



THE MOTHER-ARTIST MODEL:
TRANSFORMING MATERNAL REGIONALISM THROUGH
ART PRACTICE AND CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

An Exegesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Coming from the position of being a mother and a contemporary artist-researcher in a regional university setting, this practice-led project asserts that my mother and artist identities are interwoven in my life and art practice. Drawing on this personal experience of blurring art and life, my project seeks to examine how the role of the mother and artist is seen in the context of the mother-child dynamic. Central to this enquiry is my development of, and what I refer to as, the 'Mother-Artist Model' (MAM). This model serves as a resource for approaches to creativity and art-making that is mother-artist and child focussed. My model seeks to respond to a lack of conceptualising of the mother-artist relationship whereby engagement between mother and child is the central catalyst for creative exchange. Practice-led research employing an autoethnographic framework, and the MAM itself, form the methodological approach for the study. Therefore, the Mother-Artist Model acts as the intersection between the creative practice component (70%) and exegetical component (30%) of this study. The model's uniqueness lies in embracing an *authentic* mother-artist experience within this shifting and complex mother-child interrelationship as a sustainable approach to contemporary art practice. Through the MAM, I produce artwork that renders the authentic and intersubjective relationship that I have with my children, visible.

By interweaving art and life, the model draws on mothering attributes of adaptability and resiliency experienced through the motherhood role. The model also draws on key tropes which can serve as assets for transforming artistic production, as well as providing visibility to regional mother-artists nationally and internationally (Needham et al. 2016, p.3). Using the MAM, I explore the dichotomies of uncomfortable truths and the times of bonding triumphs through constructed narratives in my installation and video works. Through this, I have created a powerful space of agency for my children, and a voice for myself as a mother-artist. In creating this platform for a mother-artist-child agency, this subverts the patriarchal societal norms about 'good' mothers (Pedersen 2016). Further, this platform for agency gives a voice to regional mother-artists to provide them with opportunities that are equal to their

metropolitan counterparts. The equality in agency also requires consideration of ethical and familial boundaries in my personal context as well as the broader community of regional mother-artists. That is, this project applies the MAM to contemporary mother-artist research participants, to further explore whether the model holds adaptive strategies to creative practices and can be a conduit in forming collective networks and communities. Within this broader study context, my development of the MAM serves as a response to the research problem of 'maternal periphery'. Maternal periphery involves the historical and ongoing tendency for a mother-artist to separate out her thinking, feeling and moving body and shift it to the periphery so as not to 'contaminate' political and theoretical arts discourse (Boulous Walker 1998). For women, this separation between the mother and artist role(s) has been a means of 'protecting' her career identity as a 'serious' artist (Liss 2009). Further, my research considers how the networking communities developed through the MAM can overcome the challenges of maternal periphery through collective dialogue and exchange of artistic practice. By making a broader collective of mother-artist works public through the MAM, the project contributes to the disruption of the previous 'private' concerns of motherhood as being peripheral or regional (maternal regionalism). Sharing these concerns through a supportive collective network provides a powerful and meaningful exchange for mother-artists in its centralising of the maternal focus.

CERTIFICATION OF EXEGESIS

This exegesis is entirely the work of Linda Clark, except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Beata Batorowicz

Associate Supervisor: Associate Professor Margaret Baguley

Associate Supervisor: Associate Professor Janet McDonald

Student and supervisor's signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining the Study Through the Mother-Artist Model (MAM)

This practice-led study draws on my personal experience as a mother and a contemporary artist-researcher in a regional setting. The inquiry explores my mother and artist roles as intertwined and informing each other in my life, art practice and study, hence the term 'mother-artist'. Importantly, as a mother-artist, my very relationship with my children has, over time, become a catalyst for artmaking and a creative methodology of working in itself (Clark 2014, p. 14). In this way, my approach to practice-led research encompasses making art *from* motherhood, not *about* motherhood (Clayton 2017). Working from this premise acknowledges the need for my children, and I as a mother-artist, to assert our independent agency within this creative process of exchange. Considering the mother-artist-child agency more broadly, my project offers an additional layer and extension to current feminist theoretical approaches. While contemporary feminist approaches explore the 'complexities of the maternal *in* and *as* art', they are mainly focussed on the affective capacity in maternal labour and experience from a mother's perspective (Loveless 2018, p. 8). Rather than discrediting the power that exists in the maternal experience, this project expands on these powerful and crucial adaptive responsivity strategies that mother-artists learn and experience with their children from their interrelationship.

From this space of mother-artist and child interrelationship, my project builds on Natalie Loveless' concept of mother-artists' enactment of adaptability in maternal art practice as 'thinking with the urgency, interruption and responsivity of those early maternal years' (Loveless 2018, p. 8). Importantly, the significance of my project is that it applies these adaptive strategies while working from within mother-artist and child relationships through art practice itself, in order to develop more powerful visual arguments *by* and *for* mother-artists. Artist Eti Wade has begun some initial exploration on the mother-artist-child interrelationship discourse by positing a category for this intersubjective exploration as 'Intersubjective Maternalist Trace' (Wade 2016). However, the dialogue on this specific intersubjective approach has not been widely investigated until recently (Cartwright 2017, p. 321). In turn, this

project significantly contributes to the discourse on maternal intersubjectivity through developing both visual and theoretical arguments as significant responses to the limited dialogue in this field.

As a central research contribution, I have designed and developed a Mother-Artist Model (MAM) as a conceptual framework for practice. This model addresses the need for a practice and a methodology that centralises the changing mother-child relationship as a sustainable artmaking approach for mother-artists, and as a centre for agency for mother and child. Further, this platform for agency gives a voice to regional mother-artists, to provide them with career opportunities equal to their metropolitan counterparts (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017). In doing so, this study identifies three key functions of the MAM. Firstly, the MAM is used to inform and develop my own practice through the process of interacting and engaging with my children. Consequently, in this research project, I have created non-traditional research outputs through my own artistic practice. The MAM serves as a framework for applying our mother-child interactions as process-driven creative outcomes. In doing so, the MAM's second function has become a methodology within itself. That is, as a methodology, the MAM is the central framework for why the research study has been undertaken, how the research problem has been defined, in what way and why the hypothesis has been formulated, what data has been collected and what particular methods I have adopted, and why particular technique of analysing data has been used (Kothari 2014, p. 8). Further, the MAM interrogates the adaptability inherent in my practice which facilitates a resiliency to overcome the perceived ideological and practical obstacles to artmaking that motherhood and regionalism brings (Skrzynski, cited in Epp Buller 2016, p. 191). Throughout MAM's methodological framework, I have employed an autoethnographic approach to provide further understandings of the mother-artist from my own unique perspective.¹ Thirdly, through my use of the MAM in my own individual practice, I have identified the MAM's capacity to be further applied and expanded within a

¹ Autoethnography is 'the process as well as the product of writing about the personal and its relationship to culture' (Scott-Hoy & Ellis 2008, p. 130). Autoethnography is constructed of three major components: a description of the Self, an analysis of the Self, and a re-presentation of the Self (Austin 2005).

broader mother-artist collective exchange. In facilitating the extension of the MAM into the collective context, I have shared and utilised the MAM with five contemporary visual artists who are also mothers from regional Australian and international areas. Throughout this study, these mother-artists are known by the pseudonyms Sally, Cadee, Renee, Amber and Jessica.² In this research project I carried out structured interviews and a semi-structured focus group with the mother-artist participants, and a curated exhibition of the work of these participants as well as my own work. The mother-artists' works will be presented in the curated group exhibition titled *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model* at the USQ Arts Gallery, Toowoomba Campus. This collective mother-artist exhibition is accompanied by my own solo exhibition at the adjacent USQ Red Door Gallery. This two-part exhibition showcase is part of the creative outcome of this research project. Importantly, the MAM acts as the intersection between the creative practice component (70% weighting) and exegetical component (30% weighting) of this study.

