's had to do the whole lot herself. But I've been lucky in the fact that Pete's always said, "Don't worry I'll never do it". And you don't have babies to have one person bring it up....Oh fair enough, he's going to have to work, which is totally understandable, but he'll be there whenever I need him. And he'll be able to take it, take it off my hands if I have to, yep. He's good like that, he's even good now. When I wake up in the middle of the night he tries to, you know, can I get you anything, instead of me getting out of bed. So it should be all right, I think we've got it under control (laugh).

It's actually made our relationship ten times better....We've been together five years, six years, and he is just a totally different person. He can't wait. He's always said he didn't want kids, because of his upbringing, hasn't had the best family background like I have, he was scared. . . he's just totally changed. I mean he still has his moments, you know, but every man does...He's just so looking forward to it now, it's unbelievable...he's more excited than me, the whole time....Loves it now. I didn't think I'd ever get him there.

It'll be shared parenting. Yep, very shared. Very, very. Like he's already doing all the cooking and stuff like that....I mean he's two years younger than me, so mentally it was a big, big thing for him...but he's gotten around it and knows that he's got to do it....but yes, he's grown up, sort of just responsibility-wise, a lot in the last seven months or so. It's amazing. It's just like something in his head's turned on....So. We just can't wait. Pete just wants to take it everywhere. Oh he's got so many plans for it already and it's not here. Only picked out boys' names. 'Cos its only going to be a boy....Yeah, it's good fun.

Concerns

Feeling scared about the birth. Don't want to go there. Only just the last couple of weeks thought about it, and really thought about, you know, it's gonna happen, so yes. Oh it scares you, but I mean, you look at Mum, she had real easy pregnancies, real easy births and so did Pete's side of the family, so you sort of half think well hopefully it'll happen to me, then you get the odd person that says, "Oooh, I was in labour for four or five days," and you're like aaagh!. So, you just don't know. It plays on you. I'm looking forward to it, I can't wait, but I know it's not going to be an easy ride.

I know it's going to be hard to hold, because I want to try and breastfeed, so I know that's going to play a big role in the first couple of weeks, months or whatever. Um, I think Pete's more scared of it than me, he's scared that it's going to roll over, mind you they can't, but he, I think he's more worried about it coming home than I am, because I know that everything's going to be okay because I've got Mum and Dad so close. For the last probably couple of weeks have become really selfish with my sleep. I am normally the person that can, you know, put my head on the pillow and sleep right through till the alarm goes off, not even stir. And lately I've been getting up to go to the toilet and just haven't been able to get comfortable and all that sort of stuff, so I sort of get a big cranky, because I can't sleep, you know sort of blame the baby, but it's not its fault. But um, oh, I know it's coming and I know to expect it sort of thing, so in a way yes, you sort of think, oh I'm not going to get my sleep, but make the most of it now. But I know when I'm tired, I've got to go to bed...If I need [sleep], I'll have it. Hopefully, I don't know, you could have one of those babies that sleep all the time, and sleeps right through. Like me. I did. You know, play everything by ear. You just never know. My biggest fear is not knowing what's wrong. Like if it's crying, what it's crying for. It's the only real

concern I've got, but everyone tells you that you'll work it out, so, yes. No, that's it, that's all I'm worried about.

Others' knowledge

I've got a one mothers' book thing that I sort of flick through, but I don't want to work myself up....I won't sit there and study a book. No. It's like my best mate's so involved in the whole thing, it's sick (laugh). Like, it's good, but she's gone over the top and I can't stand it, really, I, I know these things are gonna happen, there's nothing any book can tell you, you know, everyone's going to be different. But if something happens and I don't understand it, well I'll go to the book. . . Friends and family have been better than books. Mhm. And even then, you never know, like it's not, what works for them might not work for you, so yes. But no, I don't like books that much (laugh).

I've got two (friends) that have just had babies and another one that's pregnant. Then a lot of the girls at work have just had babies as well (laugh) so, yes there's lots of people I can ask information about. A lot of the time it's like...what's going on with me, what does this mean, you know what do you do if, and they...say look, you know, you'll work it out, or this is what I did, it might not work for you, but try it. Yes, so...I can ring them up and say look, what's going on.

Life won't change

It hasn't changed us too much. First couple of months, stopped me from doing a lot of things, I didn't go anywhere, just didn't want to leave home. But now, can't keep me in, do it now while I can...but yes, no it hasn't affected me socially because a lot of my friends have got little babies, or they're pregnant, like my best mate is....And plus, I like being at home, more than anything. Doesn't worry me. Have friends come over here, or go there. Saves money (laugh).

To a certain degree it's not going to be easy, like at the moment we've just been packing up and going to the coast, it's a last minute decision. I know that when the baby gets here it's not going to be as easy to do that. We'll still do it, if we want to...but there's an extra person to pack up and there's that extra, you know, bit of money that you've got to make sure you have, before...But um...I honestly don't think it's going to change us a great deal, because we're so ready for it. I've got that much family support and friend support, it's not going to really, really upset me too much, or Pete really.

I love fishing, camping all that sort of stuff, and that's nothing they can't do. I was doing it when I was in Mum's tummy and then in one of those harness things. . . But yeah, and other than that, Pete would be here. I'd still be able to go and do that sort of stuff, but it hasn't affected us at all really. I mean it's not here yet, but (laugh) yes, I'm sure, like you just, you adapt to it all. Yes, if we want to do something, it's going to be able to come with us...we're not going to sit down and go, oh no, the baby's ruling our life, the baby's crying you've got to go home and all that sort of stuff. We've always just said no, we're not going to do that...

Career vs family?

Um.... Well, we're sort of playing everything by ear at the moment. I'm still at work full time, so keep going as far as I can, because I feel so good now....But then I'll stop, I'll finish for a good couple of months and just see how the baby is, really, and see if I can get Mum and Dad or Nana and Pop to look after it while I go back part-time. Um, my partner doesn't want me to go back to work, he reckons we can do it without it. We both agreed not to put our baby into day-care, we just don't want to do that just yet, not until it's about twelve months. But um, so yes, no, my life will probably go on hold, but that's all right, I need a break anyway (laugh). And plus it will always be there, and if my boss ever needs me...I can just go in and take the baby, she reckons. I don't know, we'll see (laugh). And I don't think I could do it, just not work...I've never had more than two or three weeks off work since I left school, so, um yeah, I won't complain about a couple of months off, but yes, I'm sure I'll still have bits and pieces there to do, for sure (laugh).

When I caught up with Jenny again, her son was nearly 9 months old. Brady entertained himself at our feet as we chatted, and Jenny seemed very relaxed and at ease with her life as a mother. She spoke almost apologetically about how easy she found motherhood, and said she was not keen to go back to paid work because she was enjoying life at home so much. Living underneath her parents meant that she had received daily help with Brady. Interestingly, after the tape was off she mentioned that Pete had once commented about her having 'the life of Riley' and that this view had been echoed by tradesmen that were doing renovations. Her response had been he should try it full-time himself.

I love it. . .

It's been easy. Very easy. I don't know what I was worried about at all. Um, the birth was really easy. I actually enjoyed it. It didn't hurt as much as what

everybody sort of said it would and I had no problems. I got induced, but that didn't worry me... . Six hours. I had no drugs, no stitches, no nothing. So. I walked back to the room and I go, I want to go home now (laugh). I'm over it. Um, yeah, no, it's, he's been really good. Doesn't cry much so I don't have to worry about that but, knows when sleep time is and um, no, as for, Pete's been great. He's been fantastic – even better now than what he was before. He comes home every night. I love it. It's good. Um, yeah, I don't know what I was worried about.

Brady, he's, oh, I don't know, he's pretty easy to look after. Like, he can amuse himself, only sort of every now and again he gets a bit sooky but that's alright because you get to give him cuddles and stuff, so. He's slept real well, ever since day dot....I mean every now and again you get the odd night or two. . .

It's very good. I love it. Wouldn't change it for the world....I try not to say, boast that you've got a good kid but I do. And I know I do. He's very easy, very easy. I probably wouldn't be enjoying it if he wasn't like that, but then I probably wouldn't know any different. But I mean, everyone's quick to tell you all the bad stuff too. Or, they're this, they're that, you know, and I can't say anything like that about Brady....the good times outweigh the bad times. So. Yeah, no, fits in with us. Has done since he was a baby....If we want to go somewhere we'll go. Just makes it a bit harder, and takes you a lot longer but yeah. Yeah, I allow for it.... I was expecting most of it so yeah, no, nothing's really changed. I've been blessed with a great child....

Oh, having my parent's upstairs' made it heaps easier. Lots....like every morning he'll spend a bit of time with my Dad, and my sister's just moved home ...and yeah, he goes up there and plays up there and I can come down and put my washing on and have a shower and all sorts of stuff so. . . Even if it's just something like quickly just running to the shop or something they'll be like, 'oh just leave him here', or, and if Pete and I want to go out somewhere they're the first ones to say just leave him here, he's alright. And Mum will just put him to bed and once he's in bed he stays asleep then so, um, no, that's good. We can still go out and have our time as well.

...I think it gets under Pete's skin a bit with them being so close and Pete's parents being out of town. What can he do? We're living here and get over it, basically....they don't come down here and tell me what to do and how to do it. I'm

the one that sort of goes and says well, what should I do?. . . No, I was a bit worried but, you know, Dad sort of said, you know, when it comes to smacking him on the hand, do you want me not to, or, and I'm no, no, no. If he deserves it, go for it. So, it's not just me that's going to be the one that smacks him and stuff like that. But, no, they're pretty good. He gets away with murder with them, though....I won't put him in day care. Nope. I don't need to...I've got so many people that want to look after him. Um, Pete's Mum comes up every Monday, and looks after him while I go to work and that's good for her because she can see him for a whole day and it gets her out of the house. So I don't see the point in working to pay a day care, really. And if it comes to it later on then yeah, well I'll think about it but at the moment, no way.

Yep. I love it. You couldn't get me to go back to work. I've gone back one day a week and that's enough. Yeah. Sort of time out for me more than anything ...by the time, like the end of the day comes I'm ready to come home. I miss him more than probably his father misses him but I don't know, that's probably just natural.

He's [Brady] more important than anything else....like, I used to be at work at half past seven in the morning and not come home until whenever I had to but now, nup I'm not doing that. It's him first. So. But that's probably the biggest thing [change]. Yeah. Everything's well, everything does pretty much revolve around him. And I don't mind. It's going to be like that. I'd rather it be like that. So, you know, work comes second now. And I mean we're doing a whole lot better now than what we were before....I think you prioritise.... And as for having him and how people say it's going to be you know really expensive and, it's not, if you know what you're doing and work it out right....I sort of was worried about money and stuff before I had him but I don't know why. It's not that bad. Probably later on it'll get worse but you just budget for that now and put it away so you know you've got it. He hasn't been a sick baby either, so I probably haven't had doctor's bills and all that sort of stuff that some people do have....

I'm happy at the moment. One day I probably will [go back to work] butI won't go back full time, ever....Brady's more important than work and we can manage. ...you know, if we were struggling and stuff we'd probably think about it, and with me going back that extra day does help. But, at the moment we're quite happy. Just saving up to buy a house, you know, so puts a dent in things a bit, but you don't miss out. . . When we want to do something, we do it.

better than what I thought it would be

[Brady's] definitely brought us closer. Oh yeah, everyone has their moments but we haven't had a fight yet so I can't tell you when we do. No, it's pretty good. Yeah. It's probably, probably, it's a lot, a lot better now than what it ever has been. ...How could you not love someone like him (baby)?

Pete feeds him dinner, he has a shower with Pete every night, Pete changes him, he does everything....and so when he does say, 'well can I go to a mate's place?' I'm like, 'well go for it'. . . I've put him to bed only purely because he thinks Pete's play time. It's like, oh Daddy, let's play. But I mean I don't, I don't mind doing that. It's time I get to spend with him, really. Yeah. So and, I get up through the night, like Pete could, but he sort of says, you know, I'll get him, and I'll nope, I'll do it. It's okay, 'cause he's gotta work and all that sort of stuff so, it doesn't worry me. Only when it comes to food....Pete's more worried that he's going to choke on it. But I don't sort of give it to him and walk off. ...and that's probably why he can eat what he eats now....That's the only, probably big thing, that Pete and I have ever, sort of worried about....Pete's gotta learn to not laugh at him. Sort of, he's got to be more firmer. . . I think it's just a pure novelty think at the moment, but, I mean if he's gotta be firm on him he will. He'll say, no and do all that sort of stuff but half the time he thinks it's a joke. Yeah, nope, no worries in that, that part of it. Pretty good, actually. A lot better than what I thought it would be.

...I was a bit worried. I thought, maybe he's gonna want to have, to just have his time but he loves coming home and spending time with him. Some days you want to just say, "Okay, well I'm going for a couple of hours", Pete'll find an excuse but you know, I think that's just men. 'Oh no I've just got to do this', but it doesn't worry me. I don't let it get under my skin.....sometimes just going to get groceries, or just doing the shopping and the banking and the everyday things it's heaps quicker to just go without Brady. ...Not that it worries me taking him but sometimes you just think, 'God, I could just go and be back in that short amount of time and it won't hurt him to look after him for 5 minutes'....Only every now and again – when I first had him I got a bit, you know, I've got him ALL the time. But Pete was here all the time as well, but Brady was with me. Sometimes it's like from 5:30 to 6 o'clock he gets a bit clingy, that's mummy time. So I've sort of got to distract him and give him to Pete while I run off and have a shower and stuff. But it's part of being a baby anyway and he won't always be a baby so I probably don't let it worry me.

...[I did breastfeed initially] but I expressed and he had the bottle if I didn't so I didn't really have a problem in leaving him. Yeah, no, that's probably one of the good reasons why I've always given him a bottle as well so I wouldn't have to worry about it...one of my friends just breastfed and expressed and it was hell for her....But, yeah, nup, I've never had, had to worry about leaving him but sometimes I wish I could just go. But then I'm only gone for ten minutes and I'll be like, 'oh I hope he's okay, I wonder what he's...you know.

Being mum

(Laugh) I'd be one of the most least cautious people you'd meet. Yeah, I'm pretty relaxed about being a mum. Yep, yep. He's gonna hurt himself and he's going to do all that sort of stuff. Put stuff in his mouth that he's probably not supposed to, but, what are you going to do? Be at his side every five seconds? I think that's probably why he's so happy. Because I just let him do it. He knows what he's not allowed to do and what he is allowed to do but, so yeah, no. That's the hardest thing, is, to not laugh. 'Cos some of it's really quite funny, he sort of screws his face up and does this big smile and you're, 'No'. . . . My sister's the worst but, she comes and picks him up. 'Oh, he doesn't understand, he's only a baby', and I'm like, no, he knows exactly what he's doing.

He's going to have to learn that he can't do it and I'm not going to sort of sook over him. And it probably comes across to some people like I don't care but there's a difference between Brady and say, one of my girlfriend's kids. Like, this kid doesn't like noise. He's just a real sook, and a wuss and being mothered and sooked over. Like Brady...he's been roughed up since he was a baby...I love it, 'cos I don't have a sooky little baby but, I know a couple of my girlfriends will go "uh uh" when he's going to fall, because he's walking around everything, and, I know he's going to fall over, but he'll land on his bum. It doesn't worry me.

...I don't want him to go to day care around other little babies 'cos they'll pick up on it. They'll know that if they sook they'll get picked up....You see, whereas with me half the time we're like, yeah you're right, whatever....That probably sounds really bad but, I don't know, it works for me. ...Like every baby cries, I know and every baby gets sooky, I know, and Brady has his days. I'm not saying that he doesn't but most of the time he's happy being by himself and

playing....Yeah, no, I think he'll be stronger for it, in the long run. It didn't hurt me when I was a baby, so.

If I want to do something, I'll do it.

I haven't had any worries at all. ...like everyone will say something and some things I'll take in and some things I'll be like, yeah, whatever. 'Cos one of my other girlfriends is quick to tell you what she does and you know, what you shouldn't do, and sort of puts it in her words that I'm sort of doing something wrong. But, that's just her. . . She can say what she wants. Anyone can say what they want. But I just don't let it worry me. He's happy so, that's all I care about.

Yeah, at work they criticise....He's never been a wrap up baby. He hates blankets and hates all that sort of stuff....And everyone's, 'oh you should be wrapping him up, I'll show you how to do it'. And I'm like, he doesn't like it, he will scream....But, yeah, they're quick to tell you what to do and what not to do but they were always the, sort of the older generation. And, yeah...I'd be like, whatever. You can say it but I'm just not going to listen, I don't care. And they'd do it, they'd wrap him up and he'd scream.So, yeah, no, a lot of people sort of had their say as to how I was bringing him up....I'm like, he's fine, he likes it, he wants it, I don't care. You've had your kids, this one's mine.

...I don't know, another girlfriend's, like, oh she's great. I think she's a bit over the top, sort of....one of those ones you know who is against baby food in the tins and the bottles and all that sort of stuff. But most of it's pretty good and I'll check it all out and all that sort of stuff because I'm not going to feed him shit and he has potato and pumpkin and all the good stuff...she's one like, 'well I mash up all my own fruit and do all that sort of stuff and I do the potatoes'....you just wonder if it's her playing up how good a mother she is. But...like I really don't care, it's her life. If she wants to do that, that's okay. No worries. Go for it.

Mmm, they [child health] tell you what to do and all that sort of stuff and I didn't really listen. ...Yeah, no, I've always, his last feed's always been a bottle and so I don't know. ...someone told me that that's what they were doing and I tried it and it worked and I use it. But, yeah, you know some of them say, 'don't feed them until they're five months', but he was well and truly ready before five months....he's a good healthy little boy so. I think he's more content...you just go by, you can tell. I don't know what it is but you know when he's hungry, you know when he's thirsty,

you know just. I don't know, you know(laugh)....And he sort of, he knows to come and get his bottle....books can't tell you that sort of stuff. They can, but how much you take in is up to you, really. But, and, letting him have that bottle from day dot lets me be able to have sort of a bit more of a life....He's slept longer and works for me. . .

...one of my girlfriend's that was just breast-feeding, she was too scared to do the whole bottle thing....What's the worst that could happen? . . . And now, [her baby's] a totally different child. But he, Brady, he hasn't stopped since he was a baby....Just go, go, go, go, go. . . He's been crawling since...he was what, nearly seven months....he obviously needs it 'cause he's burning it, so. Nope. Most books don't tell you that. So. I don't know.. . . It hasn't hurt me. It hasn't hurt Brady. So, I just don't let anything worry me....If I want to do something, I'll do it.

I'll do whatever I've got to do around him

Nearly all of my friends have babies. Um, we've started swimming on the Thursday.....that's sort of our, really, just an excuse for us to all get together every week. The lesson's are nearly over but we booked 'em for a new one already (laughing). 'Oh, you should come back next season', no, no, we're going to keep going'. There's only really three of us that really sort of stayed close friends. I've got all my other friends....I still catch up with them and if I want to go and see them I'll just go and Brady comes or he stays home....and well my friends aren't the sort of friends that we have to live in each other's pockets every week.....But every now and again we'll have a barbie or something like that. I don't know, my week days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months before you know it. Like this week, I don't even know where it's gone but it does seem to go a lot quicker. But you don't mind. Well sometimes I feel like, 'God, I just want to get out of this house'. But it doesn't worry me. And I'll go. I just go. (laugh) I'll go and see a friend, or, with being back at work it's made it a bit better. And swimming on a Thursday. So that's sort of broken the whole week up. And then Pete's home all weekend, so we try and do something over the weekends to get out and, just the three of us....Yeah, it goes pretty quick.

Sometimes [Brady] gets a bit sooky and you've got to spend more time and it probably annoys you a bit...but it's not all the time. And I've made a point of not picking him up all the time and just letting him play. . . So, yeah. And I'll do my

washing, and I'll do whatever I've got to do around him. I'll put the clothes in the clothes basket and he'll take them out and yeah, just help me....The washing up I'll do at night time so. Because that's a bit hard to start and stop and start and stop. But it doesn't worry me.

...I just hope that everything's going to turn out right but I think that's every mother's sort of fear, or hope, or whatever it is. I don't know....Yeah, he's going to go down the right paths. . . And nine times out of ten it's not your fault. It's kids from school, or something like that....So, you can only hope, you, you don't know. ...I've stopped letting anything worry me. If it happens, it happens. Just don't worry about it any more.

now he's here you don't know what you did beforehand

...yeah, I'm happy with Brady. He's a good kid. So, I'm just worried if I go back for another one he won't be as good. But...two's enough. I don't think I'd ever have any more than two. Yeah, no, I enjoy it. ...I can't complain, and I've got a good father to help. I've just got good support everywhere....And if [Pete] probably wasn't so good I probably wouldn't be thinking about it, but, but as it, at the moment I don't want another one. Um, I don't want to leave it too far apart either, but we sort of want to get a house and stuff though because it's too hard here at the moment to have another one. Yeah, 'cause there's not enough room. But it wouldn't worry me, and I enjoy it. You know, one day in the future. ...Maybe? (laughter).

...I love him and my time in the afternoons and stuff because he, you can see when he wants to have quiet time and all that sort of stuff. . . . So you sort of grab his dummy and we'll just sit here watching T.V. and he'll go to sleep. So, I don't know, that's probably the best bit. And now he's getting a bit older and he gives you cuddles, but he only gives me cuddles, he won't give anyone else cuddles. So, that's pretty cool. Mmm, yeah. Couldn't have it any other way. It's sort of now he's here you don't know what you did beforehand. ...Yeah, you never realise...how much you could love someone like I do Brady, anyway. Pete's the same way. ...he said "Oh I thought I loved you but not as much as I love him", so. And that's totally understandable 'cos it goes both ways. .It's like, he's [Brady] going to love me forever, no matter what. You know, it's a big thing in our family to be a family so it's going to be like that whether anyone likes it or not it's just going to always be like that. So it's good.

Liza

Liza was 33 when I interviewed her at her charming timber home. Chatting briefly about the renovation and their future plans, gave me the impression that Liza has a strong creative side as well as being a person with definite ideas on how she liked things. Liza's illness through the 1st and 2nd trimesters had left her feeling less than joyous during the pregnancy and had disrupted her plans about continuing her child care work closer to the birth. It had only been recently that she had felt up to getting things ready for the nursery and had started to look forward to the baby.

When I was um, 32 I met my husband to be, and here we are together, married and having our first child and I just, I knew that that was something that I wanted to do after I got married, um yeah, so (laugh) here I am now.

Not a good beginning

Um, I fell pregnant at around seven months. I had been on the pill a long time and we both agreed once we were married just to stop, to give my body a break, and then probably into my fourth, fifth month I had these expectations that I thought I'd be pregnant, only because you speak to friends. So I kind, I've had that in the back of my mind which is sometimes probably a worse thing 'cause...you know....are we pregnant this month? No, and then I thought gosh, well where do you draw the line of when you start (worrying?). Then at my seventh month I was still working, and I was loving it.. . . then I got bronchitis, and I got really sick ...I was on antibiotics and then I had to go back to the doctor and . . . for some reason, I don't know why . . . maybe it was a female hormonal thing, I did a home pregnancy test, at home. . . suddenly my issue of being really sick went over to, oh I think I might be pregnant. And I was. And I was like in shock. So. . . I remember going out to the car and telling my husband, and he's all excited, and like I burst into tears, 'cause I thought oh, this is just, I'm feeling awful. I found out I was pregnant, and I thought, oh...I feel like crap (laugh). So it wasn't....(laugh) a nice start.

I thought it was supposed to be some other thing

I went into hospital, because I'd just been vomiting...non stop. I was in for a few days, on the drip solidly, and that kind of gave me a bit of a boost. And then I started getting worried because I wasn't eating properly, and you know having these ideas of when you're pregnant that you're going to be eating all the right things...and then it was like, but I can't keep anything down so what am I going to do?

And I remember my husband bought me the book, “What to expect when you’re expecting” ...well I haven’t read it, right up until now. Because I just haven’t, couldn’t be bothered. I read the first page, you know about the morning sickness, and it was like, oh they’re not telling me things, about the bad things, they’re only telling you little funny things and I don’t know, I just didn’t want to read all the good stuff. All that nice, positive, vibey stuff, and it was like, well I’m not feeling like that, and to the point like I wasn’t even, I wasn’t even up to reading...When you see or hear of people who are pregnant and they’re walking around and they’re glowing and everything, you don’t hear the people who are really sick.. . . When you say morning sickness to me, well I don’t think it’s morning sickness, it’s an all day thing.

I was angry...I was disappointed. I had this big let-down because I thought it was supposed to be some other thing...you know seeing other mothers and being in that industry where you’re seeing children all the time and you know, I was just thinking oh gosh, I can’t wait for that experience, I want to be one of those people.

not the way that I had planned it

Before I was pregnant I thought, oh I’ll have two children really close together, but after the experience that I’ve had, I’m just not quite sure...I’m just dealing with this. I used to think that I’d like to have a large family, but I think two at the moment.

I was home for about eight weeks and work was wondering why I wasn’t coming back. . . I felt well, I’ve got to be honest with them because, I was feeling guilty. . . And then um, and then that’s when I made my decision, I had to resign....which was emotional in itself, because that’s just not the way that I had planned it. Because I thought, oh this job would be perfect because...I was job sharing until the time that I would have to leave...And the worst thing is, because I was still around eight weeks, I told Mum and Dad, but you couldn’t tell other people . . . And that was fretting me too, that everyone else was worried and it was like, oh god...I’m so sick, because I had my all day sickness. So it was kind of, very difficult.

My husband, you know he leaves at five in the morning and doesn’t come home until seven at night. I’d be in bed, in tears, and he came in one night and he said “what’s the matter?”, and I said, “I’m sick of this”. And he said, “well get over

it, I was in hospital for three months back in 19XX with meningitis and I nearly died". And I said, "but you don't understand, this is different, this is supposed to be a good thing and it's a bad thing".

I had sympathy from all my girlfriends and things like that. Probably some of the older age group. Mum would ring and say, oh such-and-such said try this, or such-and-such said try this. It's like all these people telling you all these different things....it's all in a caring manner, but sometimes when you're not feeling that caring and positive, it's like oh right, okay. ...[it] was just driving me crazy because....I'm just sick of people telling me what to do. I didn't want to speak to people and they might ring me to congratulate me, and it's like oh thanks, but you know, I didn't care.

I have a girlfriend here who was very sick for her two children, and um she would give me a few ideas that I would try, and I actually have a girlfriend who's due in April...and she was very sick for about five months, and we're very close, so she and I...we'd ring each other in tears, or we'd ring each other depressed, or have you tried this, or, you know...which was good...because my husband, I couldn't confide in him....and I couldn't confide in my mother...whereas my girlfriend and I, we . . . that's been a really positive thing...

Yes, I'm looking forward to it now...it's just that it's been a late reaction. Um I still get a little bit hesitant, a bit nervy, which is, I suppose is understandable. I've started organising my cot, and my father's making a big change, like a big table, so he's getting involved....you know in the last four months it has been a bit bitter...and Mum's starting to buy things and you know that sort of thing, so that's, that's a nice, comforting thing for me. I can enjoy that as well, and probably enjoy being a little bit spoilt now.

I've got to do this for the baby

I can manage with all my nausea and my indigestion and my constipation (laugh), you know those sorts of things. But, see I don't like to tell people that, because they think oh you poor thing, and it's like, no I'm all right. I'm not vomiting, I've got no reason to be depressed any more, and I, then I'm mentally thinking too, I've got to do this for the baby. And then I think maybe the baby realises . . . you know sometimes if you're feeling down, . . . I thought, I don't want my baby to feel like I don't want it. It's just not me that I'm dealing with, it's my

baby and my husband. I have to be more responsible now...you know. And I can't be feeling sorry for myself. And I have to keep thinking, and sometimes I think, I look at my tummy or my belly button sticking out, I think, that's a baby! But I have to, you know? (laughter)

I'm going to be like everybody else as a first time mother

I actually had a friend; she said, "Oh, you'll be right, because you've worked in the industry before". And my comment was, well no, not really, because for a start I haven't worked with babies. I worked with babies once and I didn't really enjoy it, because I was frustrated, I'm more of a three-to-five year old, communicate, that sort of thing....It's all going to be new to me. You know, I'm just going to be dealing with it, like every day....I'm going to be like everybody else as a first time mother. I've never been a Mum before, so it's going to be different for me, it's going to be new, and everyone has their own ways and things like that, and I'm going to be happy to ask for help, or happy to ring my girlfriends, who are in the same situation as me...instead of thinking I should know this, because I don't. No....Just because I've been in that industry. . . It's different there, it's not your own, you're not being their mother.

Being prepared for the unknown

I plan to be organised, as much as I can. Because I heard a story the other week where this lady had a baby seven and a half weeks early....and I thought, oh. . . . if it happens I'm going to be prepared, as much as I can. Mm. Maybe because I wasn't planned, wasn't prepared for what happened to me in the last four months, that I'm thinking right well now, if something happens, I'm going to be, you can never be fully prepared, for the baby. . . I just have this thing that I just want to be nested...and, although I know once the baby comes it's not, I don't have that expectation, but I think, well, beforehand I would like to think that I could have everything all set up, so when I do come home it might help me flow through a little bit, I don't know. I mean...I've got friends who've just had babies, and no sleep and all that, so I'm aware of that, I know that can't be organised. . .

Yeah. Because we're both coming into it with no idea, you know, no idea whatsoever. And that's a good thing. It's an exciting thing. Like you know, it is exciting. It's going to be challenging and, and I also think that no-one's alone. Every first time mother, as much as maybe they think they can be prepared ...are not.

What do you prepare for? Yeah, what do you prepare for? You can prepare the nappies, you can prepare the beds, you can prepare all the nice little things that go around it, but once you bring that baby home you have no idea...I must admit, I, at the moment I'm only, like I'm reading the book but it's not to do with a lot of...after. It's up until now and dealing with the labour bit, and the stages of what my baby is now....I just want to go through week to week....A friend's just had a baby and she was telling me all about the labour and she knew everything. ...I walked away thinking I don't know anything. Should I, how much should I know? And I'm thinking will I go to my obstetrician and say what can I do? ...but I haven't really thought of the...The after.

Like people have asked me what sort of nappies are you using? Are you going to be breastfeeding? And I think well yeah, I'm, you know, I'm going to try breastfeeding. ...So all those little material things. I think that's another thing with the labour, as well as having the child in a way, I can't organise myself for it, because I've never experienced it, and that frustrates me because I like to be a bit organised in that. It's like making a speech. When I've made speeches, I have everything written down and then I go over it and it's all there, you're prepared....At the moment I want to just deal with....now. . . And keep myself healthy and keep the baby healthy.

And I think I've realised that I can't, you can't do it any other way, than let it happen. A little baby, it's their own little personality and they're coming out as well, having no idea of what they're going to experience, and neither do I.... And it's just a dealing, you just have to deal with that as the time comes. So I think that's probably how. Because you can't deal with every possibility? Nup. And why should I, when I have no idea what it's going to be like?

I'll try and have the baby in my room, and but if, I am such, such a light sleeper that it drives me crazy, ...if I give it that week and I hear the baby squirming and I am not sleeping, well I'm going to remove the baby . . . I've decided that now. I mean that's not being awful it's justbeing sensible. . . . I am aware that my first couple of weeks or months whatever, the feeding needs to be done, so I have to be awake. ...'cause that's important 'cause the baby needs, you know the more feeding the baby does it will help it grow and maybe help it sleep...And I am aware too that I probably wouldn't be able, might not be able to get a shower for the day, . . . and I think you have to be a little bit aware of it so you're not hugely disappointed

that your life's, 'cause my life has already changed. So its like I am preparing now, 'cause of the way that I'm feeling, the way that my baby's feeling. . . But it'll be a more rewarding, you know there'll be reasons why.

...Yes, it's just that crying thing that I just wonder. (laugh). When the baby's crying and I can't communicate with it....That scares me a bit. Of how I'll deal with that. . . So really I think it's my, yeah the daunting part for me is the baby. Not daunting, that's not the word, but just the, less unexpected, I suppose, because it's not planned. I think that will frustrate me a little bit, of being helpless. Which I suppose is just the natural....But yeah, so I think that aspect it's a little bit, the unknown....But like I'm excited, but it's just that....when I have the baby I'm responsible and my husband's responsible, so we've got this thing that we have to look after....that's why you know, we have to revolve around that, you know especially for a while, although we both decided that the baby's not going to, you know, control our life.

my whole thing is like family orientated

...in the aspect of going back to work it hasn't been a major issue for the fact, oh you have to go back to work because...you need the money, and, when I have my baby I'm going to be 34 and, I'm, I'm not hugely career orientated at this point in time of my life, my whole thing is like family orientated and things like that. Who knows what I'll be like in a year or so, or a couple of years but at this point in time no I can't, because I don't want to.... I'm not used to someone else supporting me, and we're still getting through that where Kerry has been brought up where its the father role supported the family sort of thing, so a little bit of me is a bit of guilt going, Oh gosh, I should go out there and maybe do more because he's supporting me. . . And also, I don't want to send my children to childcare...you know, I agree with the system, but for me, I'm not, I haven't waited for all these years for me to have a child and then. . . And I am fortunate and blessed that I have got a husband who is very supportive in that way because I can understand people why, whey they do, you know, I can understand all different reasons. And it's not being selfish or anything like that but it's just um, but who knows? . . . So I'm not initially looking back and going back into teaching. I think it would be something for a little while, for myself. But that's not, that's too far ahead at the moment.

I want to send my child to, like, kindy and pre-school, kindy for you know the separation I think that's important.... I want my child to be surrounded by people that they feel comfortable with so if there comes a time where even when they are two and a half, three, that they go, for their own interaction...that's when I'd do it, for them, for their benefit.. . . Because they've got a long way to go in life, and if we can do anything to help them be secure and independent and things like that, you know, starting off, and you know I see children that start from birth right up, and sometimes you think oh gosh that's a bit sad, but you know, they're learning a lot. And sometimes you think I wonder why that's happening, but then there are different reasons....with some people it's like, well no I'm a career person, I've got this thing,. And sometimes you hear of, you know people saying oh gosh they're having more fun here than they would if I'm sitting at home with them. And that might even be the case. That's why I want to send them there, for their interaction and the educational side and things like that...you know.

I want to be out, still interacting with people and whether that's, you know, at the beginning going to playgroups and talking to other people, and so the child is reacting as well, 'cause I don't want to be locked into this home thing...But then, I'll probably be thinking of having another child....

I don't want to do it on my own

....I'm used to doing my own thing. [Mum and I] we're close but we're not that close...but she will do anything for me, they're family, they've always been supportive....But then in the same token I don't want to change myself, I don't want to lose my own little independence as well. I'm happy for help and things like that, but then I'm always someone well, I want to try it myself? Before you tell me what to do it.

...and that comes to when I have the baby, I've still got to think....well, when do I want my Mum to come and visit? ...we've [husband and I] been talking and I think the first week when I come home, I'm just going to have Kerry and I, because I will fuss. Well, we're bringing someone, someone new's coming into the house....so then I can just get a little bit of a, something happening....Then that next week Mum can come over. So then I feel like I'm a little bit, not control, control's not the word, I don't know what it is....Whereas...when she comes, she will naturally be saying, oh well I used to do it this way and I can say, well actually we

tried this, and this works great. I can get in before, so then there's no bitterness. Because that can happen, like. It is different eras, isn't it?

But then you don't know how you're going to be afterwards anyway, and you don't know how the baby's personality is whether you're going to have problems or not...and just have to take each day and get support when you need it, whether it's from family and professionals. I need to be aware that no I don't need to do this by myself, I am not doing this by myself....And like I admit that there's probably going to be days where it's just going to be absolutely chaotic and things like that, but I just know that there's be another day. Because it's all here for good reasons.

I mean we're going to have our ups and downs, you know. My girlfriend, she went post-natal depression with her two children and like she's separated now, and I think a lot of her reasoning was she didn't get support from her husband because he owned his own business...and, I'm not saying that's happening to me, like you're always aware of you know, the blues and things like that, but then that's something that my husband and I, you know, talk about that. We want this together and I can, I understand he owns his own business and that's a huge commitment thing, but then he has to start realising, he's still the father

...we've got to both communicate. Time out, I need time out, can you do? And I think that's, I think that's one thing that we have to both work on as well as, okay I'm the mother. And that's something that I have to teach him, as well, that we're both in it together, so when I need a break, you know, that's why I have to keep telling him...it's, I don't want to do it on my own. And like, you know my husband says well I'll get up and do that, so he's been thinking about things that's going to help me, but then in an aspect too, you when he goes back to work I have to kind of think of him too, because he works really long hours as well so he can't just be running on nothing as well.

...I think you just have to go with the flow. A lot. Just like my girlfriend, and I thought, oh gosh, how does she do it? But when I speak to her, she's just so, oh well one's on the bottle and I think, oh, you know, she seems okay. She's managing. And I think you just do. I will just manage. We will just manage.

It was a very different person who welcomed me in to her home when Maddy was about 9 months old. As open and chatty as in the first interview, Liza was obviously enjoying motherhood immensely and appeared to be confident and relaxed

with her baby who woke up and enjoyed a snack for the last part of our chat. Although she had had some challenges and was now looking for some time for herself, her baby and being mum were now the heart of her life.

...I never want to go through that [pregnancy experience] again, but it was well worth it....probably now that I'm more content and everything I look at that and I think, that was just dreadful! How could I possibly have been like that? But...well I hear of other stories that some people were even worse...oh....and that's how I was feeling...

at the end I did lots of cooking. And put food in the freezer....you know, I thought that was being prepared. But, um, yeah, but no its different. So....I've got someone else to think of and I've been very lucky that she's been a good little girl as well. However...you know, I've been emotional at the beginning when I brought her home, tired, this, that, you know trying to work in the whole thing but I'd go to bed at night and I'd feel okay. And I think I just completely lost that whole focus of how sick I was....while I was pregnant I'd say there's no way you'd forget about this, but you do. Because you have this little bundle and it's all this love and experience

Exciting as well as overwhelming

...right at the last month...you know, I went through that bad period...okay I only have a month to go....And then she ended up turning around and she was breach ...and it was like oh, it's going to be closer than I thought. And then we ended up...having a caesar...not that I was disappointed about [not] going natural because I, I didn't have any expectations of how she was delivered as long as we were both healthy.... I think it was probably all a bit of an emotional fact that it was all coming to a halt, and a new start was happening. Exciting as well as overwhelming. So then, and the whole caesar thing was amazing and quick and it all suddenly was over and a bit freakish (laugh). . . yeah, out she came...and I was pumping myself with morphine so I was really in la-la land. Not really knowing what's going on...

....I wanted to try the whole breast feeding, and I wanted to do it right and I don't know, they, nobody, sometimes it's drummed into you...I don't know, maybe it's just in hospital or there's this expectation that you've got to try and breast feed. Which I wanted to do. And I had all these different nurses telling me what to do...and I was lucky that a girlfriend of mine...her breast feeding was a bit of a

disaster....and everything seemed, and I suppose I was sore from the caesar, and had visitors and. . .

...it all just happened so fast that I couldn't, I wasn't, it wasn't a sinking in thing. I don't know. It's a bit weird. But anyway. So, she, I had problems breast feeding on the left.... And then I was, I think I was getting a bit emotional in hospital and my doctor came in and he said, "Right, you ready to go home tomorrow?"...and I went, I want to stay another day please...I think I was slowly winding down off the drugs a little bit and realizing that, okay, this is all going to happen. I'm not ready to go home yet. I think I want to stay in here another week. I'm not prepared for this....I want all these people to help me so when I get home it's [breastfeeding] not a problem. But reality, it can be. . .

...my husband stayed home for the first week and that was good but that was challenging....I think he'd step back because I'm the mother and then I was the one who was feeding all the time and you know. And he'd organize dinner and I'd say, 'don't you dare get a frozen meal out of the freezer' because that's for those times when I'm at home by myself and when we have to have dinner and I don't know what to have....And, um, so I still had problems with my left and I ended up, um...ended up getting thrush. And it was cracked and bleeding....I thought right, I don't want to give up until I find a professional. So I saw this lactation consultant and she was great...And then, so this went on for a week and then after that that's when I got the thrush. And she, the lactation consultant told me well I'd better go to the doctor and get some antibiotics...And then I just burst into tears in the doctors and I'm like, oh I can't do this, I'm you know, tired and emotional....then I went back to the lactation consultant and she said, "Well, you can shut down on your left and only breast feed on your right," and I thought, I'm not doing that!...I'm not going to have a soccer ball and a little pin....they don't make bras like that! So I went home and through my sister in law and I rang a friend...breast feeding, it didn't work for them...my husband was, well whatever suits you...and I worked out that she wasn't getting enough on the left...and I was stressing and I was sore. So we decided well that's it, we'll do the bottle. So then after like 2 weeks of trying different formulas and going out at 8:30 at night, all the whole bottle thing...she got constipated, go back to the doctor....So I think after a month it started settling down. But like we still had, the late nights, still getting up twice to her...but I was feeling more con, more happy, she was more relaxed, she was sleeping more. I was maybe

getting a little bit more sleep and, um, yeah, so I think it was just that trial of having an expectation of I want to do this right and then it was like, why isn't it working? Yeah, why can't I do this?