In this practice-led research, the three key functions of the MAM are also interconnected as they each inform and respond to my research through a process of reflexive practice. Reflexive practice can be defined as interrogating practice, both objectively and subjectively, to confront how creativity is constructed and legitimated through negotiation with institutional paradigms (Crouch 2007, p. 108). Within this, self-reflexive practice interrogates an artist's own creative insights. For example, my self-reflexive inquiry is directed through my own practice using the MAM, and also informed by discipline-specific knowledge, to uncover alternative viewpoints to explore through subsequent artmaking (Sullivan 2010). I then consider the practice-led alternative viewpoints that were uncovered through this self-reflexive inquiry, in context with the research findings from the participants' use of the MAM. Through this reflexive process, I uncover key insights into the use of the MAM in practice and, consequently, review conceptual strategies to reveal new

² For the purposes of this study, pseudonyms have been employed as per the ethics approval, to protect the identity of the participant's children.

approaches to artmaking from a mother-artist-child perspective. Through this, I also seek to enact change by questioning and responding to problems uncovered through this reflexive process (Sullivan 2010, p. 110). From this reflexive and self-reflexive practice, insights into the authentic intersubjective maternal experience are revealed and drawn upon as conceptual strategies. Therefore, reflexive practice has been a key process in the development of the MAM as a model and a methodology.

My development of the MAM as a practice model and as a methodology offsets the ingrained and often negative social perceptions affiliated with the concept of the maternal in visual art (Stadtman Tucker, cited in O'Reilly 2010, p. 27; Kosmala 2017, p. 88). The MAM's unique contribution of focussing on the daily lived experiences between mother-child subsequently exposes the social constructs of the 'good' or 'ideal' mother. This 'ideal' mother is unattainable, representing 'selflessness and all-encompassing commitment to motherhood' portrayed within the broader field (Maher & Saugeres 2007, p. 6). My project exposes these constructs by highlighting that there are differences in how women engage with the cultural and social construct of the 'ideal or good' mother (Maher & Saugeres 2007, p. 6). For example, the debate in psychoanalysis 'over an innate, essential femininity versus a sexually constructed one defined by culture' (Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 5) has relevance here. Sherry Ortner (1972) states that Nancy Chodorow argues in *Family Structure and Feminine Personality*, that human psychic structure is not innate, but rather is generated by a system of 'universal' female socialisation experiences (Chodorow, cited in Ortner 1972, p. 26). Ortner (1972) contends that although not genetically programmed, a child's psychological structure is learned through identification with the mother in traditional domestic structures where the mother is a primary carer. To add to the complexity, in regional areas, the social construct of 'ideal' mother may differ from those in metropolitan areas (Reid, Crockett and Mason 2012, p. 8).³ This demonstrates that each mother-artist holds a different construction of her own 'ideal' motherhood and therefore, a different engagement with her child, and these constructs can be explored in a self-reflexive way through the MAM in practice.

³ For example, according to Reid, Crockett and Mason (2012) regional mothers may see family as a source of support and power rather than oppression.

In the past, these negative perceptions or constructions of motherhood have resulted in authentic mothering experiences being side-lined as a way of separating the mother role from her artist identity, known as 'maternal periphery' (Liss 2009). In this exegesis, the term 'authentic' means experiences from the perspective of the mother and child, each with a different cultural or social perspective, interpreted through artwork from the perspective of the mother-artist. The term 'authentic' is also used to emphasise the constantly shifting, idiosyncratic and intersubjective relationship between mother and child (ed. Epp Buller 2012, p. 8). The use of the term 'authenticity' challenges the traditional aesthetic theory perspective and subscribes to Dutton's explanation of expressive authenticity as a personal expression of (mother and child) experiences, being true to one's artistic self rather than true to historical tradition (Dutton 2005, p. 267). A central objective in my study is for this form of mother-child relationship to be recognised as a valid and inductive creative motivator and process facilitator within contemporary art.

In this study, there are three key terms that expand on the term 'maternal' in light of my project being explored in a regional setting. These terms include maternal periphery, maternal regionalism and maternal resilience. In my experience, maternal periphery involves the tendency for the mother-artist to separate out her thinking, feeling and moving body, and shift it to the periphery, so as not to 'contaminate' political and theoretical arts discourse (Boulous Walker 1998). Michelle Boulous Walker (1998, p. 135) extends upon this idea of maternal periphery by highlighting problems with the 'maternal metaphor' as silencing a woman by reducing her to a productive body: 'Sexuality is repressed, along with her voice and her breath'. As feminist art writer Katarzyna Kosmala (2017, p. 88) contends, this separation results in a constant negotiation of 'porous multiple selves', with a danger of becoming so worn down by this constant mediation that an artist's self becomes almost imperceptible. However, Kosmala also posits a positive outcome for this as 'such a multi-layered dislocation can also inspire the formation of a new episteme for creative practice and engagement' (Kosmala 2017, p. 94). Therefore, the MAM exists as one such example of a 'new episteme' for creative practice.

Extending on the notion of maternal periphery, through the negotiation of 'multiple selves', an artist can experience a sense of being on the 'outer/other'. I refer to this double periphery as 'maternal regionalism'. Maternal regionalism involves mother-artists who are residing and practicing in areas that are geographically outside metropolitan centres of art. Such an experience is linked to the psychological and experiential challenges that mother-artists can encounter. These challenges can also involve the psychological feeling of being isolated or 'outside' of society or art dialogue (Throsby & Zednick 2010). Further, maternal regionalism for mother-artists can involve a historical familiarity of being on the periphery of art and society, relegated to the 'private' realm of the domestic home. This is due to the historical patriarchal ideals that associate women's capacity to 'give birth' with the trappings of domesticity. Historically, women were seen to be highly valuable for their virgin status (Irigaray 1985, p. 186), or more generally as *procreators* not creators in the patriarchal casting of their role in society. That a mother's life-giving body was expected to be kept private was therefore conflated with, and confined to, the 'private' domestic sphere. In short, women were traditionally affiliated with their body, and therefore considered as less valuable than men, who were affiliated with the intellect/mind. Such a binary opposition resulted in women being regarded as 'other' (Battersby 1987). Then and now, feminist critique scrutinises the basis of culture and examines gender power relations. As part of this ongoing critique, feminist art practice has subverted those power relations through our image culture (Millner et al. 2015). For example, certain feminist legacies highlight themes of contemporary art such as centrality of the body and the subjective experience, as well as the insistence of social connections and working through community (Millner et al. 2015). Hence, these themes relate to the intersubjective relationship and collective context explored through contemporary art in this project.