But now speaking to people who breast fed, which you don't just talk about it when you're pregnant because it's just that you might know it's there, they would say well I could only do it for five weeks. ...and I thought, oh, that's okay....And see that, and see that's the thing. I probably didn't realize that it, how it was such a hard job to do it...

we're all in it together

...my Mum came over for the next week and...she came in the first day and Maddy was crying or something. She had wind. And Mum automatically said well, why don't you just turn over and put her on her tummy? And I said, no, I said I'm not doing it....I said look Mum how about we work out a routine you do the cleaning etc and you know, I set the ground rules and then it worked fine. And it was great....I thought no, she's just offering advice and I just take what I want from her....So it was all ended up being really positive. And then at the end I think she looked back and thought...that's really what she was here for anyway. To help with the chores whereas it was her mother's instinct to get right in and give the advice which we all do as a mother, now don't we....And sometimes I would ask, oh, is this der, der, der? And she would...you know give her um, opinion and then I would think Oh I'm not doing it that way or okay.

And then she left and then it was on my own. However, it was good that my friend, um, she'd had her baby, he's six weeks older than Maddy....we were on the phone to each other all the time through our pregnancies and so we had this support...we still speak to each other every day and we catch up and she's actually comes into town and looks after the two, looks after Maddy while I go and do house things, so we, I've got this really close network, just the two of us....and like we bounce off each other where there's, you know, different issues. But, no, it's good, and then Maddy started sleeping through, um, from about four months at night. But then I'd wake up in the morning and wonder why I'm still tired. And I still do that. I think it's a, I don't know, maybe it's your, your mind, and you just keep clicking and it's being, I don't know what it is....because...you're always thinking, you're always responsible, you're always on the go, aren't you?

And then I went through the stage where my husband would come home and what'd you do for the day....Oh well, there was this and that and yeah, I did lie down and I had a sleep. You know. I'm going to tell you that....Sometimes if she'd had a late sleep I would wait until he'd come home so he could bath her. He liked that, because he felt involved. However, sometimes...he'd just want to sit down and have a beer or something it's like, sorry. You've, you've just, this is what we've got to, you can do that at 8 o'clock tonight. You know, or. I'll bath can you organize dinner? You know. So we had a few little teething things which is only natural.....I think he's enjoying it more now because he gets more of a reaction out of her than when she was younger, and I must admit that I probably, without being awful, I loved, like I love the whole baby and, but now that she's, you know, wanting to stand...I don't know, it's more of a...not en, enjoyable's not the word, it's probably there's more response now....Yeah. Although when she was, you know, younger she was so dependent on me and she knew, you know, she'd turn her head at my voice. And even that it was like, ah, she knows her mother.

my husband....he's probably more relaxed now with her more than...when she was younger. But then I had to remind him that just because I'm the mother, you're the father and we're all in it together and I might have more of a mother's instinct but at the end of the day I've never had a child either so we both have to, and I would try and swing questions with him. Oh what do you think we should do, and he would say well whatever you want, and it's like, well no, I want your input because I don't want you to feel left out. Which I think sometimes he did but it wasn't intentional. And sometimes I didn't know either.....

You know a couple of times I'd, I would ring my mother...I did [find her ideas useful]. I did. But it was always funny "back in my day" like you know, oh this what I'd do with you....But, yeah, I'd speak to other friends and you know I, I've got a book...I thought that was helpful and I've got a really good child health nurse here so...and I could ring her at any time, or go down there...One incident...she took Maddy's temperature and she said, "Right I think you should go to the doctor," so she would ring the doctor...and it was like, she's my mother she's looking after me. And I went there one time and I burst into tears because I was so sleep deprived or, and I don't know what it was...She, the girls came and took Maddy and she said, go off and have a coffee. And, I thought, ah. And that's really good because...I didn't have, I don't have that family support.

....And I mean another thing that I've found is hard that I don't, I'm realizing now I don't have a lot of time without Maddy. Which is only because I don't have the support, and I probably, not that I don't have the support. I've found it, I still find it a little bit hard to separate from her. I, it's only, it's natural because I can't, I don't. So a couple of times whether, when I've had to, I wanted to go to the hairdresser or something I've said to Kerry, well I'm sorry but you have to come home....and I, the first couple of times I've left him I was as nervous as anything and I was ringing all the time...Now as she gets older the more I leave her with him I feel everything's fine because he's fine....So instead of me leaving for one hour I'll leave for three. And I'll maybe only ring once.I've left her with my friend once. And oh look I raced around for an hour, but then I think that's an only, it's because of you know if she did this cry, or this or that...it's just that mother's instinct....And worrying that they're not going to understand her....But, um, but I think that will come in time when I do separate more or that. But I mean it's hard when you don't have....

Um, I think at the moment...because of we're building this house. I'm taking her with me and it's just...I get frustrated...I speak to my husband and go, "How, how can I do this when..." And I mean I know that I've got other friends around but they have their children that I don't want to say oh listen, you know, maybe...I'm not one of these people, unless it's an emergency....I feel, oh I don't want to impose....Because I know what it's all about....I mean one's busy enough....I don't doubt their abilities or I don't doubt that they wouldn't love to have her....Yeah I don't know what it is. But, you know I'd be happy to look after their children....I suppose it's trying to be in, not unselfish, I don't know the word.

But yeah, no, it's good and you know another thing is we've had to, with my husband with his business...okay you've got a family now....I think he comes from the old school of he's the breadwinner, he'll work, and I'm the, and he actually said I'm the mother, that's my job. And I thought, right, however you're the father. And you have a special job too. And without being selfish and I want to try and get him more included. . . when he does come home...if she's still awake I'd say oh here's daddy and just when she sees him, she goes berserk....I said see, we need more of you.....You know. And I think that's the support I need too. Because I'm probably tired and cranky and just want a, a break....But still being together. And also I always say to him I need you to be home so then you can learn what goes on during the day because if for some reason if I'm suddenly not going to be here, you don't

even know what she eats...So. But we'll see.... I don't even know if it's, a lot of it is support but then the other side is...I feel sad and sorry that they aren't seeing him as much as....Maybe that's me being a bit selfish. And I know someone's got to work. And...I said look I'll, do we have to work? ...And he admitted that the money isn't the issue. I said well you need to, we need to work out priorities then....But then that might come. In time. I don't know, but...(Sigh) Does it ever end. I don't think so (laugh). No, its all good.

...then I put myself in...Kerry's role and I think my gosh he's missing out and I imagine how he would be feeling. So...we'll do something nice for daddy....And always letting him know what she's done during the day, because he misses it. You know....When she first said Mum, Mum, Mum and Kerry said, "Well everyone told me they say Dad," and I said, "Well, it's just how it is. Get over it." Without being awful and selfish. But then you know he, yeah he's, he's a good dad. He's a quiet dad. He's a helpful dad.

I don't know whether you can be a good mum,

I am working. But do you know what?before I had her there's no way I would say, 'a mother's working'. . . We all have jobs. But it's a different sort. And do you know, when people ask me, oh would you go back to work, yeah I'm a mother. I work. And I do say that. To some people, you know. . .

Um, when she was younger I found it harder to understand her needs. Because...I was the only one that could help her. Because they're so, just, what's the word? So Dependent on you...I would be a little frustrated like, 'what's the matter I don't understand'....But then I look back and I think that it wasn't as bad as what I thought and I think it just...came naturally. Or I just went on with it, or dealt with it. I do know that I haven't really got angry. I don't think I'm an angry mother. If I didn't work it out I would just maybe get a little bit emotional for the fact that I'm feeling sorry that I can't help you. I don't know what else to do.

I'm not one to praise myself. I just never have. Um, I'd probably say yes I am [a good mother]. But I don't know what the defining word of good is though. Um, I suppose I look at that on my little baby as well when she's the way she is. You know, I know that she has her upset times but she gets lots of enjoyment as well. She's happy....you know she, she's seen her mummy being a little bit upset with her and that sort of thing but that's natural and that's how it's going to happen. Especially

now that she's crawling around. And she's learning all the boundaries...I think I try to be as organized as I can as well, but not, I'm not a pedantic organizer. I've had to learn that if the house isn't clean that's fine....And I can be more relaxed and that sort of thing. . . Yeah. I don't know. I don't know whether you can be a good mum...

from an early age I, um, we've been out and about....And I think that's a lot of the reflection too. That makes me more calmer and makes her calmer because I didn't want to be in closed doors. ...other um family members....said, "Oh don't do what we did. We've had two girls, they don't travel well in the car, we hate going away, because they wanted the routine, routine, routine, structure, structure,"...and so at two months old she and I, um, went over to Mum and Dad's for a week or so. And that was our first trip away together. That was, I was a very brave mother then. Because I had to go by myself. And people were saying how brave you are....And from there I thought I can do anything. We can go anywhere....you know we go out together and we sit down, I have a coffee and she has her morning tea. Just the two of us....and someone said to me, oh my goodness you do that by yourself. And I said well I'm not by myself. I'm with her.

And I mean there are times...you know, if, if I've got to go out I think well to be, to be fair on her I want to still make sure that she can have her morning sleep. However...if something's on at 9:30, and we've got to go, well, we'll go....and she might be a little bit grizzly or she won't be...and we just deal with it. And I put her in the car and she has a big smile. Wow, where are we going today Mum? . . . I mean maybe I've been lucky that she's been a little bit more flexible.....And also I had my friend who had her baby too and....we would every week make an effort to meet somewhere....It's important for us as mothers, as important as the children. To get used to being around, being out with people.... She's just had to get used to it because I thought well that's what I want to do. . .

For me. For her.

...And now. . . I have to kind of re-focus and think okay, now I need to do stuff for me....that's starting to get important to me now....Now...I need to step back and....Do a bit more for myself....And also us for a family. I always need to push that. Yeah....we need to probably do something together as a husband and a wife, but at this stage that's not a, it's just not, not an issue, it can't really be done....We can't find the time and then what would we do with her? You know, if we went out to

dinner it's always one person or the other person doing something but then that's just how it is. You know, maybe when she gets older I could, we could take her over to my parents and she, they could look after her for a week. Or a few days.

It's not as if I don't feel comfortable its....It's that imposing thing as well. Although my girlfriend's mother...she said look, if you and Kerry want to go out dinner we'll come in and look after her. And I thought, oh that would be great but then I have to think, oh she's never looked after her before....So I probably think that we need to do that so then I can get over that....So probably, but then, knowing me I'd want to make sure okay it's 8 o'clock because then at 7:30 she'll be, hopefully be asleep and you know that sort of thing. . . But, and also too I think especially during the day it would be good for her to be looked after by somebody else....So she's not with Mummy....So then if there's times where I have to go away she can be happy and be flexible.

[I am] still focused maybe 100% on her....But then that's just a, that's a mother's instinct that we're like this. That we all, that we put her first before everybody else, you know I suppose. But, yeah, it's good. I'm probably missing time away for her benefit as well as my benefit....For my own stimulation and, and that sort of thing. Mm. I actually looked into, because we're building a house. I got some courses for interior design. . . But then I thought, when am I going to fit that in?. . . However...I thought, maybe this is something that you know I could do later on but at the moment it's too important for me....being a child care worker, I wouldn't want to put her in child care. I, if, if I couldn't have a family member, I would probably get someone coming into my house. If I had to....And I just think it, it's just too important at the moment. And also too she doesn't see much of her father because he's working so much I, I don't want to remove me as well....she'd only see us both in the morning and both at night....At least she's just got to have some, a bit of stability. Maybe when they're older I, I can work in, you know....a job where I wouldn't have to plan...But at this stage no.... Yeah. And I don't want to either. She's still too little. She needs her mummy. I love all that...It gives you a whole new prospect in your whole life and it's such a different sort of love that comes before, well before anybody else.

...I sometimes think I can't believe she's mine. You know, although you're with her the whole day and you're doing all these things you sometimes have a relative, reality check and think oh my God, this is mine. And. You know and you

hear of all these sad stories of you know separation...and you think oh my goodness I, you know, if I had to choose between somebody who you, you know you're going to love...like your husband....But then suddenly when you have a child that overrules that in a different way but in a probably not in a romantic, a, a different romance....A different, different sort of love. Stronger....You would [do anything for them]. And you'd just protect them to bits. You know. More than anything. Or anyone. And...that's what they need...

...It's so different. But, um, it's good different. Like I, I'd, if, if we weren't, like I, I'd want to have another one. Like I'd, that's and no question....I mean it's easy to say it, but it's just because I suppose it's just this little person that you think. Oh, I'd love some more of you. However, you don't know what it's going to be like the next time. Yeah, so....but...I'm, I want, I'm in two minds. I'd be happy if we fell pregnant now but then I think oh my goodness we're building a house and all those sorts of things....whatever happened in the pregnancy hasn't turned me off having another child. Although I do realize when it happens again, and if I am sick, I will be calling on support.

....I think after we went away for the, when she was two months old. That's when it kind of, I had a turning point. Whereas that first, up to that first two months is, it was hard work. Which is natural. And I know...if we have another child it's probably going to be the same, and it's going to be different because it's, it will be harder because I'll have already have had a child. But then that's where I have to, that's when you get more support...at the moment I don't want to be that selfish because I think well you know that's what I'm here for at the moment....Mm. I think it's important [to focus on your child]. For me. For her.

Yeah, and also too I look at her and I think she's healthy, she's happy the majority of the time. She's not broken. She's got a lot of coverage. You know....She's a good thing. I don't need to be stressing about little things....So....And I must admit one of, um, a friend's mother she said, "Oh, it's all worth it, isn't it?"....."See, look at this gorgeous good baby that you've got. It was all worth it, all that sickness," and I thought, yeah, but I'm not saying that it's a rule or anything like that. But it all makes it worthwhile....it kind of made me think, oh it's all okay.

Lucy

Enjoying her work in education, 32 year old Lucy was doing her masters degree when we first spoke. She and her husband of 9 years had not long been back in Australia after travelling in Europe. As we chatted, Lucy's comment that she enjoyed long conversations over a glass of wine confirmed my impression that she is a social person whose relationships with family and friends are central. Articulate and introspective, she spoke with some clarity about her expectations, and her needs and wants as a mother, and seemed mindful of some of the issues she might face.

...the week before Christmas [I] found out that it was, I was pregnant, so it was a big surprise, and got all excited. I had, wasn't really sick....so I'm feeling pretty lucky (laugh). Now I'm cruising, just, I mean that nice stage that everybody tells me is just lovely, and yeah, I'm pretty happy with everything.

I didn't necessarily picture myself having children. I suppose I defined myself by what I did for a living and who my social circle was and all that sort of stuff, it really didn't become something you thought about until your friends starting having kids. . . It's sort of an assumption I suppose yeah, mm, more than anything. . . but it wasn't actually a conscious thought....Um, it's always been a really big fear of mine that if I decided I wanted to be a Mum, I'd then find out that I couldn't, and then I'd be devastated with that, because, I don't know, part of my personality, I need to be successful I suppose.

it actually had to be a choice

We had other things we wanted to do before we started a family. I'd told Shane when we got married that I wouldn't even think about having kids until we'd lived overseas. It was always a dream of mine....Once we did the overseas thing, it opened up all these other doors. All of a sudden we had this picture of wow, I like this...we can zip all over the place and have all these wonderful experiences, and we don't have to follow the formula that everybody else has followed. So that was a real challenge, because before we'd always assumed that, you know, we'd get married, we'd have a couple of years just us, and then we'd have children....and all of a sudden it actually had to be a choice. We had the big debate of, do we want to be parents, (laugh) or do we want to keep going with this lovely lifestyle?. . . and in the end, the end discussions were, less about our lives and more about um having an impact on the world, and getting to our 50's and regretting it, that we didn't have

children. That took about six months for us to go through and eventually decide that no, yes we wanted to do the parenthood thing, so, yeah.

I haven't had second thought about being parents, I've had a lot of thoughts about whether I'm going to cope....But yes, lots of, like when we watch the videos of a birth, we just both sort of sit there and think oh my god, (laugh), what are we doing? But yes, once I'm at the six months stage, I think most of that should be okay, we should be settled into our new life, but yeah, it is going to be a new life.

it changes everything

It's going to be a huge part of my life for the next 20 years or so. I'm always aware, in the back of my mind, that no matter how much I think about it and analyse it and prepare for it, and do all my reflections on the way to work...no matter how much I do of that, I'm never going to be really ready, it's still going to happen and I'm still going to feel out of control. Because you can't practice. You know, you can't practice breastfeeding (laugh). It's not the dealing with the little issues as they happen, it's the all-day-forever concept that I think takes you to the next notch of frustration when things aren't going well, the fact that there isn't any mother coming to pick this baby up, if you don't deal with it nobody's going to. There's no, there's no getting round that, so I'm just going to have to handle it as best I can...

...like when we were first pregnant. Once we found out at work that there was other people pregnant, that's all we talked about....yeah it changes everything. I think actually it will make me closer with my friends who are mums, because I imagine they went through it....We went out and I wasn't drinking of course, and Helen was, she was having a great time, and she said, "I'll have scotch," and I just looked at her and she said, "I've been where you are," she said "and one day you'll be back where I am". And I thought yes, I know, like, but I didn't think of it then, when she was pregnant...it sort of made me feel like I probably wasn't as, as good a friend to her, when she was pregnant, because I didn't have that understanding of what it's like, yes, and how hard it is to try and go on with your life until the baby comes, so yes, that's interesting.

Whenever I have holidays, I have one whole day, when I don't even get changed out of my pyjamas....I will just have a stack of books and I will just work my way through them, and that's my indulgence....that's what I do for my escapism I suppose, and yes, that's going to go out the window, isn't it?

I'll need the recognition that you get from your job

We have talked about me going back to work and him staying home, so we'll see how that goes anyway. I haven't put as much thought into it as I probably should have actually. I'm going to be full-time at home for a year....And then, my current plan, which I'm sure will change...is to go back part-time. I think I'm going to miss my job. I think I'm going to miss the, the responsibility and adult contact and things like that. So yeah, I think I need to plan to go back to it....Yeah. If we just needed the money, I'd probably do a day here and there, but I think I'll need the recognition that you get from your job...and you develop those relationships and things like that, so that counts a lot, for me....I don't think I'm going to get that affirmation as easily, as a Mum....If I've got a couple of days at work, a couple of days at home, and a weekend with my partner and the baby, then that's a nice...balance, yeah, between all the things that I need. If I'm happy, then...Then everything else will be happy.

what it's going to be like

...this is going to sound a bit horrible, but I don't think there's going to be many rosy pictures in the first couple of weeks, because you have to be in a sort of rosy frame of mind to be able to see the real good stuff. Everything I think's going to be seen through a haze of panic and chaos and, and that's okay, yes, because I know it won't last forever....I don't think I've got a clear picture of what it's going to be like. Because they say, you know, all babies do is sleep and eat for the first couple of weeks. But if that was true, why would Mums be so exhausted, for the first couple of weeks? But that's not it, because they cry in between and they don't always feed properly and then they don't always go to sleep....Shane will come home, and it'll look like he's just walked out of the house in the morning. I'll probably still be in my pyjamas, the baby will probably still be crying, there'll be mess everywhere. It will be those days I'll think what the hell have I done with my day, and he'll probably think the same thing.

...sleep, I think, is the big thing. Um...yeah, I think that will impact on everything else, because when you're tired, you're cranky and you snap at each other and you don't have the patience to deal with the baby...and I just want everybody to go away, am I going to mouth off at someone and then...regret it later, yeah. So, like the impact of that exhaustion, I think, I'm worried about.

So yeah, I don't know. I'm excited, and I'm happy...but I know it's going to be out of control....If I know it's going to be...teary and miserable and highs and lows, and, and we don't know what this one's going to do and all those sorts of things, then yes, that's probably more realistic than somebody who thinks it's all beautiful...Yeah. Like some of the teenage girls, think they're going to have a doll that they can dress up and take out and show off. I'm thinking, I'll be glad to get out of the house in the first month with the baby and...all the stuff they have. . .

I know when the baby first comes home from hospital, I think everything will stop, like my needs, Shane's needs, everybody's needs, because at that stage, yeah, the baby can't do anything for itself, well it can't do anything for itself for ages, so, but there's going to have to be a balance somewhere along the line, otherwise I'm going to start to die, and our marriage will too, if we don't put that effort in to keep it going. Yeah so having time out, individually and as a couple, I think will be important....And I know that's something that we sort of, we guard fairly jealously at the moment. It'll be all about the baby for a little while and we're going to have to make a point of, you know, once the baby's asleep, right...we're going to sit down and we're going to talk. . . I think that's going to be the biggest issue, we're not going to have time, So I think, yes, that'll hurt.

But I, I think I know myself pretty well and I know when I reach my limits and I need some time. ...so hopefully I'll be able to say, on Sunday...I'm really going to need an hour or two to myself, so make sure you programme an hour in where you're going to be looking after the baby. I think I'll have to. And my husband knows I'm impossible to live with. And he's just as bad if he doesn't have his time. So we'll just have to see-saw that. But he's got work as well, so he's going to come home from work, feel like he hasn't had any time, and then want an hour. And I'm thinking hang on a minute, you're finally home so I can have an hour. So it's going to be when that slots in to our life, that will be the conflict I think.

I don't want to be the only person . . . I want to share it properly

I think my partner's feeling a bit left out now, yeah, and he jokes about, oh well, night feeding, that'll be your job sort of thing, I'm not getting up. And I make similar jokes about expressing a month's worth of milk and making him do it all (laughing) so we haven't sort of talked about the logistics of how all that's going to work, but he's taking three weeks off when the baby comes, so I'm figuring over

three weeks we'll work out something, if we've got the chance, but yeah. I have all those great ideas at the moment. I've got a friend who's husband doesn't like to be left alone with the baby, because he's scared and can't handle it by himself, and I don't want that for us. I want to be able to go out for coffee with the girls and Shane will be home with the baby....If I'm fine with it, he's got to be fine with it. So...

I think the, um the division of labour, is going to be an issue. I don't know if Shane thinks it is, but I think it is, (laugh) because I'm going to be home, and, yeah he jokes about, oh well, when you're home with the baby, I'll come home and dinner will be on the table, and the house will be spotless, and the baby will be, you know, wrapped up in its crib, and you'll be all, you know, dressed to the nines, and I'm thinking, I know he's joking, but you know how you sometimes wonder when somebody makes a joke, how much of that is true, how much of that is he really expecting to happen...Yes....he still pretty much had the traditional upbringing Mum did everything for you, and, while I had a working Mum for most of my school life and we learnt to iron our own uniforms and get dinner started and, you know, (laugh). So I think there may be some conflicts there about what he thinks makes a good home and what I think makes a good home.

I want him to have days, as well, with the baby. ...I think he thinks that I'm joking about the expressing milk (laugh), but I'm going to learn how to do it, and really quickly. Because I don't want to be the only person, I don't want to carry it by myself. I want to be able to share it, and share it properly, not just...saying 'oh my day was really hard because of this, this and this'I want him to have the bad day and know what it's like to be on your own and not know what to do, because then we'll really be together in terms of understanding, I think. So yeah, that's going to be, that's going to be interesting....we're going to be tired and unsure of things, and not have the time or the energy to sit down and talk about it. Civilly (laugh).

About being a mum, being a martyr, and being me

The idea that um...oh the expectation that some women have, that their job as a mother is to sacrifice everything about themselves and their personal life, in order to give their children what they need. And I don't agree with it, obviously, but at the same time...I suppose it's a spectrum – at one end you've got the martyr and at the other end you've got a selfish mother who gives nothing to her child.

My mother-in-law's of the opinion, you know....She will never, um, disagree with any of her kids, she will never say no....like if one of them asks for it she will rearrange her entire life to be able to fit in with whatever it is they want. I think, well you know, somewhere along the line she should have started to say, no. I know that it's a big commitment and it's my job to be the mummy and all that sort of stuff, but I'm not going to kill myself over it. My sister-in-law, she's gone through hell with breastfeeding and sore nipples because that was the right thing to do, and I've already said to her, I'm not doing that...I've got to be happy too, so I want to see if I can find that balance.

my Mum's always had her own interests, and her own friends....I can remember as a little kid, Dad would come home from work, play with us and wrestle with us and all that sort of stuff, and then Mum would say okay kids, it's Mum and Dad time now, and they would sit down and they would have their glass of wine...and we weren't to bother them, and I think that's the sort of balance I'd like. It's not like just because I've had a baby I become less of a person, so, yeah. . . I know the sacrifices and there's all that sort of stuff that has to be made, but I don't want to make them unnecessarily, and you know, oh this is my job, you know, oh that's a mother's role, you know all those phrases that you hear, and that's, that's not me.

I have a friend down south and when she weaned her baby she took a weekend. She left the baby with Daddy and bought...a bottle of wine and took some books and went to a town, like four hours' away, and had three days to herself, and I really liked that idea. That number one, she expected it as her due, and number two that she actually followed through and did it and saw it was a good thing to do, and...that would have been hard for her, to be away from him for that long, and maybe that's where Mum's have to make the sacrifices, not in being over, um over-available and....Yeah. Like sometimes indulging yourself is the best thing for the baby, because it means that baby's growing up somewhat independent, and that hurts, I imagine, to say this baby doesn't need me as much as I'd like to think it does, but I think in the long run that's, that's a good thing. So yes, so I've picked up bits and pieces of what different people have done.

I had a dream that I'd had the baby (laugh) and, it had teeth, when it was born, and my first thought was oh thank god I won't have to breastfeed (laugh). I woke up thinking, that's dreadful, you can't think that already, like, you're setting

yourself up for failure. I was giving myself this little pep talk (laugh) about, about how I shouldn't be making assumptions yet, just because other people found it hard doesn't mean I will, and you know, give everything an even break, sort of thing...

And then you feel guilty. I was really cranky the other night because I couldn't have a drink. And I was tired and I was worn out and I had a shitty day and I just wanted to have a scotch, or three, and I couldn't, and then I felt bad because my other friend, who's desperate to have a baby, would love to be pregnant, and I shouldn't be moaning about anything to do with being pregnant, because I'm just lucky that we were able to fall so easily and, you know...you're not meant to, you're not meant to hate anything about it, so I suppose that's why I spend more time talking to the pregnant girls at work, because we can have those little moans and nobody thinks less of us for saying that....So, it's not huge guilty, it's like I should look on the positive....you know you're very lucky, and we are. So yeah, all those sorts of things, you need to put into perspective, I suppose.

it's a big deal for me to be good at what I do

I'd like, I like the idea of any children that I have being resilient and flexible...Mum and Dad when I was a baby lived out west, and if you went to a party it was for a whole weekend, so you know, you learned to sleep wherever you were, and I like that idea, I don't, I don't think it needs to be as restrictive as some people make it. So hopefully all that will balance out. Here I am saying all these great things, who knows how it's actually going to (laugh). Yeah, eventually, I see the baby as fitting into our lives. I know that will take time, and that assumes that the baby's born without any health problems, and is a good feeder, and a good sleeper and all those other things that will impact on that. Yeah...I've set myself a mini-goal, by Christmas I sort of want to have a fairly good idea of what I can do and what I can't do and, yes, and the sort of structures we need. So the baby will be four months old, I think, so I'm figuring I'll be over the worst time, (laugh) hopefully, and I'll at least have some idea of what I'm doing by then, yes.

We've got friends who've had a baby and they're super organised....their answering machine is this great big long message about all this detail about the baby's routine and times to ring and times not to ring. And I'm thinking, part of me understands why they've done that...like the baby's a big enough variable that they're cutting down on all the other people variables. But I don't want to be that

uptight...at the same time if someone knocks on the door, I want to pretend I'm not home too, that's what I want to do.

It's a big deal for me to be good at what I do. And, I've got no options here. Like I'm going to be a mother and, um...and I suppose with that goes other people seeing me to be good at what I do. . . I know deep down, that whatever comes I'll deal with it. I'll handle it. And I'm, I'm, I suppose I put a lot of thought into because I know I've got to adjust myself to the idea that I don't know everything, and I don't have all the answers, and that's okay. But that's not my normal way of being happy, so that's been a bit of an adjustment, and that's ongoing. But I have a friend who's a midwife, who's just pregnant, and she doesn't know everything either, so I'm feeling good about that...like it's comparing with others and how do I match up, and am I going to cope as well as that one?. . . I think I'm going to find it really hard when um, if I have people turn up to visit on a day when I'm not coping. Because then other people will see that I don't know everything, and that I'm not handling it. . . Well that's not the picture I want people to have of me....Like I don't expect to be brilliant, but that really grates against me that people would see me in a bad light as a mother. As in not in control of the situation.

If I was at the beginning of the problem and thinking oh, this isn't going as well as it should be, I'd probably contact a friend. If I was really upset about it, I'd go to a professional, or I'd ring my midwife friend and ask, I'd feel happy to ask her, because that's what she does, and she wouldn't think less of me because I was panicked. Yes, but professionals seeing me not coping is okay....I'd probably question the, the usefulness of cracking up in front of somebody who didn't know what I was going through. Like I'd rather pick a person who has been a Mum and, or is a Mum...and can give me real advice rather than just there-there's.

I'd feel comfortable ringing Mum and say can you come out here, like, I'm stuffed and I need a break, come and look after the baby....Mum said to me that she'd like to have the baby one day a week (laugh)...when I was two months pregnant. So I told her she was probably jumping the gun a little. Um...that's a great idea, but Mum and Dad are both getting to the stage where they can have a bit of freedom and do what that want to do, and I don't want them to commit to something and then have that limit for the rest of their lives, so I've sort of said that to Mum, and she said oh no, it won't, it won't, you know, it'll be fine, I want my

Grandma Day and all that sort of stuff, which is lovely and that would be wonderful, if she was to have that....Mum's the main one.

connectedness

I have a rosy picture of Christmas, because my brother and his wife will be down and their little girl will be two, and this will be her first cousin, so....that's, that's nice, like I like that idea of you know, mum and dad, my mum and dad being able to see their kids, and their kids' kids and that whole connectedness. . . I like the idea that this is something that Shane and I are really doing together, like, you know we've done things together before, like you know, travel, a trip or something like that, but you could have done that by yourself. Well this is something (laugh) you know, this is really going to be a team effort and.... And what we do now, determines what sort of person this one's going to be later....hopefully...the product's going to be, the end product's going to be something that we're really proud of, so I think it will be, yeah. I just know he's going to turn to goo, like, when the baby's born, so (laugh)....Um, first steps, and all those sort of things, first smiles.

...the whole concept of being the mummy....I, yes, I feel positive about it...like eventually I'll get the hang of it, (laugh) I think. But yeah, it sort of doesn't feel as real as when you go and visit someone at the hospital and they let you hold the baby. You know...like at the moment I've got this whole belly and all the stuff in there that's keeping it alive...and, and I know if it wasn't for me it wouldn't survive, sort of thing, but because I don't feel like we've connected emotionally. I don't, like when a baby cries, and the mother, they know from its cry that it's hungry. I don't have any of those knowing things about the baby and its personality. So it's yeah hard to get the full picture of who that is in there. You know...I know I'm having a baby and I know I'm going to love it, because it's our's, but at the moment I don't know it very well, so what's to love?....At the moment the only reason I've got for loving this, is that it's mine, so, and yes, everybody tells me, 'oh you won't believe it', and they talk about that rush, I don't know. It might happen....that will be wonderful, that'd be great. But I don't want to set myself up for unrealistic expectations. Maybe it will be a flash of lightning and it will be love at first sight, but it might just be, oh my god, what do I do now?

I've got a friend who said to me, she said, "I loved him from the day he was born, but I didn't like him for a very long time" (laugh). Yeah, I'm preparing myself

for that, and if it doesn't happen, well that's good, I figure. It's the same with the birth. You know, all these people say, oh no, I'm going to have a natural childbirth, and they're traumatised when they have to have a caesarean. I don't care, like, so long as I get a baby at the end of it, that's, that's what want.

...when it's born, and you know, and it recognises me, and it feeds from me and all those sorts of things, and it settles when I pick it up, like you know, that bonding thing that happens, and that, that knowing each other, I think is going to make a big difference....the love will grow from that. That's my personal theory, so we'll see how that goes, yeah....It would be easier if I got the flash of lightning, I think.

Lucy and her daughter welcomed me into their home for the second interview. While we chatted companionably, 8 month old Cate pottered around our feet, had a snack and generally charmed me with her good nature. Lucy seemed relaxed and comfortable with her new role, stating she was enjoying motherhood more than she had expected, despite some early hiccoughs. Sharing similar life views, I found it very easy to chat with her about her responses to new motherhood. Candid and unapologetic, Lucy spoke of her desire to get back to paid work as well as her need for regular leisure time away from the constraints of mothering.

Um, ah I think it's more productive to think of things as a journey because otherwise it's just a series of mistakes. So if you think of it as a journey you think, well the destination's going to be somewhere good. And, and you're not real sure where you're going but you get there just the same. So, yeah, I think it's been, um, it has been an interesting journey. We had a few ups and downs....Cate was breach....We waited until two weeks before our due date and she still wouldn't turn around so we had to have a caesar. So that was experience number one, I suppose. So in the, in part that was good because I like to have things organised...Shane could book his time off work and all that sort of stuff. Um, and I didn't have to go through labour so, I don't know. I've talked to friends since and we've decided it evens out. You either get the labour or you get the after, the recovery time. So that was fine and then, um, yeah she was pretty good in the hospital. She was a really calm baby and, and um...the next hitch we hit was, um, my milk didn't come in...

all the stories that I had heard about people not being able to breastfeed were about their nipples being sore, and about the baby not wanting to feed and all that sort of stuff....And that, that was fixed before I left hospital....Like I had this blessed

run, and then to have no milk....at least if you're going through pain and you're feeding your baby, at the end of it you've got a full baby. I would sit there and I would feed her for like 20, 25 minutes on each side and then she would cry and cry and cry because she was starving and we would give her like 30 mls of formula, like the tiniest little bit, and then she'd be fine and go off to sleep. And we'd think alright, okay she's obviously not getting any and I would sit on the pump for ages and there would be no milk coming out. So we eventually decided that that wasn't worth the stress....So, you know I felt it was all me. And it was nothing to do with the baby that was wrong. And it was nothing to do with the technique....It was nothing I could learn....There was nothing I could do. I was eating all the right things. I was getting lots of rest. The other thing they say is 'don't stress' which is hard, very. I beat myself up over it, of course, but I got over it.

So, um, we tried for three weeks, with the expressing, trying to bring my milk on and taking medication and after three weeks...I found a lump which was the beginning of mastitis And, um, I said nup that's it. I decided I think about two o'clock one morning I'm not doing this any more, and...went off to the doctor and got medication for the mastitis and medication to stop my milk, if it was ever going to come. So. So that was it. She went onto bottles and life got a lot easier after that so....And when I told other girlfriends about it they said, "That was me three years ago. I was doing exactly the same thing. Did you get the electric pump? Which brand?" (laugh)....And I thought...I've been talking to the wrong people....

....I was having to give her formula but with every feed...I would give Cate some expressed breast milk...so I knew she was getting something good....And, um, and [the child health nurse] kept saying you know, "You've just got to persevere, you've just got to keep going." And I'm thinking, 'well it's all very well for you to say that, I'm the one with baby who's hungry'....when I, I had finally decided, 'no that was it'....she said, "Now, are you still expressing?", and I said, "No, I developed mastitis, so I've decided I'm not going to keep trying breast feeding. We've gone on to formula." And she went, "Oh well, you weren't that keen on breast feeding anyway, were you?" And, and I didn't say anything. I didn't respond at all....and [in the car] my friend...said, "I thought I was going to have to hold you back then...Will you be going back to see her?" and I said, "I don't think so!"

And I had, I mean I had my Mum...she had me in the 70s. You put babies on bottles, you know you fed them for the first couple of weeks and then they went onto

formula....And, ah, and I said to Mum, “Oh they reckon that breast fed babies are healthier, and breast fed babies are more intelligent, and breast fed babies are this, that, and bond better with their mothers and all this sort of stuff.” And she said, “Well you were a bottle fed baby,” and she said, “and you’re intelligent and you’ve never been sick in your life,”....And...then I started to put it in perspective...that was the click I needed to say, okay relax....And she didn’t like the child health nurses when she was having us either (laugh)....So we survived.

missing my freedom, missing my work, missing being a grownup

...I was prepared for the physical toll. Like I knew that I would be tired. And that was actually less than I thought it would be....Um, so that was nice. We had everything, um like, practically, under control. I had meals cooked ahead, we had nappies bought for like for the first however many weeks or whatever, like. And we had things worked out like how we would handle getting stuff done around the house. . . She’s a great baby. She’s, she’s no hassle. And that’s all fine. But we sort of never, I sort of never worked out in my head how to I click back to other stuff. Like, you know, you put all this other stuff on hold. When does it come off hold? And, um, and it’s only just now that I’m starting to think, okay...had enough of being the obsessive mother. Now it’s time to do some other things. And I think that, um, that I wasn’t prepared for. I didn’t plan for. Didn’t think ahead to.

...And I have decided that I’m not made out to stay at home. Um, I’m going back to work after the June holidays....Um, and Cate’s going to my Mum for one day and going to day care for, um, two days a week....I like being at home when most of the time I’m at work. Being at home when most of the time you’re at home is very different...Um, I miss, um, being able to sit up late watching some TV program without thought for the consequences. Because anybody can get through a day at work a little bit tired. But getting through a day with a baby a little bit tired just makes everything worse. Um, I miss having conversations with people that aren’t about babies. I miss having conversations with Shane that aren’t about the baby.

Um, there are days when I’ve waved Shane off at the door and thought, ‘why can’t that be me going to work?’ I want to be the one that gets to leave....Um, I have, there’s, there have been bad days where I’ve thought...‘God, if I knew now, if I knew then, what I know now, would we have made the same choice?’ Would we have said, yes, let’s start a family?. . . Because that was always the big, um, a big

deal for us. That freedom. That, you know, oh well, if it doesn't work out we'll sell up and move....And now we've got to, another consideration....I remember we did a workshop at work and they asked us what our most important possession was, and mine was my passport. And, ah, when I was home on maternity leave I was cleaning out the office...and I discovered that both our passports had expired without us noticing. And I was devastated. Devastated. The loss of freedom like, you know, even if I did want to go overseas...in a flash I couldn't because I had no passport now, ah besides the fact that at that stage I was nine months pregnant....But, um, I haven't actually wanted to walk away from it. I wanted a break. And I'm really lucky in that I've got both mothers here....My mum loves it. And if I say I've got jobs to do she'll say, yeah, I'll have Cate. . . So that's really allowed me to have a bit of time.

...um, this is an interesting...illustration of how having a mother to look after the baby isn't the same as being free of the baby. Um, when I went down to Sydney my friend...dropped me at Bondi Junction shopping centre and said, "I don't finish work till 7:30pm, just catch a cab. . . I'll see you at home." And this was at 12 o'clock. ...So like, logic, my brain knew that I had 7 hours...And I'm walking...and I'd see something and I'd think, 'oh that looks, I...don't have time to look at that today'....and I'd been doing that for like 2 hours before I realized, hang on...I don't have to get everything done in a set amount of time...because even if I'm not home by 7:30 tonight it doesn't matter. And, that was a real revelation that all of a sudden...I had real freedom, not just the temporary freedom which I have when Mum looks after Cate. But real freedom to say, 'oh I'm going to spend three hours looking in this bookshop, or I'm going to go and try on 50 million things in that shop....And it made, it was like, oh I love this. And I got home that night...and she said, "How was your day?" And I said, "If the rest of this holiday sucks I've had a wonderful time just today."....Yeah, it was....I was, yeah, without responsibilities.

I have changed. But, um, I'm working on that being temporary...um, I haven't been the easiest person to live with. And have had big issues with the missing my freedom, missing my work, missing being a grownup, um, missing being important. You know. Because every-body tells you that motherhood's important but, you know, it doesn't sort of hold the same weight I suppose as being important in a workplace....I think I've had a temporary absence from, from my own self and, and as a part of that I was getting really, um, obsessive of how things had to be with

her and just focussing on her which is really unnatural, and um, I've given myself a good shake, and Shane had pointed a few things out...and we've just had to relax a lot more....Like once she's in bed, did she have a good day, yeah she's great, what's happening tomorrow, talk about that, right, and then leave it. And then we talk about grown-up things....and it's been more of a conscious effort than I thought it would have to be. I thought it would just click back, but we didn't. So, yeah.

And, but I am, yeah, there's a, there's a fair amount of pressure to, on me to stay at home and on Shane for me to stay at home. Um, from our families. Um, but I don't want to stay at home even if, um, even if Shane earned twice what he was earning now....Because I miss it. And, um, yeah, I'm a happier person if I've got some, some time at work....But...we had lots of negative feedback from my mother to start with. And then she went and had dinner with all the people in her street...and the next time I saw her...she now appreciated the fact that Cate would learn things at day care and that it's not a negative place to be...Shane's mother's...said things like, 'oh you'll have to make it up to her'....and I was a mess. I was so angry, I was crying, and um...you know she's like, well, sell the house and move into something smaller and Lucy could stay at home....I love my job. I'm good at it. I get a lot of positive feed-back. It'll be nice to have a bit more money. But if it was a financial decision I'd be going back full time. So. And I'd be back by now...Um, but I decided...I'd have her first year with her and then I would go back to work and I'm really looking forward to it so, yeah....um, I've only just started talking to him in the last month or so I suppose about missing work and missing being a grown-up because I've only just sort of started to put it together in my own head and...You know, I earn more than him, he's said, "I couldn't do it. I could do it maybe one or two days a week but that would be it." And he's really open with that. And, um, doesn't feel bad about it. Just says, that's how it is. So I suppose he recognizes that I have the right to feel exactly the same way...yeah

one of my friends...she didn't want to go back to work. She had to go back after six months....And I met with her at Easter time and I said, "So how's it going?" She said, "It's easy." She said everybody builds it up to be this big stressful thing.... She said Abbey's in a great place, she's having a wonderful time, I love my job. She said it's wonderful having money again, you know we can do the things that we want to do...when I do have time off its great....So I tend to take the same perspective I

think. Yeah. Yeah I think part of you, um, part of you dies when you don't have everything that makes you tick.