Reflecting on my practice, an autoethnographic approach is used within the MAM to acknowledge my personal experiences and to inform the process of navigating and overcoming my identity struggles as both a mother and artist. Through this reflection, I uncovered the root of the denial of motherhood in my practice. For

instance, the socially ingrained sentiment of ignoring the mother identity was inherent in my undergraduate arts training. When I began my arts training, the visual art discipline was run mostly by males. Exacerbated by my lack of knowledge of university study as I was the first in my family to attend university, my awareness of, and ability to circumvent, patriarchal expectations of what art subject matter *should be*, was limited. At this time, I actively resisted exploring my identity as a mother-artist in my art practice. This fear-based resistance was rooted in remaining hindered by patriarchal structures of the past where, to operate in the art world, women artists separated their identity of artist and mother (Liss 2009). Cultural theorist Andrea Liss (2009) contends that traditionally, it was considered taboo — even by feminist critique — to explore motherhood as subject matter, for fear of it being considered as ‘trivial’. In fact, historically, mother-artists kept the reality that they had children hidden (Thiell, cited in Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 278). This identity concealment of an artist being a mother occurred because of the art world’s misconceptions. These included that an artist, also contending with the physical and mental responsibilities of a baby, could no longer make artwork (Thiell, cited in Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 279). Notably, considering that my work is subjective, I began to think: *What type of mother, indeed what type of person am I, that I would deny the existence of my own children to make ‘acceptable’ work?* My practice has developed within a process of adaptation to practicing art in my motherhood role. Accordingly, I now see how it is possible to circumvent patriarchal expectations and position mothering as the nexus of my practice and as an approach to building resiliency, rather than as a peripheral element which does not meaningfully contribute to my artwork. While this process of adaptation stems from necessity and practicality on the one hand, it also develops ‘naturally’ to consider how to transform a perceived limitation to practice into a sustainable process. This process privileges the experiential nurturing role that I already live, as a significant form of maternal resilience strategy. I now re-contextualise the discourse about artists who value and draw upon their experiences as mothers and artists, to reorient this way of working as maternal resilience. Importantly, this project opens up a platform that privileges mother-artists who co-construct their experiences with their children as a critical element of their arts practice. This platform subverts the idea that the mother

experience is often devalued through a tendency for authentic mother-child engagement to be omitted or understated in visual art discourse (eds Chernick & Klein 2011; Liss 2009).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The central focus of the MAM acknowledges the interrelationship between mother and child as a transformative creative process and exchange, in order to provide both with agency. Moreover, this engagement can be interpreted as a co-constructive creative exchange that offers an innovative and authentic methodology, one that explores the continually evolving mother-child relationship. In turn, this practice-led research is a transformative re-contextualisation of mother-artists and their children. That is, re-contextualisation occurs because it shifts the mother-artist and child relationship from its cultural position as a traditionally undervalued 'private' (home) space, to the public (professional) realm, as a basis for contemporary art practice (Loveless 2012, p. 4). The MAM does this through the very process of intertwining art and life. The model not only provides mother-artists with exhibition practices, but also gives visibility to creative methods through mothering in the public realm. These are not contrived creative acts by, or about, the mother-artist. They are acts that are complex in nature, as they derive from lived experience. Therefore, in this study, mothering provides the context for the research, the methodology and the conceptual subject matter.

Utilising the MAM in my individual practice, I observe my own intuitive creative approaches to the daily challenges of being a mother-artist and the unique characteristics (Needham et al. 2016) of this engagement with my children. My model draws on mothering attributes of adaptability and resiliency, which serve as unique assets and transformative practices within artistic production for mother-artists (Needham et al. 2016, p. 3). The art produced through this model of practice also has unique characteristics which reflect the traversal of these intersubjective relational dynamics. Unique characteristics inherent in the mother-child relational dynamic can be unpredictable or chaotic. Instead of segregating these contexts, I

integrate these experiences as useful material, subject matter and methods in creating artworks, a process which is also a resiliency strategy. These strategies also extend to practice for mother-artists long after their children have grown into adults.

In the context of my own practice, the MAM is designed to encompass the changing mother-child relationship, evolving and ongoing as the children grow up. However, I will always be their mother, and the experiences between us can be transformed as subject matter through art. Further, as Canadian artist Leslie Reid articulates, the role of making can exist as a strategy that the mother-artist adopts to cope emotionally with the challenging 'teenage individuation mothering experience' (Reid, cited in Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 329). As I have found, the MAM is a tool for assisting a mother to identify the signs of the teenager's individuation experience and prepare the mother-artist to 'let go' of her need to have control over her child as they mature into a young adult. These mothering attributes of adaptability have been articulated by other mother-artists through their work, including British-American artist Lenka Clayton and American artist Courtney Kessel. Clayton adapts to other mother-artist's requirement for artmaking to occur in the home by instigating a mother-artist residency model for artists worldwide (Clayton 2012). Kessel's practice is partly a resilience strategy and partly a protest, seeking to: 'Reposition the ongoing, non-narrative, dialogic flow that occurs within the domestic, to open up a dialogue of the subjective experience of maternity' (Kessel 2018, para. 2). Similarly, this study contributes to this discourse by investigating how my project's mother-artist research participants utilise the MAM. The study also investigates to what extent this can be a proactive strategy for their practice that adapts to the changes that motherhood brings. It is also important to share the MAM with other mother-artists to investigate the model's capacity for transforming practice outcomes. Exploring the MAM's use through collective application provides an opportunity to collect beneficial information through the experiential facets of mothering in the wider community that otherwise may be overlooked as peripheral.

1.3 Introducing the Mother-Artist Model Participants

This study examines the intertwined roles innate in my relationship with my children as a catalyst for artmaking and the methodological framework itself. In this light, my own children are engaged as voluntary research participants in a co-constructive capacity that embraces diversity and an expansive understanding of creativity. To introduce my children as participants, Ella, my daughter, is currently a senior secondary school student and works in a part time job. My son Riley is currently a middle secondary school student. As a central contribution of further gathering insights into my own as well as broader views on the mother-artist and child relationship, I have extended and shared the MAM with five other practicing contemporary mother-artists from regional Australian and international areas. These five participants serve as case studies for further expansion and public dissemination of the MAM as a resource for creativity and method(s) of practice. This is important because each subjective experience of the MAM expands understandings of mother-artist practice resiliency strategies in regional settings (McDonald and Mason 2015, p. 5). In turn, the MAM is an ever-evolving model of practice and a methodological tool.

Through this research the broader participant selection process for the MAM prompted me to define the term 'mother'. I define a contemporary mother-artist as a female who cares for at least one child, has been a practicing professional artist for at least the last three years and has exhibited in a professional gallery during that time as defined by Throsby & Petetskaya (2017). In the context of this research, the use of 'mother' is beyond the patriarchal heteronormative paradigm and is experienced by any woman that is the carer of a child (O'Reilly 2010, p. 21). For instance, my participants include a mother who is in a same-sex partnership. The mother-artist participants include four artists from regional and metropolitan Queensland and New South Wales, and one international artist from regional Canada, whom I chose for their suitability using purposive sampling. Researchers who use the purposive sampling technique carefully select subjects based on the study's purpose with the expectation that each participant will provide unique and

rich information of value to the study (Lee-Jen Wu, Hui-Man & Hao-Hsien 2014). As a result, members of the accessible population are not interchangeable and sample size is determined by data saturation and not statistical power analysis (Lee-Jen Wu, Hui-Man & Hao-Hsien 2014). The project includes regional and international artists in order to refine the model, and to determine how the MAM can be used by other visual art practitioners to overcome the constraints of motherhood and isolation. The project includes mother-artists from Australian and international areas to determine whether maternal periphery is experienced by the mother-artists. It also includes participants from these areas to determine if location impacts their maternal periphery and whether the MAM assists practice for other mother-artists to overcome maternal periphery.

1.4 Central Research Premise

Through collective sharing and dialogue, the research considers how the model can be used to form networking communities to overcome maternal regionalism for mother-artists. In this context, this practice-led study asserts that:

Through the MAM, I produce artwork that makes visible an authentic and intersubjective mother-child relationship, and in the process, I create a space for critical agency for both myself and my children. I therefore, argue that this model is transformative in responding to the broader issue of maternal regionalism for mother-artists. By employing maternal resilience attributes of adaptability, resiliency and nurturing collectivity, MAM forms a conduit to forming collective networking communities for mother-artists.

In this light, my central research premise aims to investigate the usefulness of the MAM as a transformative practice-led approach in my own art practice and as a broader model of resiliency and adaptability for other mother-artists. Further the research aims to explore how the mother-child co-construction implicit in the MAM potentially facilitates authentic agency and how this applies to other mother-artists and their children. Finally, the research addresses maternal regionalism by challenging traditional 'private' tropes of the mother through the MAM process-driven renegotiation of the mother-artist identity. The project further addresses

maternal regionalism by examining whether sharing the adaptive strategies of the MAM generates creative networking strategies of co-working, and collective support among broader communities.

In considering these assertions, the wider impact of the project lies in its key contribution to cultural and social discourses as an interdisciplinary, practice-led methodology (Sullivan 2010; Leavy 2009). According to art theorist, Graeme Sullivan (2010), practice-led research involves a rigorous exploration of ideas and problem solving where the creative work is a form of research and a methodology within itself. Arts-based researchers are creating their own research tools that allow them to not only show the relationship they have with their work, but to embody the complexity of the research (Leavy 2009). According to C.R. Kothari, research methodology encompasses not only the research methods, but underpins the logic behind those methods used in the context of the study, explains why we use particular techniques so that the research results can be evaluated (2004, p 8). This is applicable to my project because the MAM is its own methodology because it is the framework through which the research questions were defined and for the decisions about methods used in practice-led research. As a methodology, the MAM also underpins the techniques of data collection in the interviews and focus group while also existing as a tool that enables research development through the creative work which exists inside the mother-child relationship.

Contextually, the project has a particular focus on contemporary representations of motherhood in visual arts as theorized by Andrea Liss (2009), Rachel Ep Buller (2012) and Myrel Chernick (2011), and the MAM's reflexive implications of psychoanalysis and feminist theory including that of Katarzyna Kosmala (2017). The study examines the impact of these debates in the context of my autoethnographic research and collective autoethnographic research approach with my mother-artist participants. Collective autoethnography in this project is defined as exploring a 'collective journey' through a combination of reflective activities, recorded through diarizing and recollections of events (Cord & Clements 2010, p. 12). This has involved

exploring mother-artist group interactions as a means of support for issues such as isolation that underpin maternal regionalism.

To overcome these challenges, the MAM, developed from my experience of constant negotiation, and at times suppression of motherhood, contributes to an emerging 'new episteme' for privileging motherhood in creative practice. This episteme values 'the complex reality of motherhood' (Bossom 2017, para. 1) by shifting this practice into a public platform. To shift mother-artist practices into the public realm enables a potentially powerful representation of the complexity that exists inside the mother and child relationship (Liss 2009). Representing the interrelationship between my child and myself through art, troubles the complex ground between my negotiated identity of mother and artist. Concurrently, this traversal of our interrelationship involves the liminal space of my child's identity development and how the model supports this individual development. The liminal space is described by Kevina Cody (2012, p. 46) as a 'suspension of identities in which commitment to the fixed and definable social categories from which they left and towards which they gravitate cannot be made'. According to Victor Turner's concept of the liminal space, my children are constantly in a transitional stage in their development and social status from child to adult and therefore, as their mother, I negotiate a challenging and constantly changing role within their shifting stages (Wels et al. 2011). This negotiation can also be understood through the Deleuzian framework to examine liminality in terms of traversal and becoming. This begins with Fleur Summers and Angela Clarke's (2015, p. 236) interpretation of the Deleuzian metaphor of the rhizome as having no beginning or end, as a non-hierarchical entry point to the in-between spaces in the traversal of mother and artist roles. A quote by Gilles Deleuze offers an accurate description of the constantly changing, and therefore challenging, liminal state of the mother-artist as working within and between many states of being:

Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning

or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (Summers & Clarke 2015, p. 236).

The evolving interactions and synergies of our relationship take place among everyday rituals and activities, which are navigated through practice. Striving for 'attunement', I seek to navigate this space respectfully, adhering to my child's needs as a critical part of this two-way process. In this navigation as a mother, I endeavour to be 'attuned' to my adolescent children's internal states, that is, to be well situated to provide a secure base for their exploration, by responding appropriately to their search for autonomy and provide a safe haven for them in times of emotional stress (Allen et al. 2003). An ethical process that protects the rights of the child in this navigation is of particular importance, and as such, this project obtained a Human Research Ethics approval which involved a detailed and rigorous application process.

The artwork that is produced through this process involves a subversive representation of traditional tropes of motherhood, such as the stereotypical 'hallowed mother of religious allegory and the 'pin-up' mother of lifestyle magazines' (Needham et al. 2016, p. 3). This subversion relates to the changes I have experienced in my role as a mother, where I have found that attempting to be the 'pin-up' mother is unsustainable because of the time and emotional energy required to create the 'perfect mother' persona. Conversely, I have avoided attempting to be a 'pin-up' mother as this approach is not only ego-centric, and does not consider the child's own changing needs, but leads to what I consider is 'inauthentic mothering'. This would ultimately be detrimental to the mother-child relationship and the child's agency. Using the MAM as a framework enables authentic representation of our mother-child relationship. This representation participates in feminist cultural debates which critique the social construct of motherhood that is built from fragments of unexamined political, biological and social assumptions (Pitts-Taylor & Schaffer 2009). Some examples of the political, biological and social assumptions include: 'contradictory expectations that mothers will be stay-at-home caregivers and also, paradoxically, that they will be well educated and have meaningful careers', and judgements about childbirth, feeding and discipline (Pitts-Taylor & Schaffer

2009). This subversive practice-led exchange between myself and my child values the role of mother-artist who as 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' (Clark 2014, p. 37), seeks to provide a sense of agency to the child in a mediated art space. Appendix A (MAM Explainer Handout) provides an explanation of how the role of 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' is used in the Mother-Artist Model.

By exploring the interrelationship between mother and child as an engaged and privileged space in contemporary art practice, the MAM disrupts and subverts traditional ideologies of the mother-child as subject. Through this reorientation, I address the three functions for exploration. The first function of the study is an investigation of the effectiveness of the MAM as a transformative practice-led approach within my own art practice and as a broader model of resiliency and adaptability for other mother-artists. Secondly, I explore how the mother-child co-construction implicit in the MAM facilitates authentic agency and how this applies to other mother-artist participants and their children. Thirdly, the central exploration of this study addresses maternal regionalism by challenging traditional 'private' tropes of the mother through the MAM process-driven renegotiation of the mother-artist identity. The project further addresses maternal regionalism by examining whether sharing the adaptive strategies of the MAM generate creative networking strategies of co-working and collective support among broader communities.

1.5 Theoretical Scope of the Study

There are theoretical boundaries to the scope of this study. Firstly, it is not a sociological study of mothering and art practice, nor is it a traditional ethnographic study of a set of practices. Further, my research involves working within a practice-led and autoethnographic study of my positioning and experiences as a mother-artist. Therefore, I cannot (and do not) provide the father-artist perspective, and so my project's limitations involve the decision not to examine the father-artist perspective. In this light, my focus on the MAM allows me to embrace the subjectivity and privilege the positioning of the mother-artist (Donoghue 2018, p. 40). As my project involves my children as research participants, there are also

considerations around ethical boundaries or limitations pertaining to my children's motivation to participate in this project. There are creative restraints specific to a project such as this that includes the perspectives of mothers and their children. In this way, some of the participants did not wish to include images of their children as part of this project. However, this has also provided valuable information in relation to refining the MAM. For example, this development revealed that the MAM should have the capacity to be utilized without including images of children in the artwork. Concepts of the maternal body are briefly discussed however, they are limited to the role of the maternal body (Boulous Walker 1998) in the concept of 'othering' (Spivak 2006).