But at the same time, she was two weeks old and we decided we'd have wetting the baby's head drinks. Up at the tavern...So, um, she came along for a little while.....After, um, an hour or so Mum brought her back here and we stayed up there....I had a couple of scotches because I had expressed all this, well all this milk, like, all my little bits....You know so at the same time as I say we haven't had our freedom I have had a lot more freedom than a lot of other mothers give themselves I think....So, yeah, I mean to hear me talk you, you'd think that I'd been locked in a box for, you know, 8 months or whatever and not been allowed out.

Um, ah when we were down in Victoria recently, um, we hired a babysitter and we all went out dancing until 3 in the morning. And I knew I had to get up at six, but...I thought, what the hell, I'm just going to enjoy it....And I suppose there's things like, you know, I want to go back to work so I am going back to work. I want to be able to go shopping on my own so I do. You know, I, I want some nights off so I will get a, I have no qualms about getting a babysitter. Getting Mum to look after her. And, um, I have no issues with saying to Shane you're not working next Saturday, I'm going shopping...

If we want time as a couple, that requires a bit more organization. And you can't sort of do it spontaneously....So, yeah. I suppose we haven't, this is what we're having to focus on now. We haven't made as much of an effort to do stuff as a couple as we, um, probably should have....Yeah. We have [noticed the lack]. But I think we've sort of just been involved in the logistics of having a little person to look after and instead of sitting down and talking about it....and, it's funny, like I said to Shane the other day, "Every day when you leave to go to work, I miss you." ...But then as soon as he comes home, it's all, you know well it's, she's got to have her bath and her feed and she goes to bed, and then we've got to have dinner and, and it's more about practical stuff and which bills need to be paid, and it's not about the fun things. So, um, we're having to make...a point of putting that back as a priority.. . . and the week down in Melbourne was great because...we went out and had a ball. It was like, oh we could do this again....I found I've been better since we've been back....And if I know that's how it's going to be then that's okay.

...I think too because I had the two days at the conference with other teachers....had a real chance to talk to them about what's happening in their schools and what I'm doing now in my job, and, and I was back to being Lucy the Teacher again. I wasn't Lucy, the Mum, like, and I'd just say, "Oh I'm on leave at the moment....I had a baby last year," "Oh that's nice. So, what are you doing with programmes for..." you know, it wasn't the be all and end all of my person. So, all within a week. I had that, I had my husband to myself, and I had a weekend of partying with old friends....you know, it was a really good package for me. So, in terms of what I needed. And so I've, I've, now I've come back with the perspective, well I've only got one more term now...and then I'm back to work. So I'm just going to enjoy this. For being at home. And knowing that it's coming to an end. And, yeah...she's important, but so's my work. To me.

a more positive way of looking at it

I was in a frame of mind where I was...I was saying to myself that I resent having a baby, I resent the things I miss. But I've reframed it to say, I miss my work, I miss my adult freedoms. Um, so it's not about resenting Cate and it's not about resenting being a mother because I chose to do that and I like that. Ah, and it's added a new part to me. Um, at the same time I'm allowed to miss the things that I don't have access to at the moment. So I, and, and that's been a more positive way of looking at it for me, and that's made a big difference I think in how I am every day. Like when I get cranky and frustrated I can say I need some adult time. I know what I need now. Like I've, I'm able to put a name on it...

[It wasn't acceptable for me to say I resented her] I had no one to express it to. I only told Shane a month ago. That I was having those thoughts. And, um, because the closest people I have...nearby are my mother who I wouldn't say it to, Shane's mother who I would never dream of saying it to, and my best friend who's going through the IVF process. So having a discussion with her about wishing I'd never had a baby is probably totally inappropriate. And at the same time that created a whole new set of feelings of guilt. Like, we should be pleased that we've had a baby and she's healthy and beautiful...So really, so I really needed to reframe it so that I could, I can talk to my friend about missing work. That's okay. Talking to her about resenting having a baby is not okay.

And, because, um, I suppose we haven't been as connected as, in our marriage, because we've been focussing on Cate...Um, but because there was that little bit of distance it's not easy to have a really deep discussion about things that are really scary. But yeah, since we had that discussion we both concluded that we're not going to be people who live through their children. We're both people who live for ourselves....we love her and we're glad we had her, um, but we're people too. So. And we're a couple too. So....Sorry kiddo.

I actually did forget for one stage, at one stage that I was a mother...my friend was visiting we went and saw that movie 'Suddenly Thirty'. And it's 'cos she's, 'cos all the music's 80s and that was our era sort of thing and, and we were really getting into it, and after the movie I thought, 'oh that was great'. And I thought, 'Oh. Oh, I've got to go and get Cate'. Like I'd forgotten that I had a baby...but then I suppose that's escapism for you. Good movie (laugh).

it's not all that hard

I'm a bit over the 'not being seen as a bad mother' thing. I got past that fairly quickly I think. Um, yeah. I think I'm um, I'm more into the zone of well, 'I'm her mother, and I'm doing it my way. Or our way'. Shane's opinion counts. Um, I'll ask other people for their opinion but it is just advice and if I choose to take it then it's well and good and if I choose not to then that's my call too....As long as you get the job done, it doesn't matter how you do it....Like, you know, she's healthy, she's happy, she sleeps well, she eats well, you know, she's an outgoing little girl, you know she's not scared of people.....So all the, the big things, I think are fine. You know, and um, if I'm doing it my way then anybody's got something to say about it, then it's too bad. So I've probably reasserted my independence there.

I knew I had relaxed when I stopped reading all my baby books. That was my big indicator. I realised I hadn't read one in a week. And I thought, ah, I must know what I'm doing now....I'm less vulnerable to the criticisms of other people. Than I thought I would be....from my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and you know, I'm um probably more critical of the way they do things than anything.

um, as my husband would say, it's not rocket science is it really? You know, it's, it's constant work, and it's new, and I suppose that's hard, um, but if you've got common sense and you can read a book....Um, then yeah, there's things that...um, you don't come pre-programmed to know that, you know, babies shouldn't eat

strawberries in their first year, for example. Like, so, there's things that, um, you either need to be told or taught. . . But I think the caring for another human being is built into all human beings....if it was all to do with mothering instincts, then you know, why would men make such good carers? . . . And, and if it was about being pregnant and giving birth then adoptive mothers wouldn't make good carers....I don't think it's a, an extra special skill that's instinctive in some people. I think we've all got the ability....

I've got an assignment that has to be posted on Friday, and I know I, after today I have...three two hour nap periods to get the assignment done in. If I don't want to have to do any night-time work....And, um, it will depend, you know if she has a horrible Thursday and a horrible Friday....She's pretty good. It's just, you know, 'oh okay, while you're happy playing, I'm going to go and read this article'. ...I suppose I'm a bit, um, pragmatic about it, in that, you know I do what I can when I can.....when I was at work if I got behind I would take a day off, to get the assignment done. But I can't take the day off here, so. But that's okay.

...you know, being at home is work, and I suppose it is. But...it's not all day. Like she has a sleep and, and...you know I've got the freedom to meet the girls for lunch. Or, um, go and visit Mum. Or you know sit her down to play with some stuff and watch a DVD while I do some ironing....You know for all the lack of big freedoms there's small freedoms there and I know Shane's contained to the one shop, all day...and I'm sure he would love a day where he didn't have to talk to the public....but, mothers all over the world will spew about this. I don't think it's all that demanding. Because I have a good baby who eats what I give her...um, you know she sleeps three hours a day. She's up at six and asleep again by seven. So...she's a good kid and, and it's not all that hard. Um, now that we've got the system sort of worked out...Yeah. I can, I can do other things and, yeah. And then in others it has [been constraining]. Because....I can't do the old things. So, yeah, but I don't know. It balances out, I suppose, doesn't it?

[When] I went to Sydney for three days...Shane stayed home....with Cate. And his conclusion is that he couldn't do it....(Baby interruption) And the days he stayed home a friend of mine, he text-ed her and he said, "This staying at home thing's a breeze. Um, baby's fed, down for a nap, I'm watching a DVD." And she text-ed him back and said, "And what about your chores?" Because...he didn't do

any other jobs....He just had two days and just looked after Cate. So it wasn't even a real picture of what it's like, yeah (laugh).

he's been really good

Shane's been really great....um, he knows Cate's routine....And I might, I might do it Monday to Friday, um, but he could. If necessity came to that. He would prefer not to....He, like she'll go to bed for him. She'll be fed by him. There's no, um, things that are particularly my job or his job. Um, if I give her a bath she looks at me funny. Because....by the time he gets home from work it's time for her bath. So it's the only time when he actually gets to play with her....So, otherwise he doesn't get to see her during the week....But if he's late home from work then I bath her. Or if he's had a bad day and he just wants to sit and watch, I'll bath her and he'll sit and talk to me while we're doing it. So, um, no, he's been really good that way. And, and um, even when we're out....Like you know we were out on the weekend at a family do. . . She needed changing and he said, "I'll do it, you've had a go. It's my turn." Like, and he grabs the stuff and off he went and left his conversation Um, and you know he thought nothing of it...

...I get impatient sometimes because there's things he doesn't know or doesn't realise. And that's unfair. On my part. um all I need to do is point it out to him. Like, on the, over the Easter break for example, um, I was really looking forward to him being home for four days because I would get a break. And on the Sunday morning when I had gotten up at six o'clock Friday, Saturday, Sunday morning and he'd slept in every morning I thought fair enough it's his holidays, he goes to work all day. And on Sunday morning when I was getting up, I said, "I want to sleep in tomorrow. I'm not getting up tomorrow. You are." And I was really cranky about it. But he had no idea...he hadn't thought....as soon as I pointed out to him um, that that's what I wanted then it was fine. So yeah, and things like when we go out places. Like, um, well no, we're going to have to take the big car because we need this, and this, and this in the boot, and you know, you know and he doesn't think ahead because he's not practised. While I know what's involved in going out with her and it's more automatic with me....And...there have been a couple of times when she's had a cold and, and has been whingey and he can't, not can't deal with it, he doesn't like dealing with that...

the cute things she does

After she was born they took her away to do all the little checks...and all I'd seen when they pulled her out was like her legs. So I hadn't got a proper look at her. So they brought her back and she was crying and crying and crying and I just turned my head and went, "Hello," and she stopped crying. And that worked for the first week in the hospital. Whenever she heard my voice she would stop crying and thought, oh, she knows who I am. That's so lovely....

I always felt like she was mine. Um, and I would get annoyed when people would tell me what was wrong with her. So it was like, don't come into my space, she's my baby, you know I'm the one who's with her 24/7. How on earth would you know better than me what was wrong with her? So I suppose that's a bit of protectiveness. Ah, but in terms of the rush, I never got the rush. I was really thrilled that she, she stopped and listened when I started talking which was great....I wouldn't call it bonding. But she's definitely mine. She's definitely her father's.

....now I love her. Because, you know she gets cranky and you know she's got all her little idiosyncrasies. But when she was first born...I felt like she was mine but...um, I didn't really connect Cate the baby with the lump that I had....Probably because I had a caesar, I think....but, yeah, it was, the first couple of weeks it was like, um, you know you hear stories about women being in tears because they don't know what the baby wants and we did that a couple of times....You know, and I always, the question I had in my head was, 'what do you want?', 'Just tell me'....

There's lots of wonderful. Um, going into get her when she's woken up from her nap, and she's um, she's sitting there moaning and just having a whinge and then she sees you and her face lights up and she turns her head on the side to peek at you....That's lovely. I love seeing her with her grandparents which is great....Yeah. And, um, just the cute things she does. You know, the smiles and the frowns, and um, when she figures things out. I remember the day she found her hands for the first time and I took heaps of photos. So, yeah, the joyous things are, um, seeing her learn things....So, and the knowing that you know, all this is going to, um, make up the person that she will be one day. And I look at me and Mum, and I think, you know, one day Cate will go shopping with me. And we'll have lunch, and you know, she'll tell me about her work...and one day she'll come and tell me she's going to live in

England for two years and I'll probably freak out the same way my mother did, so. So, yeah, I sort of think about those future things...

Meg

A quietly-spoken, articulate 35yr old, Meg projected calm and self-assurance, a definite asset for her work as a health professional and the volunteer work she was passionate about. Living on acreage in an old home they were making their own, Meg said she was an outdoors person, enjoying gardening and keeping fit by swimming, cycling and horse riding which she had stopped due to her pregnancy. A thoughtful person with a bubbly laugh and wry sense of humour, she expressed some uncertainty about how she would cope as a new mum while maintaining her career and continuing study, both of which were important to her.

My husband and I have lived rurally, in Queensland all our lives. ...we've had a long time together as just 2 of us and I guess now, we're looking forward to having this child.

you're probably more mindful now

I've been really lucky, I would say, [with my pregnancy]. I did have a slight bleed with my placenta previa on Christmas Eve. When I had 20 people coming for lunch the next day (laughs). So, I was driving to the doctor thinking, I don't want to lose the baby. You can't put me in hospital. I've got to feed all these people. And I hadn't actually really felt pregnant because I was only just starting to show, and I've suddenly felt, oh, my goodness, I'm going to lose this. ...I was amazed at how much I've probably bonded with this little thing. ...It was terrifying....fortunately, my doctor was in his office. So I could see him, which was reassuring. It really jolted me, and my husband actually works an hour away. And so he was really jolted, too. ...But um, it was just, I think, a warning to, to settle up and yeah. It's all been fine. Because, the week before, I had my major ultrasound. And they said that my placenta was low and I thought, oh yeah, so what? Who cares? And just kept going. ...But yeah, there wasn't any specific precautions I should've taken. And now I guess, I'm a little bit on edge, like I'm actually, my dog took me for a walk the other day and I had a bit of a fall and I, I was trying to get back to the house thinking, oh, I hope nothing's disturbed but. Yeah. So, you're probably more mindful now. And, you just think, oh, my belly. You land any way you can but on your belly. ...Yeah, and so other than that, I've been really well.

And it's just um, it's just unimaginable at the moment, 'cos you have this little thing kicking around inside you and then you're trying to imagine the whole time what it's gonna be like, and what he or she's gonna look like and how she's, he

or she's gonna react or, and if it is a he or a she. 'Cos, I mean, I have no strong convictions....as a nurse, I've been looking at the ultrasound thinking, well I could probably just about work it out, but I couldn't, which was quite, yeah relieving (laughter)....a lot of people have said to me, particularly like mums and aunties have said, "Oh yeah, you count the fingers and toes as soon as they're born", but like, you can see that on ultrasound for us. But, um, we have no real interest in finding out what it is.

But, yeah, it took me a long time to probably realise, if you like, in a sense that I was pregnant. Or get that feeling. Once that 20 week mark happened, you sort of think, oh well, yeah there's someone else to think about. And I think it just comes, it almost comes naturally. Like, even things like being at a party and not having your usual couple of drinks....oh well, I haven't really even looked for them. You just sort of, automatically, switch into this new mode. And, I mean, I've been a fairly keen career person and love my study and already really looking forward to 3 months off and, I could never imagine before, looking forward to that amount of time off. Yeah. So. Probably thinking as a mother I guess.

...and, I know that you have antenatal classes and you have birthing plans and I don't have any of those and I think well, am I really not maternal or am I just totally laid back or uninterested but, I guess, professionally, I've seen so many go wrong, that I have, all I want is a well baby. And to be well myself, so. I have no major ideals of how it's going to be. I did offer to go to antenatal classes with my husband. . . But he felt that I had explained enough to him. . . And, I know basically that, you know, what happens, happens. And I'm quite prepared to accept pain relief and that sort of thing. I'm not looking for this a-la natural birth or, the heroic mother. No, I'm definitely not heroic. I know I'm the biggest sook under the sun. So and at the same time I think well, everyone else gets through it somehow, so I will come through it. So I don't really have a fear about that. . . And that, because of my placenta, I might end up with a Caesar but if that's the safest way to have this child well, so be it. So, probably fairly relaxed about it. I can imagine being terrified when it actually happens but, but um, my overall view is fairly calm, I think. I hope (laugh). It's going to arrive. There's no stopping it.

...how is it going to be? It's a very unknown territory

I've been very apprehensive about going to hospital um, as a patient, when they know that I'm a midwife. Because, I think it's a fear all nurses have of being a patient and nursing staff are often frightened to nurse nursing staff. ...I've really had to think about teaching myself to be a patient...it's really hard to revert to that role. Yeah, and it is probably a stumbling block of, of mine. And, and asking some simple questions. Having the courage to, you know, say well, I really don't know... I haven't done this before. I need all the help I can get. And I think that's broken a bit of a barrier for me. So...when you're a patient rather than a professional, a lot of that knowledge just swims out of your head too, so, I don't know how much I'll retain and apply to myself.

And I think um, you know, I know I can ask my mother any time. But then, I have the fear of the generation gap too, 'cos sometimes she's advised my sister-in-law, to do things which I really don't agree with (laughs)....And I guess, that overwhelming, should you use disposable nappies? Should you use cloth nappies? Should you go back to work? Should you demand feed? Should you feed on the clock? All that sort of stuff. I mean, it's something that every mother gets dumped with and I know it's gonna happen and, I, yeah. Not something that takes up all my time everyday...but you wonder how you're gonna cope with it....

I mean, in theory, every mother of a newborn, should put their feet up for you know, an hour every afternoon and if they've got 2 toddlers and a newborn, you know it's never going to happen. So, I try, I think, to be realistic but, yeah....I'm probably a little bit, I'm apprehensive. Um, I'm looking forward to the event and as you do, you know, collecting all the gear and trying to get organised. But every day at work when I'm sitting down with a mother...calmly explaining, "Oh, well don't worry if they don't have their, their fifth feed for the day, it'll be alright." I'm thinking, now how am I going to do all this? Or you see a mother and they say oh, and little Johnny was up for 6 hours last night and I'm like, I'm already thinking, and I'd have to go to work the next morning, 'cos that baby's 6 months old. You know, how am I going to manage?

I haven't got any um, strategic plan in place about managing sleep deprivation, but when I go to work, I'm very hopeful that Judy [relative]. . . that she'll actually come and nanny with me for 3 days a week. I'm probably very

privileged in the work situation because the clinic I work from is actually attached to a house, which I have the right to live in. . . . So, I can actually take bub with me so I can continue hopefully, to feed the child and be interactive without interrupting my work, too much. But, getting through the um, tired days, I don't know how I'm going to do that. All I think about is well, if I only have to work 3, then I have 4 off and hopefully that will get me through. Yeah. And I have a very supportive husband. I'm very spoilt in that respect. I only have to look like being tired at the moment and he's there to help, so. And I'm probably more fastidious about the house than he might be. So, it's only up to me to relax a bit, rather than him.

...once the baby's born...I guess I'm prepared to be totally irrational and understand that some of my best and most professional friends have been through that. Um, I guess it's something that I, it's a bit of a fear that it's a real unknown for me, and I just don't know how I'm going to react. ...like a few of my friends say, oh, you know, you'll be fine. You'll cruise through but, you don't know too if you're going to get a windy, refluxy, whingey baby or if you're going to get a placid little thing that sleeps and eats and drinks just, you know, when it's meant to.

...one of my friends just delivered her third baby and because we have been pregnant at the same time, we've developed a fairly good bond and she's cried on my shoulder a lot and I feel quite comfortable ringing her and saying, "what in the hell's going on today?" And I'd probably, probably even ring her before I'll ring my MumUm, so I guess I look to her as a support mechanism there where I can be guided and she is also a health professional so, she understands professionally...and emotionally where I come from. 'Cos I actually was at work with her um, one day when I was just initially pregnant and feeling very sick and wondering if everything was ok - in the 'don't tell anyone' phase. And I could confide in her. And feel like a complete idiot at times. But yeah, we've sort of been able to have that sharing. So um, hopefully having those sort of mechanisms in place will help me through. You just need someone that you know. A bit of a mentor. I guess.

But um, the first week is probably my most fearful in recovering from delivery and. . . probably trying to establish, not the actual bond with this baby, but the feeding, getting that right and juggling visitors and that whole new environment and just wanting time out, somewhere along the line and yeah, ...when you've got this precious bundle and you're learning this whole new world, I mean, that first week has probably got me the most worried, but, after that I just hope to learn day by

day....I guess, and do what I can do and. . . I am lucky. I mean, I've got friends, and I've got um, mothers and aunties and sisters all within sort of, reasonable distance. So, I will have support....Certainly, there's fears there. And I guess now, I'll wander around and think you know, in 10 weeks time there's gonna be this third person in the house and it's gonna get up a few times a night and I'm gonna have to get up with it and. . . like you know, how is it going to be? It's a very unknown territory. I mean, I'm far more relaxed than I anticipated being, but I am daunted about, I mean, I'm used to being a structured person, so how's this day going to unfold and, and how am I going to get used to well, ok, we've just fed the baby, so let's jump into the car, if you don't have a screaming attack and get to the shops before the next feed's due? Like, the priorities are just going to be completely different.

It's a very confusing time. And it's very daunting to think that when we have, basically, I keep saying, 10 safe weeks left. . . .and then the fun begins. You can't turn back. It's just, it's forever.

...whilst I definitely want to devote a lot of our life to this child, I want to remain a stimulated adult

Like, I always knew that I, that we wanted children....But, I guess, we weren't settled and um, it just sort of dawned on us, I mean, that the time was right for us. But, um, 2 years ago even, I would've been really horrified and frantic, but I'm quite relaxed about it. . . And surprisingly so. I think, probably, when we thought about um, trying for a child, I was probably more apprehensive than since I've been pregnant....But. . . some days I catch myself thinking, oh well, you know, I'll go to this and do that and prepare this and I think, I won't be. Or, I'll continue like all my activities but a lot of meetings are at night, so I probably won't be going to them as often as I would have. I'll have to find other strategies.

I'm probably um, supported in the fact that I know my husband is so excited and he um, he became an instant uncle when we were married, and he had all these nieces and nephews running around and he is so good with them, that I feel that I'll have um, a lot of support there. But um, yes, it's gonna be a whole new world. I don't doubt that at all.

I probably have a rough sort of mould in my mind, [what a mother should be]. But I think...every one has such a different personality and um, and different values and different ideas about parenting and I know that mine differ from a lot, too.

Um, so, I probably have some ideals for myself....It's pretty hard to outline. ...I want to give as much time as we can afford, I guess, being a typical young couple situation with a mortgage, like, you have to go back to work. But, I want to probably be there as much as possible for the child but at the same time, I'm mindful that I will need stimulation, too. So, I don't want to drop my life, as such. So that's probably a bit of a contradiction but, trying to get that even balance and um, and give them all that stimulation and support and um, probably you know, provide a safe, nurturing home. Rather than, having them choofed off somewhere (laughter). Um,. . . I hope to breastfeed, but in the same instance, you know, if that didn't work, it's not something I'm probably hung up on. But...you know, I'll give it my best shot. I guess there's lots of parenting techniques that you know, you see and you think, oh well, yes, no.

...I have a really active role with the Cancer Fund and I hope not to have to give those things up completely....maintaining the links but taking on different or altered roles. I hope. But at the same time, this, my husband and child have to come first. So, I sort of, as a mother, have thought, well, you know, I've got a probably a good 5 year break here in my life, where I'll be concentrating on other things and I can come back, to professionalism and that sort of thing. That's like a grand, broad spectrum sort of plan. But I think that helps me get through too. Mmm. Yeah. So. I'm probably really looking forward to the idea of having 3 months at home with bub and really getting to know this little person and caring for them and just having a bit of um, down time, visiting friends, and having cups of coffee while the baby sleeps maybe (laughter). And maybe not (laugh)....But yeah, joining in playgroups and that sort of thing is something that I'm looking forward to and you know, it's just a foreign concept from the past 10 years.

I'm prepared to have my world upended...but I've thought, I mean apart from my small hiccup, I've just thought, oh well, it's a fairly natural occurrence and you know, people say, oh, you can't do that, you're pregnant and you sort of think, well why not? You know? I'm not standing on my head. Like, I mean, apart from taking obvious precautions with heavy physical activity, you just keep going with life and I'm, I'm very hopeful, but I'm also prepared to understand it may not work but, this baby will come into our lives and whilst you definitely give up some things, I'll be able to continue my life with it and hopefully, if I remain fairly relaxed, it will be too. It'll come along for the ride in, in some respects. And maybe that's really

ideological, but I don't envisage, you know, sort of turning the telly off at 8:00 so it goes to sleep or you know, changing our whole lifestyle so that this baby runs the house and we don't. Because, I don't believe it's actually um, a good way to bring up um, a family anyway. And I guess that's just one of my values or ideas, yeah.

I guess I'm prepared to change my interests and I see, for example, I swim 2 or 3 nights a week, and I really love doing that, and I'm thinking oh well, my husband's not always home by 6:00 when I have to leave to go swimming, and he's not necessarily going to want a 5 minute handover, if you like, and be lumped with the baby for the next 2 hours and that's probably a selfish expectation if I was to continue, but in lieu of that, the baby and I can go for a long walk each day at the time of day that suits both of us...maybe, I can then come to town um, during the day and swim and impose on Granny once a week or, change my life around a bit and. . . Yeah. I think um, I think just being prepared to change my mindset and whilst um, making it an easier life for the baby, my husband and myself.

I just feel that I can't expect to continue with my life the way it is and to try and force the baby and my husband and everyone around me to cope with the way my life is now...I think I need to make allowances too. Yeah. I wouldn't say that I was thinking my needs are secondary, but I think that my husband's needs are equal. And so, therefore, for me to dump the baby and run, if you like, puts me first and him second and why should, if I've been at home with bub all day, suddenly have the right to say, well, you've had a tough day at the office, I don't care....maintaining his rights as well. And sometimes you see mothers put everything out for the baby and the husband comes second...well maybe I'm wanting to be careful that I don't leave him out of the picture or dump everything on him as well, 'cos he's um, supportive and I don't want to take advantage of that I guess. If that makes any sense? And realistically, if I'm not working, I have all day to fulfil my needs in different ways. And he will only have the evenings with us, so. ...and I guess it's, it's probably a statement too, of my realisation that life isn't just gonna go on, the same. It is gonna be different. And changes need to be made.

So. Planning frantically. Like, how do I not get excluded and yeah, cos I mean it is important for me to remain involved. I don't want to...I've never been a person who, at parties, has been in the girls' corner goo-ing and gaa-ing about what brand of nappies, they'll, they buy and some women instinctively do, I've never sort of really gone for that. I haven't in the past seen myself as maternal. I've always

thought that I would be a mother and wanted to be, but I. . . Not that sort of mother, no. Isn't that, that's terrible. I mean, those friends of mine that are like that, that's fine for them and they're totally obsessed by their, or not obsessed, that's the wrong word, but they're totally taken up, their lives are totally taken up with their children and whilst I definitely want to devote a lot of our life to this child, I want to remain a stimulated adult and I guess, I've seen some of my friends too, give up work, and absolutely crave adult stimulation and quite a few of my friends have said to me, oh, you're very lucky. If you can work 3 days a week, cos you'll have a balance. And my husband said to me, he doesn't think that I could give up work completely. So, in that respect, I have his support to continue. Which is comforting. But I'm quite prepared to have my whole mind changed once this baby arrives. Like, it's just the 'I don't know'. Mmm. I have this grand plan. But it could change.

someone to love and share your life with.

You know, I can't imagine not having children. Because yeah, they liven one's life up in many different ways. Yeah. And I think um, we've done a lot of things together, over the past years and, we're ready now, to sit back and stay at home, not that you're housebound or anything, but you know, to have a more family relaxed sort of time. Yeah. And just um, even now, just looking at my husband's face when he's talking about it, his whole face just lights up ...and you think, oh wow, that's just, watching his face excites me....And also...looking forward to the delight, you know, that it will give our parents as well. Not that you do this for them as such, but to watch their excitement is, that's been fun and will continue to be.

It's just a huge achievement, in the first place, to deliver a live bundle and um, I guess I've been happy in pregnancy that I've been well and it's exciting that it will be, you know, our own baby....our own precious bundle to um, nurture and develop and be part of our family and I think all those special moments that I'm yet to learn about, but I'm sure, like can appreciate how they're there to share with. And to, yeah, to have this little person and watch them develop....and take on that new facet of our marriage as a family, too, I think, will be really exciting and challenging. Yeah. And then sort of, it's a whole new planning for the future of, you know, then in 5 years time, this little person's gonna want to go to school and there's a whole new lot of um, special moments. A huge achievement. And someone to love and share your life with. ...like, my over-arching longsighted views is, it would be very sad to grow old without family around you.

I thought, oh yes, I'm the most apprehensive professional mother ever to be and I don't want to give up my life but it, I don't know what it is, I've just, yeah, have a, probably a different outlook now. My overall picture is I'm prepared, I hope to take it as it comes and um, how well I do that will remain to be seen. Um, yeah. . . I mean, I go on maternity leave and I graduate on the next day for my Masters...So, why have I just done that if I'm launching into motherhood, but now I can see that like, in 5 years time, or maybe 6 years time, I'm not too old to continue study and I can get back into it.

Meg invited me out to her home for our second interview when her daughter was 9 months. Tasha kept us busy with her crawling investigations of the tape recorder and the hallway while we chatted over a cuppa. Meg spoke about how much she was enjoying motherhood and the unexpectedly overpowering sense of love and responsibility she felt for her baby. I could see she was completely smitten with Tasha. As Meg spoke about looking for paid work she could do from home, it became apparent that her career had taken a back seat and that her child and family were now took centre stage.

Um, [it's been] quite exciting. And a wonderful experience but no-one could tell you how good it was going to be until you're actually there. Um, different in so much, like...as soon as I had Tasha I extended my maternity leave drastically. Um, and then went back to my previous job...part time and after the second day decided to call it quits. So that was a very different outcome to I guess what I was expecting. I have now after nine months gone through a job interview and I guess I'm looking forward to the work that I've applied for only because its probably the only work that you can do mostly from home....I've been blessed with a very easy baby. ...Tasha is such a happy little one. And so relaxed and placid that I really haven't had too many worries...So, yeah. It's just been a great time.

I didn't expect to feel as confident as I have

Um, initially, I can remember being given Tasha, and as a midwife thinking, 'I'm going to breastfeed this baby, and I'm going to get her attached properly,' and it was going through my head at 100 miles an hour, you know, chin to chest and nipple to breast and all this sort of stuff. Thinking, 'oh, I've got to get this right'. And she just suckled immediately and I thought, 'oh I can do this'. And then in hospital it was quite a funny experience because she was a really relaxed and happy baby from day dot, and on probably the second day I was upset, because she wasn't crying and all these other babies around us were crying and I thought that she must have low blood

sugars and they hadn't picked it up. So I said to this poor midwife, you know, you've got all these mothers in tears because their babies are distraught and then you have a really good baby and your mother's still in tears. ...after that, when I was reassured I, I really haven't been, I can't remember being panicky or, or anything. I'm, I'm a relaxed mother I would say. And, and, I probably only just realised when we went on holidays. . . with another couple who have a four month old baby....Like, I just said to James, "I never realised how much I take for granted, my nursing knowledge". Because little things that happened to that little baby I wouldn't have thought boo about but that mother is quite concerned. And I can say the simplest thing and she'll say, "Oh, oh is that all? Oh, that's okay". But we just know it. And I'd never, um realised. It helps, you know, that [experience]...so you're just not on edge...

Um, I didn't expect to feel as confident as I have. I think because I had a very jaded view of babies...all I would see was holy terrors come in to my clinic and just scream the place down. And the few times that Tasha has screamed I've said to James, "She's not screaming yet." . . .

James has been wonderful actually. In, in hospital I figured that I knew how to bath a baby....And I've had a caesar so I felt that I wasn't really even capable on the first day...I said, "Well I'm sore, and I know how. James can learn." So he bathed Tasha the whole time we were in hospital and it just went from there. Yeah. James gets up as much as I do at night and does as much as he can considering that he works all week as well, but, you know it's not, um, he knows how to feed her as well as I do and is as, is comfortable and confident with her as I am so we're lucky....[other mothers] they question themselves the whole time and then the minute they hand the child over they're questioning the husband, or giving instruction or...um, a friend of mine describes riding a horse with an electric backside, you know. If you're nervous, you'll make, you'll, the horse will feel that and you'll get a rough ride, and, and I think the same with a child. If, if you're nervous, they'll pick that up. And then you'll have this unhappy baby. I mean, there's physical reasons for unhappy babies too but I think some of the more restless ones can be attributed to that.

I'm still doing it, just in a different way

Um, swimming I did start going back to...at night. But I've decided probably to give that up for a while because I think, from my point of view, it's quite an effort

to get there, and it's easier for me to go walking every day, with Tasha. And I feel, I guess I feel it's pretty selfish that I have to put all these people out of the way so I can have an hour's swim....um, fitness is still important to me and I'm, oh, I'll get that in other ways and walking with her is very enjoyable so if I walk for a year instead of swim so be it. It's a small price to pay. Gardening hasn't really been difficult because when she was a baby she would just sleep in her pram and now I suppose she's getting a little bit more active it's going to be a bit more complicated but we get out and about as we're able. Um, and she's actually a very happy baby outside as well. . . . So that's been, I've been able to do more than I anticipated probably which has been good. And my volunteer work – I haven't been back to the meetings. Um, but I've...taken some new, ah, focuses and it's probably a good opportunity for me to change direction....So I feel I'm still doing it, just in a different way. And that way I can, when I go and give talks I just leave Tasha with my mother. Good old Mum, I'm so spoilt.

...she would care for Tasha once a week for a couple of hours. Because she wants to and because she's able to and because I'm very lucky. ...one of my friends who's very isolated she lives way out west. With no family around, and she said, "You don't know how lucky you are," and I said, "Well, I think I do."....Tasha didn't go to the shopping centre for four months. Because Mum kept saying, "Oh, you can't take her there. Think of all the germs!". . . . But yeah, in retrospect I didn't have to go grocery shopping with my baby or anything like that which is incredibly lucky.

...Tasha's great, and I can pick her up and take her out but I, I'm suppose I'm mindful of the fact that I wouldn't pop out every day, I try to limit my trips so that she has, so that she actually manages to develop a routine. Not that we've had much of one. ...And, I mean, I'm, I know come Christmas time when I was shopping one day it was five o'clock and she started to whinge a bit and I said to the shopkeeper that we'd been out since 8 a.m. She is a really good baby. So she's not difficult to take, but.... I mean it's more difficult than before, you pack the lunch bag, and you pack the nappy bag, and you pack the baby into the car and you hope you haven't forgotten anything. But, you can do it.

...within 24 hours Tasha had something in just about every room in the house and I, I've just accepted that I guess. And everything's probably as clean as it ever used to be but probably not, I don't have to have things done by a certain time on a

certain day, I just get them done within a week and that's that. And I guess it hasn't been a huge issue because I haven't been at work so I've had the time. I'm not stressed for that time to get everything in order get to work and get out of the house. If I was working full time I think it would be very different. But I've been privileged to be able to stay at home which has made life a lot easier.

Tasha comes first

I remember going back to work, I suppose because I was able to breastfeed so easily and I really enjoyed that and I was privileged to be able to take Tasha to work with me. Um, and have a babysitter at my work place. . . But, while I was there I was trying to feed her and my, the nature of my work is people drop in so it was fairly unstructured. Um, and, I felt I couldn't give to Tasha 100% and I couldn't give to my clients 100% and if I was dealing with some poor old fellow and my daughter was screaming he'd say, "Don't worry love go to your baby." But you're not doing either one justice. And I just couldn't. I'm a perfectionist at work and I couldn't give 100% and no-one expected me to but I did. And I was unhappy with that, and unhappy because I could see it was disturbing Tasha and she has slept through since she was about six weeks old and she started waking up at night and she was obviously disturbed. And I felt that I didn't have to do that. And...I was then offered more work...which I could do all at home and it didn't disrupt her. So I had, I had an option which probably made the decision easier....yeah I was really torn was the word, um, between Tasha and work and Tasha came first....It was a very tense couple of weeks. . . But I just couldn't do it....yeah, I just didn't realise the overwhelming sense of responsibility and nurturing that you have, and, and how that is so overpowering, I guess. And it's great. I'm not complaining. And I'm so thankful that I had the choice to be able to pull out and do something else....even yesterday in my job interview I was still feeling torn because I know the time's coming where I do have to go back to work and I have to give up some time and I don't really want to....But, um, yeah, I, I guess the biggest shock for me was my inability to give her up quite as easily as I felt that I would.

[Working from home] was much easier once I got myself organised. Getting yourself organised is quite an effort. And, um, I've always been a fairly organised person and actually, I think there's a few things, you have a baby so that throws your whole routine out. That, that's fine. I think, and also working from home, getting yourself into a routine because you don't have to be out at a particular time was quite

a challenge. But after about a month I got myself there. And when you're given a few deadlines it helps a lot as well. But I did find that as soon as Tasha went off for a sleep I could get in and just mark, or in the latter months when she started to wriggle around the floor happily, she entertains herself pretty well. And, um, so I found that I could mark sort of for an hour or two while she plays on the floor, and I could focus on what I was doing quite well. And, and I actually enjoyed it then....and if she cried I could pick her up then and there.

...I guess by working you're still in contact with your work colleagues and still having that social, adult contact and, more recently I've been involved in a research, um, project and feeling that I'm still able to contribute in a professional sense and balance a baby is a really good feeling. I feel that they, the team appreciate that I have a young one and that I'm not going to make every meeting but they're still willing to allow me to participate. And, and that to me is pretty exciting because I am starting to balance both lives a bit. And at the same time she's still not missing out which is the most important thing to me.

I want my child to learn to build cubby houses...

...I remember thinking who could and who could not babysit Tasha before she was born, and as soon as she was born I revised the whole list. I think I was more protective, she was a lot more precious than I ever imagined she could be. Um, one mother, one woman was a really beautiful woman but her family...they all smoked and I wasn't, it's something I hadn't thought of before I actually had my precious bundle, then I thought, 'oh, there's no way she's going to that house'....I had looked at the local child care centre and thought that I might utilise that and then I thought, 'no' I didn't feel comfortable with that. I guess the fact that children that do go to child care often end up with wogs and colds and things. And, and the fact that when we went into the babies' room and they said, "Oh, you know, at three months they do finger painting and this sort of thing," I, I didn't want my child to be in this structured environment from the first living experience. I just wanted her to be a baby...I mean, they can't do as good a job as I can but I, um, I just didn't like the environment....And I guess I see some of my friends go off to work five days a week and their little ones go to child care and have done from day dot and I really think that they don't have a home life. And I, I sort of was very desperate to give her a home life and let her be a baby as much as we are capable of anyway. So

...just the ability to nurture her and give her stability and, and nurturing comfort....I mean and we're privileged to be able to spend most of our time at home as opposed to having to go to work but I see that we're the parents and we're the primary carers....that's probably a really damning thing to say for people who have to do that [use childcare], but I think...if you're able to nurture and let your child develop with you they, they must benefit from that. I appreciate that not everyone is in that position and if that's what they have to do well that's a great thing for them to be able to have that facility. But, um, it's not what I would want to do. Yeah.. . . because she's with the people she knows and loves and trusts and, and I am the parent and no-one can substitute that role....It's something I didn't expect...I, um, thought that I'd just be quite comfortable and that and, and now I don't know. You know I, I guess I'm looking for every way out of day care.

I, I've booked Tasha into kindy. Um, I'm looking forward to that at three plus years...I have a lot of friends with little ones and we go to swimming once a week, and so I feel that Tasha's socialised...I have another friend whose little ones go to gymnastics and Italian and piano and something else and they're not even four years of age....that's fine for them but I want my child to learn to build cubby houses out of old sheets and run around the garden at home and just be a relaxed happy kid...I was allowed to be a kid and, um, I don't think I suffered academically by not being pushed at three to know the Italian alphabet. That might be a bit scathing, but...Yeah, I thought, 'she's got 12 years of that ahead of her and she doesn't need it'. Um...that whole concept of, yeah, the structure and regimented lifestyle that she'd have.

it's been a really good life

I have a lot of friends here and we see other...so I'm not looking for that extra adult contact, I suppose....I think some mothers feel very isolated, they feel like they can't get their baby out of the house and whilst I was talking about trying not to go out too much I, I can pick up and go. I'm, I don't feel particularly restricted. And I mean there's certainly things that you're more restricted with a child than you have been and, um, but I don't feel closeted by any manner of means. I mean James is great. He's confident with Tasha too so I can, I can go and have my hair cut or I can, I can say, "Here's Tasha I'm gone for two hours or so". Yeah. I, I don't worry. Um, and I suppose having Mum in town too....so, yeah, I, I can do that

sort of thing and I'm, I probably do manage to do that every couple of weeks so, yeah.