1.6 Overview of Chapters

This study consists of five chapters, including this *Introduction*.⁴ *Chapter Two - Creative Practice Literature Review*, explores the seminal discourse surrounding how feminist cultural theories have been involved in the complex development and evolution of defining a contemporary mother-artist. *Chapter Two* engages in discourses surrounding feminist motherhood by Andrea Liss (2009) Rachel Epp Buller (2012), Myrel Chernick (2011). My practice involves a re-negotiation of the traditional 'private' space of mothering (Liss, cited in eds Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 73). I do this by making visible through art, the hidden space of the mother and child relationship where there are sometimes underlying tensions and ambivalence which are exacerbated as the child becomes less dependent on their mother (Tuval-Mashiach & Shaiovitz-Gourman, cited in ed. Bueskens 2014, p. 357). To provide context for this, *Chapter Two* will examine how other established professional mother-artists subvert the concept of 'otherness' by engaging with the realities of motherhood in their work. This transfers the realities from the traditionally undervalued 'private' realm, into the valued 'public' sphere. As I use my work to blur the boundaries between 'private' and 'public' as a strategy for overcoming social and maternal periphery, *Chapter Two* will also explore ways that mother-artists overcome maternal regionalism through networking and practice. This exploration of

⁴ The Introduction is included as the first chapter, as per USQ thesis guidelines.

disparate themes provides a useful overall context to the project in relation to the progression of the feminist research paradigm (Ropers-Huilman & Winters 2011) that underpins the study as a whole.

Chapter Three – Methodology: Three Phases of the Mother-Artist Model builds on the literature surrounding feminist motherhood to identify and contextualise the methodologies and methods employed in this study. *Chapter Three* introduces the overarching methodologies of practice-led research, autoethnography and reflexive practice within the MAM space, and justifications for their use. Further, the chapter provides detail about the research participant groups as a contextual background for discussing the MAM as a collective model with a broader social and cultural scope. This chapter also addresses the application of the research methodologies and the process of designing and developing the MAM, which I have identified as three distinct chronological phases of the project. *Phase One: Understanding my Practice Through Researching Methodology* explains how autoethnographic approaches were employed to extract focussed details about my practice-led research using the MAM and details the design of participant research methods. *Phase Two: Using the MAM in Practice and Collective Autoethnography* details my use of the MAM in practice-led research and how collective autoethnography was employed through participant research methods. *Phase Three: Practice, Transcription, Data coding and Exhibition* explores how reflexive practice was utilised to extract meaning from the data in order to determine the extent to which the participant's engagement with the MAM, as a transformative practice-led approach, facilitated agency and addressed maternal regionalism.

In *Chapter Four – The Mother-Artist Model: My Creative Practice*, I further interrogate the concept of mother-artist and child agency and intersubjectivity through my own practice-led research using the MAM. *Chapter Four* therefore includes extracts from my own personal reflections on motherhood, and explorations of my creations through practice-led research using the MAM. The chapter also addresses how the development of these bodies of work has furthered

and influenced understandings of MAM as a methodological contribution and as a practice-led model of resiliency to renegotiate the mother-artist identity.

Chapter Five- Creative Outcomes and Conceptual Findings, provides insights into the revelations from my own practice-led research, and that of my research participants, through use of the MAM. Through a thematic analysis, the chapter details how nine themes from interviews, reflective journals, focus group and exhibition synopsis have been analysed through narrative analysis. Further, the chapter draws on the findings to examine the usefulness of the MAM as a transformative practice approach to facilitate agency and create collective networking communities to overcome maternal regionalism. *Chapter Five* details the potential impacts of the study on visual art practice and theory as well as potential cross-disciplinary and community impacts of my MAM project.

CHAPTER TWO

Creative Practice Literature Review

This *Creative Practice Literature Review* addresses the seminal literature and discourse surrounding the social and cultural complexities involved in defining a mother-artist. Importantly, a review of contemporary art discourses provides context for how other mother-artists have renegotiated their identities and developed resilience in practice to facilitate mother and child agency. In doing so, mother-artists have generated creative networking communities while telling their stories through practice. Due to the complexities involved in the evolution of mother-artist identities over time, this chapter draws on multiple disciplines such as postcolonial theory of 'otherness', feminist theory and psychoanalysis, in its discussion. My concentration on such a broad range of disciplines is necessary as a way of contextualising, in a robust manner, the complex, interwoven nature of social and cultural constructs that underpin the unique lived experience(s) of mother-artists and their children.

To provide a historical context to the development of the discourse on motherhood in art practice, this chapter discusses historical bias against mother-artists with a particular focus on the debates that occurred during second wave feminism (O'Reilly 2010, p. 18). Following this, examples of contemporary critical dialogue within the feminist and gender discourse surrounding the visual representation of motherhood are provided as useful studies of critical engagement with the complexities of identity transition into motherhood. This discussion contextualises the MAM through an examination of public versus private arts practice, 'othering' (Spivak 2006), and the intersubjective relationship between mother and child, to position the MAM in cultural art theory. The review also examines how the global community of contemporary mother-artists interact with the subject matter of motherhood in diverse ways. Further, the review will examine how the engagement between fellow mother-artists strengthens their practices, providing contextual background for how the MAM facilitates similar collective networks and transformative practice strategies.

2.1 Historical Bias Regarding Mother-Artists

Historically, the fundamental problem of patriarchal social structures in reducing the rights of women has been an ongoing issue for the feminist movement. Arguably, the critique of these social problems began when, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Through this work, Wollstonecraft responded to the reduced rights of women by recommending that women were equal to men, with the same qualities of rational thought and right to education (Zalewski 2000, p. 7). Liberal feminists in this era sought to redress the patriarchal fear that to provide women with the same rights as men to learn and work outside the home would result in women ‘forgetting’ their body’s reproductive capacity (Hubbard 1990, cited in Zalewski 2000, p. 9). The patriarchal prescription of gender roles relegated women to the ‘private’ home where their reproductive body could be controlled. However, even in these times of patriarchal restriction, female artists such as Marguerite Gerard subverted these assumptions. For example, in *Mother Nursing Her Child, Watched by a Friend* (1802) (Figure 1), Gerard asserted the mother as urban, upper bourgeois and ‘her position far more public than previously coded’ (Belnap Jensen, cited in Epp Buller 2012, p. 17).



Figure 1. Marguerite Gerard, *Mother Nursing Her Child, Watched by a Friend*, 1802

In recent history, inequalities within gender prescribed roles in 'private' and 'public' realms were addressed through feminist art. For example, during the early 1970s, feminist artists such as Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, influenced by the Women's Liberation Movement, gave agency to the visual art discourse regarding gender (Wilding 2016, para. 2). They did this by beginning to use 'traditional' rituals such as storytelling, and domestic chores including cooking and sewing, in their artwork. Through projects such as *Womanhouse* (1972) (Figure 2), these artists 'began to utilise women's craft and decorative art as a viable artistic means to express female experience, thereby pointing to its political and subversive potential' (Brooklyn Museum 2014, para. 2). Artists were changing the negative connotations normally associated with so called 'women's work' and were instilling these labours with new associations. However, feminist art critics, such as Lucy Lippard, began to question the lack of reference to childbirth and pregnancy in feminist art through her seminal articles such as *The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art* in 1976 (ed. Epp Buller 2012, p. 2). At this time, artist and theorist Mary Kelly explored the 'oscillation between theoretical and everyday life in the mother-child relationship' in her work *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79) (Figure 3) (Liss 2009, p. 25; Cartwright 2017, p. 320).