Mm, I have kicked back and had coffee with my friends. And it's been a really good life. Very relaxed and, and I guess I've enjoyed that too. I mean, you talk about socialisation, I have socialised with my friends and that's been a lot of fun and I haven't been able to see friends in the way I have for the last nine months. I think, I was saying to one of my friends I think my coffee shop days are coming to a close end, because Tasha's getting a bit more mobile. And I'm enjoying them while I can but, yeah. There'll be other ways.

Our couple relationship has been wonderful....I mean we were always very close and very happy and Tasha hasn't challenged that at all. We just adore her and still have time for one another. Yeah, we can't believe how lucky we are....I, I guess, I mean I think some people worry about going out to dinner and having those dinners and things by yourself whereas we'd rather be with one another and with Tasha. It hasn't been an issue for us in that respect. But we certainly have lots of quality time together and, and I guess the very fact that she's been so placid and she sleeps through and all that sort of thing you do have time together to talk and what have you....

this perfect little bundle

Just the incredible bond that you have with this little person, just from the day, the minute she arrived it's just this overwhelming feeling, overwhelming rush. Oh, yes. Yeah. Then the um smile on James's face. Yeah. I'm, I'll never forget that. Yeah, she was just, mm, just so beautiful. And, and I felt, some mothers say to me they, they feel like they have to spend about three days to get to know their child whereas I felt I knew Tasha. It was just, that was how it was for me. I felt that I'd seen this little person before. Mm. And she was just there. Once I knew that she was all okay. Yeah.

I, I always knew that we wanted children one day and I'm really happy to have taken that step. I suppose it makes you feel you've achieved something wonderful and I suppose complete would, might, might be a way to describe it. I wouldn't have described myself like that. But I can certainly agree with that. Yeah. Um, yeah, it's a, it's a major achievement. And, then to have this perfect little bundle and there's nothing wrong with them and you just feel so lucky...she certainly is our

top priority together. Yeah. And ...and then the three of us, family's always probably been the most important thing to me.... If you're happy and confident at home it's a lot easier to go out...stability and strength and love, and that's what you need.

Sarah

Married for 6 years, 28 year old Sarah was approximately 5 months pregnant when I met and interviewed her at her office. I was struck immediately by Sarah's confident and forthright manner as she talked about her difficult pregnancy, her early misgivings, and her thoughts on mothering and parenting. Sarah also spoke with pride about the business she had built up, revealing an energetic person who enjoys good food, good wine and good friends. Her candour, positive approach to life and self-deprecating sense of humour made her a very engaging person to chat with.

I did expect...to enjoy being pregnant

Ah, I've had a terrible pregnancy. I've felt physically fine but at 16 weeks I got diagnosed with a 9 x 9 cm ovarian cyst. And because I was 16 weeks I was unable to have keyhole surgery. So I had to have quite a major abdominal surgery to get that removed so I've had 8 weeks off....that to me is having a bad pregnancy because I couldn't do anything. . . But, um, yeah, otherwise it's generally been, it's been good. Like I didn't suffer morning sickness or anything like that. But just having surgery was a lot of stress....the risk of, um, going under an anaesthetic. Like even if I wasn't pregnant I'm very scared. Um, and....stressful in the sense of, is everything going to be alright, you know, is the baby going to be okay?. . . what was going to happen? But, like in saying that now, I feel good like....So I think I'm a pretty strong person and you've just got to sort of get over it. Keep going.

Um, falling pregnant wasn't planned as such as, 'I'm ovulating now let's do it' sort of thing. It was more of a, I went off the pill because I, (pause) I was getting really moody....I just said to my partner, you know, we've been together a long time and we're going to eventually have kids but I really wanted to take a break from the pill. And I said, so if I fall pregnant, is this going to be okay? And he was, he's a bit older than me, so he was pretty happy with that (laugh)....and I fell pregnant 6 months later....So. Yes, my obstetrician can't believe I'm having a baby. Because everything, nothing adds up from like, ah, when I'm due from when my last cycle was, and I had an ovarian cyst, and he's, 'it's a miracle'....

Um, I don't think you're ever ready....I think you get to an age and you think, oh, it's going to be time soon, but you can always put it off and I really don't know how I felt....But definitely yeah, no I don't think I was ready as such.

...when it actually happened...how can I say, I felt like I was going through a really big um seven year itch, I suppose, with my partner, and I wasn't sure where I

wanted to be, and I felt like I'd missed out things in my life because we got married young, and I think it was just a big shock. You sort of wait for it to happen, you know it's going to happen, but then when it actually happens you sort of get a bit scared. And, ah, yeah so the first probably three months I found it really hard....But, um, as soon as you have the scans and all that sort of stuff it's pretty amazing and you get a bit excited and you think, oh this isn't so bad. And...this is what we wanted anyway....But...I think I was dealing with things personally, and then I fell pregnant, and then I found it hard to deal with those things.

We weren't going to find out the gender. But, um, I had such a rough few weeks and then, I went back for my check-up, and they told me I didn't have enough embryonic fluid, and I had to see a specialist. And I was just getting so depressed with the, with the pregnancy and I needed to make it a bit more real for myself. And a bit of good news...I'm much more content about having it now and everything seems to just be flowing now and stuff like that, so. Yeah, 'cos I was sort of waiting for the glowing and you know the feeling good and...every time I went back to the specialist he told me something else was wrong. Um, so, I sort of was getting to the point where I thought, oh maybe I'm not supposed to be you know having this baby...and everything's going wrong and maybe this is some sort of bad karma...I mean it's silly to say that out loud but you do, you can't help but think things like that. But, ah, yeah I'm, now that we know I'm much happier....I mean you know things do happen in pregnancy and that there's a high, um, amount of women that miscarry and things like that. But, yeah, I did expect it to be more natural and definitely easier and to enjoy being pregnant....But I think that it's just started late for me....and I, I'm just more positive now....and I'm getting along better with my partner. Like I'm really excited and obviously that reflects off him and he's happy and it just seems like a much happier environment around us.

The birth! The infamous birth

The birth! The infamous birth where, oh God. Where do you begin? Do you begin at breaking water and contractions or do you begin at bloody actually having it? Um, I'm not, I'm scared in the sense, not so much of the pain, I'm not really sure what I'm scared of. I know it's going to hurt. And, I know it's going to be, you know, challenging at times, but, um, yes. How long am I going to be in labour for, is it going to be an easy birth, is it, are they going to leave me hanging for 30 hours and then induce me, or what's going to go on? Definitely. The unknown. Because

everybody's so different....Today I saw a girlfriend who's just had a baby...and she was only in labour for six hours and it was her first baby and she said everything was fine. You know, I said, "did you, did you crack up, did you want to kill your husband, or did you rip his hair out" and she just went, "oh no I was really calm..." and, that's not going to be me! She made it sound too easy. Yeah, and just the...like I'm a bit scared of that being, being torn and that sort of thing.

Ah, you're not in control. And you don't know what's going to happen. And not knowing is the biggest fear anyone could ever have in anything. Not just birth. In, in life....When you're waiting for something to happen...and you're waiting forty weeks and then you think oh my God I've got to push this thing out. What's going to happen? . . . Is it going to be healthy? Am I going to be okay?...And that's probably, that's probably what scares me the most is having a baby and things aren't okay. Because you can only do so much and if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be. . . . Um, that's pretty scary for me....Imagine if...there's something wrong I'd be devastated. Absolutely. Because you bond already. You bond as soon as you start to get a belly or as soon as you ah, feel movement. Like I say, I'm not very maternal but, yeah, I love feeling movement. It's just the most amazing feeling.

just scared of the lifestyle change

Oh, everyone loves telling their horror story. People don't ah, want to tell you all the nice stuff. But, at the end of it they all say the same thing...after the baby's born, you just forget about it....But it's when the baby comes home...mastitis and breast milk and not sleeping and, but you just, you know, you deal with it.

Hard (laugh). Tiring. Ah, I don't, I don't know what to expect. Like I know it's, I know it's going to be testing, I know it's going to be a massive change to our lifestyle and I'm ready for those changes, ah, but I'm just not sure of how big it is going to be. I know that, there's, I'm going to have no time for myself. I know it's going to be really hard to get things done. But, um, yeah, I think if you look at that and realize that, you know, at least I'm trying to mentally prepare myself for it. Not think that it's going to be nice and that we're going to come home and sleep and that it's just going to fall into routine....I don't know how I'm going to cope with not sleeping very well. But apparently it just comes to you. I hope so. Otherwise I'll probably sleep through it. We'll just have to see.

...the older you get you become more selfish with your time, and you, you like your space and you have your routines and just not having to look after anyone else but you and yourself. Or you and your partner. . . And, it was more like oh, oh I'm not going to be able to just...go out for lunch, go out for dinner, just do whatever I sort of wanted to do. And, ah, just scared of the lifestyle change, I think, was the biggest thing for me. And, well I mean I'm not scared of having a baby. I'm not scared of the birth of the baby. I'm quite excited by it all now. But, um, I'm just, just scared of not being able to cope....am I going to have a good baby that's going to be good for me? Am I going to have a nice baby? Am I going to have an ugly baby? (laugh)....Oh I know it sounds silly....And I know that's a silly thing to worry about. It's not like I'm the most beautiful person in the world. But...Yeah. Oh, god, yeah, how do you love an ugly baby? (laugh). I wouldn't want to go out of the house. But, um, I think there is a lot of worries but when you really sit down and you weigh them up you think they're really silly things. . .

I'm probably one of the most irresponsible people I know....But I think having a baby makes you grow pretty quickly in that sort of sense. And when I mean not being responsible I mean I'm always late, I'm terrible with money, I'm just sort of so blasé about things and I, I mean everything falls into place but, ah, I've got to be a little bit more organized and, yeah, taking things more seriously, I suppose. But, that's going to be really hard. Because I'm, because this child's, it's going to rub off on them...

I mean you obviously definitely think of ways of parenting which is going to be the best. If you don't have some sort of plan in place with your partner, it's, it's never going to work. So it's, it is obviously something that you do think about and talk about....I mean I'm not scared that I'll do something silly or anything like that. I've got quite a good support network. Um, and if I know that it's time to maybe have some time away I, I don't think I will be scared to use that help. Ah, but just, I think try and be calm and relaxed, and it's easy to say – I haven't got a baby yet, but, ah, we'll just see how I go. I mean I've got another friend who's having a baby and she just stresses over everything and I just don't think that's good for the baby while it's in you either because they definitely feel your stress. Yeah, so if I can be as calm as I am now I'll be wrapped. But I'll see how I go.

My partner's family [is] up here so's his Mum, and she's really great. I've also got a lot of friends that have got children that are, you know, two or three, or

some of them are having babies now. So I definitely look at what they're doing. And how they're doing it. And what not to do. And what to do as well. I mean you see a lot of what not to dos....You can take a bit from everybody. Hopefully you'll have the perfect baby. But um, yeah it is good. And I ask a lot of questions. I think you need to know as much as you possibly can. I think we [Steve and I] are quite, we're very different people but we're quite similar in the way we want to parent. We have the same outlook, we have the same goals, and we want the same things, at the end of the day and everything's negotiable, I think.

someone that can communicate well with their kids, I think is a really good Mum

(pause) What am I looking forward to? I think just the experience of having a baby and bringing it up, ah, building a relationship with the child and, like ah, I know how I love my Mum, I have a special relationship. I think every kid has a special relationship with their Mum and I can't wait to have that with somebody else other than, you know, your partner. So, it's nice to have a, just that bond...and it's just the next stage of your life and. Yeah, I'm, I'm pretty excited about seeing what she looks like and what sort of person she's going to be, and, you know all that sort of stuff.

I'd like to think that I would be a good Mum but I don't know what I'm going to be like as a Mum....I do enjoy having child around. Like I would like to have a big family. Ah, I see myself as a hard Mum like in the sense of being quite strict, ah, not fluffing around the child too much....I want my kids to be independent and stand for what they like and just be their own individual selves. Um, so I see myself being quite, very supportive of course, but hard. . . Ah, I love having a baby in my arms, and I like the feel of, you know, seeing all the little clothes and little socks and stuff like that. It's beautiful. But...I just I don't know how I'm going to be. It's quite strange to think that I'm going to have this little...um, this, another human and it's, it's going to be coming out of my body and I'm going to have it there physically....am I going to love her with all my, I mean I'm sure I will but, am I going to be a good Mum, and am I going to be able to just – does it come naturally? As soon as you have them does it just, yeah, like click in, 'okay I'm a Mum...' but um, I see what I like, I'm like with my animals, so I think I'll be okay.

I think a good Mum is someone who can communicate well with their kids. Like honestly even about things that may appear to be embarrassing for the parent ...I'm talking older obviously. Um, things like drugs and um, sex, and you know

what's going on at school and, oh, I think a really good Mum is someone who can build not just a mother relationship but a friendship also with, you know, individually with her children....I don't necessarily think that a good Mum is someone who smothers their kids. Um, well obviously I'll love them and I'll kiss them and I'll want to hug them all the time, like I will definitely be a very cuddly Mum. But not to the point where it's just kind of weird.....So, yeah, communication is very important, definitely. Honesty. And ah, yeah, being honest about ah, my, our relationship, like Steve and I, that we like our time alone and getting them to appreciate things as well and not just Mum who...you know, runs around after me all the time but Mum has her, Mum and Dad have their life too sort of thing....But, um, yeah, I, ...my Mum wasn't like that with me and I really, I would have liked to have known about more things, or not have to find them out from other, from other experiences....So yeah, hope I'm a good Mum.

My main concern. Coping. Change. My main concern is that my kids don't go, you know, off the rails in things....Am I going to be, am I going to advise my kids the right path to take in their life? And if they don't take that path and something goes wrong will I blame myself? Because it, you're carrying this child and then you have it and then everything in this human is quite learnt behaviour and so we're teaching it everything we know.... Not, not so much as in successful but I just mean a good person making a good life for themselves. Being, being happy....I mean, obviously there's always going to be problems in life....But I'm talking like major things that affect their life. And that comes back to parenting, I think.

Um, I honestly couldn't really care what other people think. I'm like that naturally. I'm my own person. I've, I think I've turned out alright and I've always sort of lived by that rule. Ah, what other people think doesn't mean anything.. ...that's ah crumbling to social pressure. ...I just can't be bothered with things like that. Um, I don't even know what socially a good mother's supposed to be....It's who you are, and how you're brought up and how you appreciate things. So, yeah. I'm pretty excited though. Scared and excited.

the child is coming into our life, we're not going into it's life

I don't fluff around about having a baby, like I don't stand there and rub my belly all the time like some women do. That drives me mad!....and all they talk about is their baby and what's going on, and pregnancy and you know, you've still got a

life and I'm sure you're doing more than things of just sitting there and thinking about having a baby. . . I think there's going to be enough focus for probably the rest of my life as soon as it's born so I might as well live it up while I can. But, um, yeah, so that's what I mean by not being maternal. It doesn't, it hasn't taken over my life as of yet. Um, I hope it doesn't...where you just feel like saying to people, "Oh go out. Leave the baby at home and go out and have a glass of wine, and talk to some other people about not baby stuff."...and also another thing is people that go absolutely ridiculous about what they're eating and what they're doing. I just have no patience for that at all....Whereas I've, I've eaten everything....I grew up in a European household and that's how I eat....Yeah, so I suppose that is classed as not being too maternal either. Looking after myself.

Um, ah, I definitely would like to make the baby come into our life. I mean obviously, um, going out for dinner and things like that won't be as often, and I'm more than happy to accept that. Ah, but hopefully we can try and fit her into, you know, coming out for dinner, understanding that this is what we do and get her involved in things like that so she will know how to behave....be quite calm around lots of people and, yeah, I, I'd like to fit her into our routine as much as we possibly can....I was brought up in a home where it's really important that the child has come into our life, not, we're revolving around the child's life....I mean in a perfect world of course. But, you know, try and get it into a routine where it goes to bed early so we can have our time together because I think that's really important. And I think that's where a lot of people lose focus in their relationships and they get tired, and I mean it might be really hard for the first six, twelve months to get those routines in place but I think consistency for a baby is good, and routine is good.... I'm quite strict on that. And he is too. So hopefully we....get it together. It all sounds easy, doesn't it? Does it work? Who knows?

(pause) my partner works shift work so when he's on night shift I have a nice bottle of, you know, a couple of glasses of red, I sit in the bath, I put a masque on, I just sort of chill out, I take the phone out of the wall, and I just want some me time to not do anything. Um, I know that that's going to be very hard to have. I will still try and do that and hopefully if my baby sleeps I will be able to do that....Um, I know that all the selfish time is going to have to be gone for the first six months at least but I'm prepared to take that. But I definitely won't be forgetting about it....Because I've

seen too many friends who go like that and I'm going to be really honest, their kids are out of control. Like in the sense of they're so needy...and, I don't want that.

...I couldn't imagine just becoming....Like someone that just, sits, sits at home and waits for husband to come home and has dinner on the table and the kids are bathed and washed and, I mean I don't want to have a madhouse but I don't want to have baked cookies every night. Like, that wouldn't be me. Yeah. I'm still a person and I still want to be that person. Just because I'm having a child shouldn't mean that my life has to end and I have to become neglectful to myself...but, ah, please don't let me change!. . . And I just couldn't imagine sitting at home sewing buttons on shirts and things.

I don't want to lose focus in what I've worked so hard to build.

The income is important, extremely important....like our business is doing really well. My partner's about to leave his job and go part time. So he can obviously help with the baby. And, ah, yeah, it's, it's very important. You know, it's losing a big income out of us and all that, you know a lot of benefits. . . I'm here every day, but I generally don't come in until around 10 or 11 o'clock and I'm usually gone by four so, I've got the freedom to be in and out so.... Um, and I've just actually enrolled us at...day-care. So, only because the waiting list is so long. I think that day care is a really good thing for kids...Bit of socialisation and a bit of learning...

...this is my livelihood. Like I've, um, I've built this business from nothing and it's still, it's only been two years and I don't want to lose focus in what I've worked so hard to build....If I could I really would like to come back as soon as I could. Like I'm talking 4 to 6 weeks. But that also depends on if I can have a natural birth, if I have to have a ceasar birth. There's lots of ifs and buts and, it's just what I'd like to do. You know I'd hate my business to go under just 'cos I'd had a baby. So yeah, As soon as I possibly can.

No, it's a big change. I'm ready. I'm ready for the change. I'm scared. But, um, yeah, I'm starting to get more ready. Every, every week I think you get a little bit more and a little bit more and you just think, ah, let's hurry up. Let's have this thing....Yeah. I feel like it's happening. And then as soon as I have it I'll be going "put it back in!" I want that time again! But, no, we'll be fine. I'll be fine. It's good. Oh, let's hope that it's all still the same, after I've had the baby.

Naomi was 10 months old when Sarah and I finally caught up. Once again Sarah came across as supremely comfortable in her own skin and certainly appeared to be enjoying motherhood. Throughout the interview Naomi played at our feet with Sarah interspersing our discussion with comments to the baby as well as practical needs such as nappy changes and nap time. When we finished, Sarah commented that she had enjoyed talking, and that it had been good to focus her thoughts. This was an enjoyable encounter as motherhood appears to have rounded out Sarah's, what she herself called, 'great life'.

I had to have an emergency caesar and um for the record I'm a bit rapt! . . . things got a little bit worse [after the first chat]...and um I had to go see a specialist, they told me I might have to have her at 26 weeks. And so that was extremely stressful...and I had to be monitored weekly and all that sort of stuff and then um 32 weeks I said to my husband, "Something is wrong with me," and he told me, "Stop being silly, you're alright," because he's a paramedic and he thinks that um you know you've got be dying...before something's wrong. And I said, "No I feel sick, I feel sick all the time". And I said "So I'm going to go into the hospital before I go to work"...and they told me that she was lying transverse...not vertically. And if she hadn't turned in the next 2 weeks I would have to have a Caesar and get her out. So I had to lie on my back with my forever growing bum....And then they booked me in for a caesar at 38 weeks and I went into my doctor at 36 ½ weeks and I said, "Get this thing out of me now! I'm not sleeping, I'm uncomfortable, it's stressful, just I feel sick". Because I was so high I felt like my stomach was in my throat everyday. Anyway he said, "We want to wait until 38 weeks," and then that night I went into early labour and he had to come in at 4:00 in the morning and get her out....So I'm a bit thankful because everyone around me who's had natural birth has been horrific....If I have another baby...I'm just going to go straight for the caesar again.