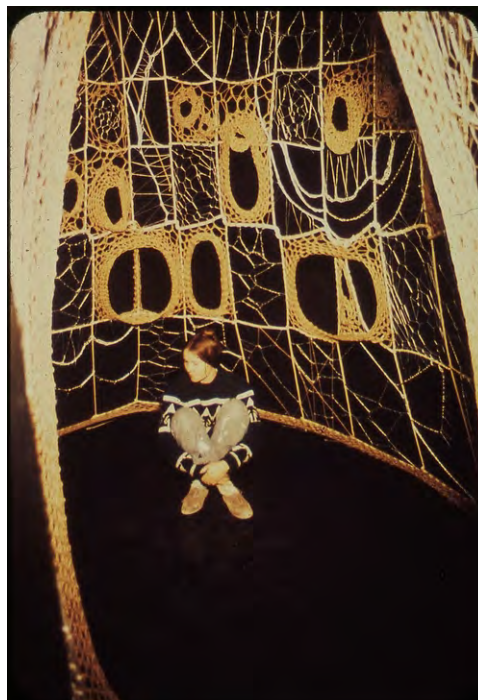


Figure 2. Karen Le Coq & Nancy Youdelman,
Leah's Room (Womanhouse), 1972

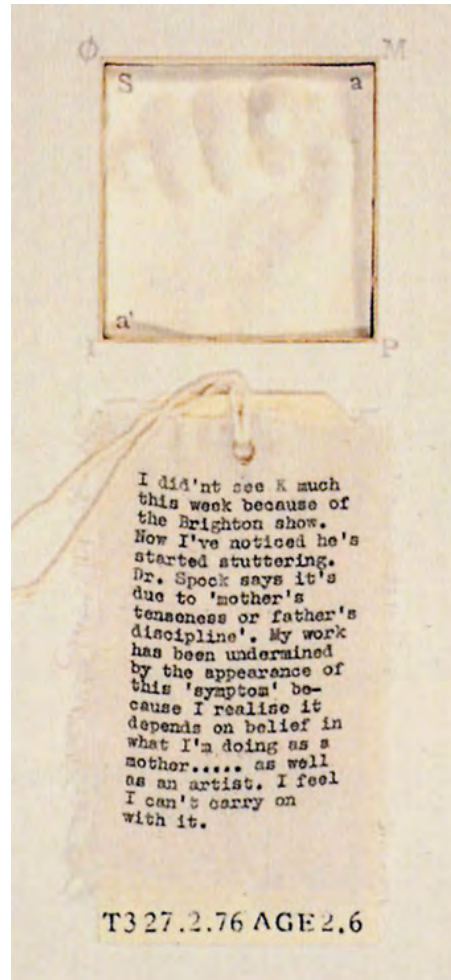


Figure 3. Mary Kelly, *Post Partum*

Document (detail), 1973-79

Continuing this debate, feminist art theory continues to question whether patriarchal ideologies have had a negative impact on the opportunities for women to sustain careers as artists, and subsequent choice of subject matter, in Western society and culture (Ross 1994, p. 565).

2.2 Contemporary Feminist and Gender Discourse Addressing Visual Representations of Motherhood

The birth of a mother involves similar hormonal and identity transitions as evidenced in adolescence and yet this natural process is often silenced by shame or misdiagnosed as postpartum depression. Perhaps instead we should be giving it a name: *matrescence* (Sacks 2018, para. 1).

This quote from a conference lecture by reproductive psychiatrist Alexandra Sacks (2018) names the shift that new mothers experience in an attempt to 'normalize' this identity transition. As part of feminist debates, analysis of the undermined mother identity began with the feminist strand of psychoanalysis. Feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir (1989, p. 26) describes how women have been positioned as 'other' in relation to a man, and also conversely defined by man as sex. This premise exposes that a 'mother' is not regarded as an autonomous being. Further, this lack of autonomy also relates to the depiction of Eve being created from Adam's rib (Akca & Gunes 2009, p. 1). In the past, cultural dialogues presented the mother as relegated to the outside, both in the formation of her child's ego, and the action of her body while giving birth. For instance, the feminist psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection posits that creation of the self can only be achieved through rejection of the mother (Korsmeyer 2012, para. 49). Therefore, everyday actions become rituals associated with becoming and being a mother and can be easily translated to being 'other' and 'outside', and of lesser importance in society and visual art (Clark 2014, p. 18). This argument is important to acknowledge as it explains why the idea of using motherhood as subject matter for art practice may represent a 'threat' to a woman's identity as an artist. In response, this study seeks to provide a greater understanding of the mother-artist's specific identity challenges and in turn, is useful in my project's emphasis on the MAM as a key strategy in overcoming these challenges.

The concept of 'othering' women's artistic production has also been discussed in the context of cultural politics. Post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak examines 'otherness' in terms of artistic production. Spivak's investigation in her text *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (2006) discussed women's work as a sustained example of zero-work, outside of wage work, and 'outside' of definitive modes of production. This comparison can be examined in relation to motherhood and the domestic realm. In this case, 'women's work' encompasses the domestic home (and hence private actions within it), motherhood and art made with the subject matter of motherhood. If this work is relegated to being 'outside' of production, then its relevance as artistic subject matter is threatened. Spivak conceives that the solution for this is to reverse the search for validity via production, and instead use the power

of the 'domestic economy' that society nurtures (Spivak 2006, p. 112). To define 'otherness' in this context, the woman as maternal artmaking body is an example of 'otherness'. 'Othering' by male patriarchal societal structures continues to be an ongoing concern for women and mother-artists. My practice also involves a re-negotiation of the societal expectations which project stereotypes of what a 'good' mother should be. I re-negotiate these expectations by exploring and representing through art, the hidden space of the mother and child relationship where there can be underlying tensions and ambivalence. Stemming from historical structures of society that have traditionally celebrated the male 'breadwinner', the eternally patient 'good' mother gives up her former (child-free) identity to fulfil all of her child's (and partner's) needs. The 'bad' mother is disengaged and ambivalent about her child's welfare or overly career-minded (Pedersen 2016). Further, the compounded term 'mother-artist' disrupts the divides among what constitutes, for example, the connotation of motherhood alone. Therefore, the term 'mother-artist' complicates the binary definitions of both 'mother' and 'artist'.

Recent feminist and psychoanalytic accounts of mothering enact a subversion of 'good' versus 'bad' mothering through the emerging ideology of the 'good-enough' mother. The 'good-enough' mother acknowledges the dichotomy that a real mother has times of ambivalence, as well as love for her own children while actually wanting to be a mother (Rubin Suleiman & Chernick 2006, cited in Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 54). The 'good-enough' mother is also defined as a post-feminist embracing and refashioning of her shortcomings as part of good mothering (Pedersen 2016, p. 38). Significantly, this literature reinforces the MAM's contribution to the subversion of the 'good' mother stereotypes as outlined by Sarah Pedersen (2016, p. 33). In this context, Pedersen argues that mothers acknowledge that 'good-enough' mothering is a reaction to the fluidity of 'good' motherhood as influenced by the media, older generations, and the 'bad' mother that they are not (2016, p.38). In the context of this study, 'good-enough' mother identity stands for authenticity, contributes to humanising mothering, and is therefore more 'real' and attainable. Hence, the MAM gives mother-artists permission to use this model to explore the authentic 'good-enough' mother in a more sustainable visual arts practice by utilising the 'realities' of

the mother and child relationship, whether those realities are societally perceived as 'good' or 'bad'.

Psychoanalytic perspectives on the effects of the 'good-enough' mother on the agency of the child are also important to explain in the context of the MAM. Further, these accounts investigate the implications of the increased power of the mother's role in the development of the child (Doane and Hodges 1992). 'Agency' in the light of this study relates to power relations between mother-artist and child in intersubjective interactions. According to Amartya Sen, human agency represents people's ability to act on goals that matter to them, as an aspect of freedom, and a core ingredient of social change. Agency can be measured subjectively by investigating how well a person thinks they are functioning toward their goal (Sen, cited in Alkire 2005, p. 218). Child agency refers to a child's belief in their capacity to take action or exert power within a context (Nieto, cited in Short 2012, p. 42). When a 'good-enough' mother preserves a part of her identity, it also leaves room for her child to develop their own (Sacks 2018). In this way, through intersubjective interactions, a mother-artist can preserve and illustrate her own agency by maintaining practice, leaving room for her child to maintain agency.

In my own practice, the personal narratives that arise in these intersubjective interactions with my children are often explored through performative ritual such as hair braiding, drawing in steam on glass or lighting incense and capturing the smoke. Kristin Langellier (1999, p. 135) explains that 'personal narrative performance can critique the underlying assumptions of a story's intelligibility and tellability; can remember how history, society and culture inform experience'. Through this lens, the mother-artist and child's performed personal narratives question cultural and social taboos that restrict whether their stories should be told in public, or not. As well, personal narrative performance 'can destabilize identity by resisting the myth of a unique, unified and fixed self' (Langellier 1999, p. 135). In this way, the intersubjective interaction through performed narrative is a space that gives mother-artists and children power to assert their own identity, and therefore agency.

Contemporary artists such as photographer Sally Mann attempt to interrogate the socially constructed ideal mother and her association with the 'private' home (Parsons 2008, p. 125). For example, Mann's body of work *Immediate Family* (1992) (Figure 4) created debate around what aspects of a mother and child relationship should remain private, and what should be revealed for public scrutiny (Parsons 2008, p. 122). In *Immediate Family* (1992) (Figure 4), Mann depicts her own children at their family farm, along with the realities of messy, and occasionally nude play. According to Sarah Parsons (2008), the anxieties about Mann's raw depiction of her own children stem from the artist's refusal to acknowledge a division between public and private. This notion challenges the traditional socially constructed 'sacred fantasies about innocent, happy childhoods, singularly protective mothers, and the privacy of the middle class nuclear family' (Parsons 2008, p. 124). Similarly, my own practice includes images and stories involving the dichotomies and tensions of everyday life with my children. Therefore, my work participates in the blurring of boundaries between public and private, exposing the realities of motherhood as visual art subject matter, and provoking questions of child agency. In this way, my project aims to prevent not only the 'othering' of mother-artists, but the subsequent 'othering' of the child. In a seminal article on the 'othering' of children in research, titled *Always Othered: ethical research with children* (2008), education researcher Maria K.E. Lahman suggests a strategy to address and avoid 'othering' of the child during research. To avoid 'othering', Lahman (2008) suggests working collaboratively in an intersubjective relationship *with* the child rather than research *on* the child by adopting the standpoint that the child is an 'expert' who can reflexively have input into the research. This strategy creates a space of visibility leading to both participants having agency. This can be transformative in broader social contexts such as reducing regional boundaries (Mason & McDonald 2015) because the mother-child relationship can be freely discussed and explored without taboo, contributing to a reduction in dominant systems of 'othering'.



Figure 4. Sally Mann, *Immediate Family*, 1992

As stated in the *Introduction*, Katarzyna Kosmala (2017) also engages in this debate by examining the current tensions underlying the social construction of motherhood through examples of contemporary women artists. Kosmala argues that artists who are mothers occupy a space where continuous negotiation of multiple dislocations, identities and socio-economic boundaries result in a 'nomadic subjectivity' or 'nomadic motherhood'. Further, Kosmala posits that this continuous negotiation of 'multiple selves' can result in a subjectivity that is dispersed or imperceptible, another form of 'otherness'. A positive outcome from this however, is that this dislocation of self can also inspire the formation of new understandings for creative practice and engagement (Kosmala 2017, p. 94). This is of particular relevance to my project because I also explore the notion of using the 'continuous negotiation' and fluid boundaries of socially constructed motherhood as subject matter to debunk the myth of the ideal or 'good' mother. I do this through visual depictions of the complex and occasionally uncomfortable realities of my relationship with my children through use of the MAM, such as our communication challenges. These depictions highlight

my ability to negotiate the boundary between the private space of motherhood and the public realm.

An example of a contemporary mother-artist who also explores 'private' mother-child relationships in relation to 'public' social constructs is American artist, Deborah Dudley. Dudley's work is based on the endeavour of a shared understanding between herself and her daughter about how the dynamics and mechanics of image consumption informs identity and a sense of self (Dudley 2017). *Brain Candy: Deborah Dudley in Collaboration with Luca Pecora* (2017) (Figure 5), is a work that the artist created with her own daughter. According to Dudley, the practice and research offer a way to involve young people in a conversation about the complex manipulation and power of photography. Through this work Dudley explores how photography informs a sense of self, in order to offer her daughters strategies for managing their relationship with photography (Dudley 2017). This informs my practice in that the creative process and MAM model for practice facilitates a co-construction of a narrative, which includes my own interpretation and that of my child. This process allows me to understand my child's viewpoint on everyday issues and activities more fully. This also opens up opportunities for both of our voices to be heard and seen through this practice.



Figure 5. Deborah Dudley, *Brain Candy: Deborah Dudley*
in collaboration with Luca Pecora, 2017

2.3 Contemporary Tensions in Defining Motherhood through Mother-Artists

Artists who are mothers have traditionally been socially and culturally conditioned to nurture, negotiate and adapt, both in everyday life and art practice (ed. Epp Buller 2012, p. 9). This process of nurturing and adaptation is employed in the mother-artist's continual challenge to meet the demands of her art and her family, as well of those of her culture (Chernick 2003; Power 2015). In exploring this premise, my study examines other contemporary mother-artists who address this tension by formulating strategies adaptive to societal changes which encourage an integration of the private (home) and public (professional) sphere (Loveless 2012, p. 4). Women artists are also strengthening their engagement in visual arts dialogue through the intentional organisation of opportunities for collectivity across national and international regions, such as through group exhibitions. These important strategies are relevant to this project as a method for collecting information that may be used by mother-artists in the creation of art opportunities. This also responds to the

limited research in relation to how contemporary mother-artists develop, nurture and attend to their practice, hence confirming this study's focus.

The following discussion of contemporary patterns of mother-artist practice contextualises the tensions that led me to formulate the MAM as a solution to practice barriers. In this light, mother-artist practice blurs the boundaries between the 'private' (female) home and the 'public' (male) realm (Irigaray 1985) to subvert patriarchal structures and taboos of what is 'sanctioned' subject matter in visual art. A seminal text *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (2009) by Andrea Liss describes the origins of these taboos. In the text, Liss (2009, p. 10) recounts the tensions between feminism and motherhood in creative practice while simultaneously addressing the ways in which artists are subverting taboos by making the 'private' visible through 'contemporary representations of feminist motherhood'. This subversion of taboos is a form of activism, similar to forms of 'confessional art', which are forms of contemporary art that focus on an intentional revelation of the private self. As an activist genre, confessional art encourages an intimate analysis of the artist's, artist's subjects', or spectator's confidential, and often controversial, experiences and emotions (Jackson & Hogg 2010, p. 1). For example, confessional art such as Candy Chang's work *Confessions* (2017) (Figure 6) incorporates culturally taboo subject matter to operate in outrage against ideological systems that constrain women (Gammel 1999). Texts exploring confessional art such as *The Art of Confession: The Performance of Self from Robert Lowell to Reality TV* by Grobe (2017, p. 12) posit that 'confession is both a work and an act – an artistic form and a social function'. Dialogue such as this has informed my focus on contemporary maternal actions and arts practices that give agency to mothers and children by addressing the intersubjective mother-child relationship performatively, as a form of activism.