And then I breastfed....and I found that really easy. I was pretty lucky I think...I think she was just, well even with feeding her solids now she just eats anything so, she was just hungry I suppose...But I only did that for 4 months. So I just sort of had enough....It was too hard...Um, just for trying to run a business and leaving her with other people and I was constantly feeding, expressing and um I had the most ridiculous mammarys – they were just so big. And because I was expressing extra feeds it just got too much. And she had really bad colic....whatever I was eating was going straight through me and into her milk and was really affecting her. Um she had a lot of bowel issues....just I was probably getting down about it

like it was really starting to affect my life and I was getting quite...uptight and angry about it I suppose because I felt like I was just like a big fat cow – like I'm trying to live life, like I definitely just didn't stop doing things, but then I had to think about when milk's coming down, if I'm out shopping [are] my boobs gonna leak, and it was just causing me more grief and because she was sick...I just had to weigh up the situation. I know they want you to do at least 6-12 months but it's just I gotta think about my own health as well. And it was getting me just down. Really down. Doesn't make me any less of a mum though.

it's as hard as you make it

Went back to work, um, the second day I got out of hospital. I was in and out of work every day, even if it was only for an hour. There were days where the girls just sort of phoned me, "oh, it's not that busy today" or things like that. . . So but um I went back pretty much straight away. On the way home from the hospital we stopped via work. So I know that's pretty sad. But it's not like I work full days....I might only go in for 2 or 3 hours – but I just have actually just gone back to 3 full days a week, which I enjoy very much.

I think it's as hard as you make it, I honestly do. Like um Naomi doesn't, she doesn't get...she doesn't miss out on things because I have to work or any attention or I don't feel my work suffers because I don't take her to work anymore but she is my priority. And then, if she's having a bad morning that just means I'm in an hour late for work. But I have the flexibility with work so that's where I probably don't find it as a juggle of doing it...I don't find it difficult at all.

...I enjoy what I do, um I find it mentally stimulating to go back and talk about work and talk about things that are going on....Because I don't like to talk about babies all the time, because I feel like that's all I do....Um, I don't know if I'd call it a break. . . Because I really enjoy being a mum, so I'm quite happy to do it every day. I suppose it is a break because I do like the mental stimulation and that's what it's about. Me time is the gym. She goes in the crèche for an hour and I go and work out. So that's, yeah I suppose it is a type of break but I've never really thought about it like that.

...Steve works 4 days a week and has 3 days off so that's pretty good. And...every Friday they have their day together and....she's in daycare 2 days a week...she gets that break away from both of us, socially, mentally....Yeah so....I

wanted her to go to...learn how to share and be around other kids and catch every bug there is. Umm...And she enjoys it so....But I think we would have regretted him going to part-time from a full-time job when I look at how easy she is now. Because it's only really the first 6-8 weeks...that was the probably the hardest time.

He does washing and cleans up the house and he...he definitely puts in more than...me. But I think that he, because Naomi has only started to go to daycare for the last 3 weeks, so before that she was coming to work with me everyday so I think he, well he saw my preparation every night....Had to pack the car, unpack the car, work all day, look after her while I'm working, come home and because he was home late I used to have to feed her, bath her, play with her, put her to bed, do all those sort of things and then make dinner because he wasn't getting home until after 7. So I think he sort of looked at that and realised that if he dared ask me to clean the house I probably would have asked him to leave (laugh)....he could see how hectic my life really was, I wasn't a stay-at-home mum from the start....Yeah I don't think it's very common that a lot of men help, because I know a lot of my girlfriends whinge that their husbands don't do very much.

you've got to make that time for each other

Every week we have a night without her. She stays at her nana's place, so we generally go out for dinner...together and things like that. Ah, but yep we still go out a lot with her as well....I think that's probably why I don't struggle a lot of times....But the thing is like we talk about her obviously, I mean we talk about other things too but...he doesn't get to see her three nights a week because she's in bed by the time he gets home. So yeah...we definitely get a break.

I'd be lying if I said that everything was fantastic and whatever but. . . Definitely there's times where you get, I find myself a little bit more emotional sometimes, um and he doesn't say the right thing and I can get quite cranky about it. Um...the older she gets the happier we're becoming again because I suppose it's getting easier. So definitely it impacts on your relationship to a degree but you've got to make that time for each other....having that one night a week is really important for...us to keep a little bit of normality of who we were before we had a baby....and I suppose....if you lose your sex drive...that affects your relationship because it's one thing that you and your partner have that no-one else can share and if you're not doing it, you know, what have you got? If you don't get that time alone

together you just, you just get caught in a rut I think...And that's happened to us definitely where we've just had times where we have just been at each other's throat but um pretty minimal I think. You just become really tired and uh when...especially when she was on feeding through the night and you have 3 hours...like dead sleep but that's all you're really getting and....Even though your partner's in bed they're not asleep and it affects them too and um things seem so much worse when you're tired. Like the simplest thing...like someone didn't put the milk in the fridge or you know....So I try and be a bit realistic about as much as I possibly can. . .

she obviously comes first

...I come last at the end of the day. So, but I'm happy to do that. Some days obviously when I'm a little bit maybe hormonal or emotional....Um. . . but it means that if I want to do something I have to wait til last. . . she obviously comes first, her priorities. To a degree, that is, I mean things like feeding times and not so much routine stuff because I'm not that strict on the routine. I am to a certain point but I'm not anally retentive about it where I won't leave the house if she has to have a sleep then you know, she'll just have to learn to sleep in the car or...in the um pram.. . . With gym for instance when she was baby-baby, like still breast fed it meant I had to go late at night when she was in bed. . . And just trying to run a household, trying to get things done. . .

I love her that much that I look at that little face and I just, I don't want to be selfish because she is a part of my life and I just I wouldn't want to not have her, and, it's really weird, I didn't think I'd be like that....Because if she's happy and she's content that makes my life a lot more easier and I mean if that means making sure she's fed on time or she's like all up to date with...things that she needs....then I can do things anyway. Definitely not angry. Look at that face, how could you be angry?

I have to take a lot more stuff in the car. That's changed. And be a little more organised with where I'm going, what I have to take and things like that.... Sometimes like I, I get a bit cranky because....important things I was always on time, and now I'm always late....but people realise that I think, because it just takes, I'm not that good yet at prioritising how long its gonna take me sometime, because every day is unpredictable. You can't say it takes me three minutes to do this every day because she might have. . . I'm just about to walk out the door and she might poo her nappy, she might be screaming....Yeah no, she um, I'm pretty lucky that she's so

good because she has lived a lot of her young little life in the car, a lot of it....but I think that's made her what she is I suppose.. . . women that I've seen who revolve their life around their baby are probably the most highly stressed, unhappy in their relationships, in their life, because the baby rules their life. And I find that really sad. Really, really sad. Because they're a joy. Like she is just the best thing that's ever happened to me and Steve. And um...I want to show her off. I don't want to sit here in four walls and go crazy and feel like I can't go because she's gonna cry. She's gonna cry, she's a baby. People understand that babies cry. And those people that don't, well....I don't care what they think.

...they [babies] can scream and throw themselves on the floor as far as I'm concerned. I'm just gonna leave her because that's just not acceptable. I will not put up with that. Like I had to give her a smack the other day (laugh). Um because she keeps pulling her hat off, and I know that she's not used to having something on her head and it's learning but...I've told her "No" probably 15-20 times and I ...I know she doesn't understand totally what we're saying but it's gotta start from somewhere. You can't just "Oh yes, yes" until they're 5 and then start telling them off for it....Like I warned her, "Don't you take that hat off again, I'll smack you" And she just looked at me and threw the hat and I grabbed that hat and I put it on her head and I smacked her on the hand and she's looked at me and she grabbed it and threw it off again so I grabbed the hat and I pulled it on, and I smacked her a little bit harder. . . Not hard but, it, the sound, she looked at me and she just bottom lip dropped and she cried and cried. I just said, "Don't you take that hat off again or I'm gonna smack you again," and I just turned around with the pusher and I just started wheeling it and people were looking at me. And my heart was in my throat, I don't want to be like that. But do you know what? She hasn't taken her hat off since. I'm not saying I bash her or anything like that but I'm a big believer in discipline....God, it's, and like I, it did...like it really upset me but I can't show her that because I feel if you go back on your word, that's when the trouble begins. . . It's nothing to do with [other people]....they don't have to go home and deal with the consequences of a spoilt, tantrum- throwing brat that it's gonna turn into and I have a niece and nephew that...are out of control and I don't want her to be like that...That's how I feel as a parent. And um...we both agreed on how we wanted to parent and our views have not changed one bit. If anything, they're probably stronger.

I felt like the worst mum in the world

Yes I have felt guilty...Um...I started controlled crying from the day we pretty much brought her home from the hospital. Uh we let her go, obviously to not a crazy extent of hours...we'd go in and check on her every 5-10 minutes, pat her on the head, give her a kiss, walk out, never pick her up. If it went over 20 minutes...I'd pick her up and reassure her and put her back down...then she just cried all, like screamed and screamed and it was horrific....Three really bad days that I can remember like yesterday and um she screamed from 5 o'clock in the morning til 8 o'clock at night constantly, constantly with probably 15 minute intervals where she was just exhausted. She'd have a power nap and scream, couldn't feed her, couldn't do anything. I had to call my mother-in-law over and said, "You've gotta come over and help me. I'm not coping. I need to get out of the house just for half an hour," and that made me feel guilty a little bit like leaving her. But I just, I couldn't handle it, like....After 11 weeks she was still going and my mum came up and helped me and um she said, "Sarah, it's not a cry for attention there's something wrong with her," and I said, "Well, I'm on the homeopathic colic stuff," the chemist recommended it...I thought that she had colic but I wasn't quite sure, to be honest, what that meant. Um because every time a baby cries people say, "Oh it's colic" or "it's teething" or it's you know it's never just crying for the sake of crying.

And...my mum said, "Come on we're going to the doctors."...and my doctor said just, "Oh yeah she's definitely got colic, you need to put her on Infacol" and I started Infacol and she never cried like that again so I had 11 weeks of controlled crying for my little girl having colic and I felt like the worst mum in the world...I felt so guilty because she was crying and screaming and my husband and I we'd sit here and go, "We've gotta let her go." I used to actually go out in the backyard and do washing so I could not hear her. And um yeah it was awful, I felt so guilty.

...like, [I] cried like just broke down because I just didn't think I could cope....And that probably was probably my lowest, lowest point....You don't know how long it's gonna go on for and when you're tired and they're screaming, you constantly think the worst thing. So...not...just depr...just felt down in myself a little bit of a failure you know. . . That's probably the most guilty. I felt guilty for leaving her...but I was it was really doing my head in. Um because it just didn't stop. It was so awful....but it didn't matter what I did I couldn't help her. You know, it was terrible. So I've had a few guilty moments like that....like questioned if I've

been a good mum. Um have I done the right thing? What are people going to think if they know that I let her go for that long. But then I had a good midwife...and she said "Look, it happens all the time..." You know. "You don't know, being a first time mum, you're still working out her different cries." And um she made me feel that it was a common occurrence...I felt better after that too (laughing). Because like, you can't help but compare yourself to people that you know and as much as...you don't want to. . .

the worst thing about mothering is mothers

Women that get back into their jeans after like 3 months and don't do any exercise [annoy me]...And eat crap all day and I exercise and eat bugger all and can't shift it. Because I had an inactive thyroid after I had a baby. And then they say to me, "You've gotta move it to lose it" and you know....that's the worst thing about mothering is mothers. Like just the comparison. That's probably the thing that shifts me the most. Because it is a big competition for a lot of people, that don't have much in their life and need to get out a bit more. Um, yeah everything is comparing – not just with babies....you can see how mothers groups become so bitchy...

We started off with 7 women, and there's 4 of us that are close....like we all met through the postnatal programme at the hospital...A lot of women in that group um obviously confidence was a big issue for them and that like it is overwhelming but...you need these support networks when times are tough....No-one should be judging you in your mothers group anyway because that's what they're supposed to be about but sadly they do. Some women do. One of the women phoned me and said, "Are you interested in being in a mother's group with me, such and such, and such and such"...she said, "Because I'm not interested in the other women. I just want to go to a park once a month"....it's easy, it's not about someone's house anymore. . . And I was actually really rapt because you could see the bonds that were forming between some people....The hardest thing for me is that my sister-in-law was one of the people that was segregated. . . And um that put me in a really difficult situation uh because she is one of those people that really needed the support but yet she brought her own shit on herself....she's quite, not maternal....And new mums don't want to see that – I mean you don't have to be dotey and carrying on but....um I just think that some people just aren't mums....They're not interested in talking about their baby or how they're going. They're more interested in talking about themselves....not that you want to talk about your baby all the time but when

you're first getting to know these women that's all you – all you do have in common.....But yep...these women that have been a little bit segregated...were more selfish and talked about themselves. And sort of left the babies a little bit – a bit too much....just not mums in that way when you're meant to be at a mothers group. And that's the whole...it's not like out for dinner or with your mates....

um now our kids just seem to be cruising....we don't have to talk about poo anymore and how many wees and what are you feeding them...And um even though it started about the babies now it is an actual friendship. So definitely spoke about negative stuff when they were...like newborn....And now we're all back at work it's about, we talk about our relationships and things now so it's good in that, it doesn't seem to be comparing....I think that the smaller the mother's group the better they are. The bigger, the nastier, the bitchier, the competition...“My baby's done this and your baby's behind” and it's just sad really...Yeah mothers groups are funny things.

....[some mums] put on a bit of a – a bit of a show all the time...no-one else [at the group] was there being fake and people were quite open about like for some people it was about sex you know...one girl said “oh, I'm really, I don't feel like sex....” and I've gone, “Well neither do I. Are we normal?” and “Oh, Yeah it's fine” and then the next one will go, “We haven't had sex for 8 weeks either.” And like no-one made anyone feel less intimidated by having a problem...and then we'd laugh...or someone might say, “Well, I don't have a problem with that, but I do this...”

...there's one um woman....I really liked her and I made an effort with her and so on but she is really frustrating...[she and her partner] revolve their life around the baby...I can only see her on between 2 and 4 no 2:30 and 4 but at 4 o'clock I'm asked to leave because he goes in his pram for a walk....that sort of behaviour, like I just think it's. . . It's strange. Yeah it's routine, and we try and we're all in the same situations but a friendship is something that is a two-way street and you can't expect people to change their lives to revolve around with your routine....I said, “Oh well, if that's your life, that's your decision. I mean I have my ways of doing things and that's just the way that we are but I don't let my baby rule my life.” And um she said, “Oh yes but Naomi's so good. You can take her anywhere,” and I just said to her, “Well, she's been like that since the day she's come out of hospital,”. . . like the second night we got home from hospital...we went out for dinner....Naomi had to know that that was a part of her life, not “I can only see you between 2.30 and 4” I'd

die if I said that to someone –like how embarrassing....I think she...she must feel a bit alone....

Yeah – mums are strange. Like it is – everybody is so different and. . . I suppose because I cope pretty well and um I’m pretty happy with who I am and the way that I do things and I’m quite pleased with my life. . . I suppose things don’t worry me except stupidity things like that...I just find that ridiculous. Absolutely.

I love it, it's the best thing that's ever happened to me

Every morning when I wake up and I see that little face, staring up at the cot. Just because they just love you, they love you so much. Like I love my animals. . . before I had the baby, yeah, they were like my babies and I’d come home and they’d be so excited and you could see the excitement in their eyes. I see that in her eyes you know like first thing in the morning she’s like ‘Oh, mum’s here – great! We’re gonna play’. And then when...you know I don’t like it when she’s sick but I, now that she’s older when she’s sick I love the fact that she wants me to hug her and she just wants to be close and it’s nice to feel so needed and loved I suppose because. . . You’re loved by your family and everybody around you and things like that but it’s different. It’s a completely different need and love and they’re so innocent and you’ve got to teach them the way. I love it. I just, I just love her heaps.

I think um a lot of it [mothering] is a natural instinct with certain things. But in saying that (talking to baby - Gee you’re noisy Miss Moo!) um. . . I think a lot of it is how you’ve been brought up because um I think that I’m a lot like my own mum....I don’t think it is for all mums. Um, I’ve got someone extremely close to me that is not a natural mum at all and really struggles. Um, and like her mum is exactly the same. Like very selfish with her time and not interested in the baby. So it’s been a natural process for me but I think it’s because of...my mum’s maternal instincts, which I’m obviously similar to. That other lady’s obviously not very maternal at all and I’m definitely nothing like her at all.

Um.... She speaks to that baby awful....Like...I’ve heard her like call him an idiot a few times and just heartbreaking for me. Like I just....I up her and I say, “he’s a baby...just stop it,” “Don’t speak to him like that” because...they don’t know....I’ve seen him sit in a highchair and throw something on the ground and I’ve seen her throw a tea towel at him....and go, “Well if you’re gonna throw something, I’m gonna throw something.”...that sort of behaviour is just ridiculous....that’s not

being a mum or a leader or a teacher or a peer, it's being an idiot. It's being someone that shouldn't have had a baby to me... Yeah I'm sure I'm gonna have times where I'm going to be so angry um that I'm probably gonna fly off the handle and say the wrong thing and it's gonna be upsetting for her but it's gonna hurt me just as much. . . Just as much. And she just doesn't seem to have that regret or um...embarrassment or anything like that....And I just think that's...like a type of abuse....So that's gotta be not maternal doesn't it? ...Like this is also a woman that gave birth and naturally...and you know they automatically put them on your breast and she said, "Get that thing off me!" and then vomited everywhere and didn't want to touch him. Did not want to touch him. But that's what happens when your partner pushes you into having a baby.....What sort of mum says that to a new baby? Yeah they've got blood and they look gross but in your eyes they're beautiful. I look back and she was ugly. . . (laughing) but I remember, I cried I just couldn't believe that I had something so beautiful and have her inside you all that time and finally see her little face....So yeah I'm maternal. Well compared to that (laugh). Yeah. So....How about a bit of a hug and kiss and tell them you love them? And a bit of nurture and a bit of good stuff....Yes, it's really hard to understand how people can not see that.

I suppose I had no expectations. If you go on with no expectations you're not let down. So, I know that I was always good with kids. I was a bit worried about my patience because sometimes I can be really impatient but...I suppose, I've become more relaxed and happier with the person that I am, within myself. And I suppose that just all comes together and makes you a good mum, a relaxed person, a good wife, a business woman, ah god I feel like I'm supernanny, supermum! But (laugh) God hail the supermum! But um yeah I think it's like I said at the start it's as hard as you make it and if you try and prioritise everything evenly, as much as you can, it sort of all just comes together and it's fine. But yeah I love it more than what I thought. But I think it's because she's good too.

She started sleeping through the nights from 6 weeks....Um. . . she loves interacting with other kids....Um...I can leave her in her playpen...and she will entertain herself for 2 and a half hours...you'll hear her laughing. She's generally happy I'd say 80-85% of the time. She will go to anybody um....She's got it, we've got it pretty good together. We've definitely got it going on...like I think she knows when I'm cranky....when I need a sleep in, because she sleeps in til 8 (laugh).

Definitely feel confident as a mother. I have days where I doubt myself about situations where, 'am I doing it wrong'? Um, but surely that would be a common thing that women, that confident, good mums would do I think....If you think you're perfect and you don't question yourself well there's definitely a problem there....As much as I tell my husband I'm right all the time, I can tell you right now sometimes I'm fibbing (laugh)....I'm confident in what I do, but yeah definitely there is some doubt in certain situations. She's so beautiful, she's so beautiful; I just want to bite her. . . You know when you just get...So excited, you just mmm...(laugh). Just want to bite you! Show you how much I love you.

I love it, it's the best thing that's ever happened to me and I, I've been very very lucky my whole life and things have always just happened and for the right reasons and uh it's just another...another journey I suppose and I've been very blessed that she's just so good. But that also reflects on the job that Steve and I do as well. Obviously she's got her own personality and things like that but we show her lots of love and affection and lots of teaching but yet give her her independence to be able to entertain herself. Gotta get that balance....Like we went to Melbourne and I had a friend there with a 3 year old and she was still up at 1 o'clock in the morning because they could not get her to bed....that child is running their life. I'm. . . absolutely not doing that....Well, I was someone, my husband was someone, we were somebody and um she's come into our life. Yeah she gets a lot of time...but she's also got to respect ours....Like I do sound a little bit harsh on her I know but I'm hopping down the track I'll be thankful....Maybe I am selfish? Here I am saying I get left 'til last but do I really? (laugh)

Yeah, I am happy with how I am. It's um it's a lot more rewarding [than I expected] and I have found myself a lot more relaxed in a lot of situations like um things don't worry me because that's, my family now is my priority and I'm happy with that. I'm more content in myself I suppose and um it's just been the most rewarding beautiful thing. . . I'm hanging to have more. Yeah. We're already trying (laughing). As long as they're all as good as her!