Figure 6. Candy Chang, *Confessions*, 2017

Additional external restrictions within the art world also contribute to reducing income and the professional exposure of women artists, further compounding the barriers to practice. According to cultural theorist Elvis Richardson in *The Countess Report* (2014) (Figure 7), contemporary women artists are underrepresented in gallery exhibitions, art prizes and reviews. In a recent study about the impact on the practice and income of artists by David Throsby & Katya Petetskaya (2017), 38% of women artists in Australia feel that their children significantly restrict their work as an artist as opposed to 18% of their male counterparts. However, on a positive note this has decreased since David Throsby and Anita Zednik's 2010 study in which 81% of women artists in Australia perceived that their child-caring responsibilities restricted their work as an artist as opposed to 48% of their male counterparts. These views are heightened for mother-artists in regional areas where additional resources are not always available. This is offset to some extent by a greater sense of 'community', which is evident due to the smaller population. Of visual artists situated in regional settings, 56% felt that living outside of a capital city had a negative effect on their practice (Throsby & Petetskaya 2017). However, arts practice in regional

areas is differentiated by its role in the formation and maintenance of inclusive communities (eds Mason & McDonald 2015, p. 5).

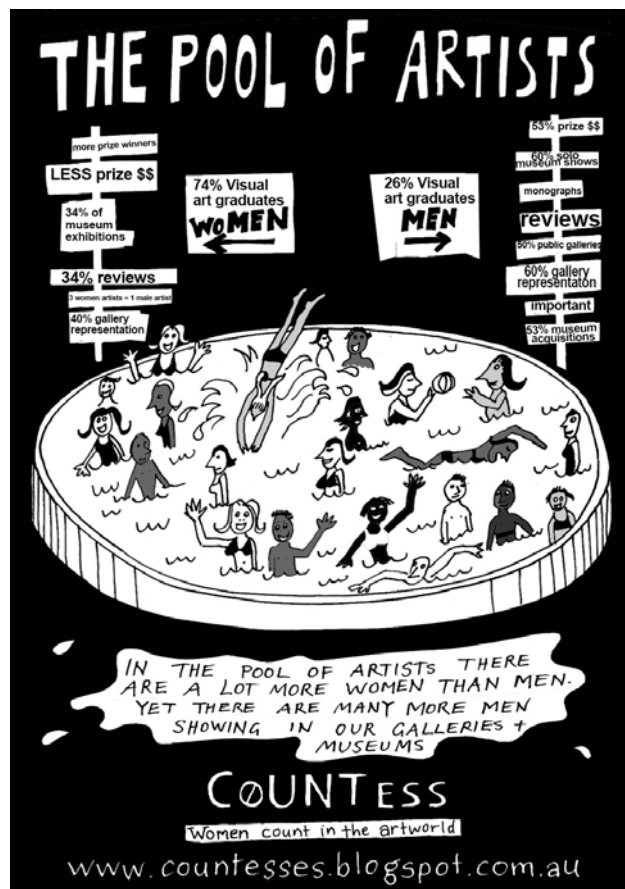


Figure 7. Elvis Richardson, *The Countess Report Infographic*, 2014

Mothers serve as primary vehicles for ensuring the continuity of human history; in a literal, physical sense if they are the birth mothers, and through the attitudes, knowledge, and values they transmit, consciously and unconsciously, to their children. At the same time, they themselves are changed by the experiences of motherhood. The intersection of the lives of mothers and children is profound, marking each of them (Matthews, cited in Epp Buller 2012, p. 165).

This statement by U.S. art photographer Sandra Matthews (2012) is from a seminal text *Reconciling Art and Mothering* (2012) edited by Rachel Epp Buller which explores how contemporary mother-artists visually engage with issues of the maternal gaze,

the maternal body and the boundaries of mothering (ed. Epp Buller 2012, p. 143). The statement by Matthews (2012) is important to my work, because it articulates the complex, interwoven nature of experience inside the mother and child relationship. Artists whose practice explores their subjective perspective as mothers, translate and understand this experience through visual art.

There are many nuances in the practices of artists who are mothers, and conversely, differences in the conceptual premise and subject matter of their work. However, it should be noted that not all artists who are mothers choose to make work that is grounded in the intersubjective mother-artist-child experience. An example of the difference between subjective and intersubjective viewpoints in maternal art can be seen in Ilona Nelson's works, including *In-Sanitarium* (2015) (Figure 8). These works were the result of a collaborative project where Nelson focussed on fellow mother-artists' personal testimonies regarding their subjective experiences of motherhood to inform her work (Nelson, cited in Needham et al. 2016, p. 11). In a contrasting example which informs my own practice, Erika Gofton explored her changing sense of self in relation to her *child's* changing adolescent identity in *Liminal* (2015) (Figure 9) (Gofton, cited in Needham et al. 2016, p. 6). Gofton's work asserts the critical agency of both mother and child through investigating the mother-child intersubjective relationship nurtured by the mother-artist identity. The works reorient the focus of motherhood in art practice by exploring the complex exchange that exists between mother and child and the capacity for agency of the participants.



Figure 8. Ilona Nelson, *In-Sanitarium*, 2015



Figure 9. Erika Gofton, *Liminal*, 2015

2.4 Review of Contemporary Mother-Artist Practice and Exchange

In the discussion below, examples of 'maternal actions' that create mother-artist networks of support also give context to my project which seeks to discover whether the sharing and application of adaptive creative strategies can enhance individual mother-artist's development in their art practice.

Currently, the number of contemporary artists that engage predominantly with the subject matter of motherhood is growing (Loveless 2018). In addition to their individual practice, these artists engage with fellow mother-artists and audiences across international boundaries through collectives, group exhibitions and projects, enacted in gallery settings or online. This is important to note in relation to my project as examples of how mother-artists create connections with fellow artists by translating and applying the way they nurture connections with their children. As an example, *New Maternalisms* was an exhibition series, curated by Natalie S. Loveless, and showcased in Canada in 2012, followed by Chile in 2014, and redeveloped as *New Maternalisms: Redux 2016*, upon its return to Canada. The *New Maternalisms* exhibitions included the work of leading contemporary mother-artists across a wide social spectrum, including U.S. installation artist Courtney Kessel (Figure 10), American performance artist Jill Miller (Figure 11), British conceptual artist Lenka Clayton (Figure 12), U.S. performance artist Jess Dobkin (Figure 13) and Chilean performance artist Alejandra Herrera (Figure 14). The artist's investigation of their maternal experience is inherent in these exhibitions. Through this process they drew attention to material, biological and bodily maternal practice as an important political and affective force (Loveless 2016).



Figure 10. Courtney Kessel, *In Balance With*, 2016. Performance image, performance at New Maternalisms: Redux 2016



Figure 11. Jill Miller, *24 Hour Family Portraits*, 2016



Figure 12. Lenka Clayton, *Artist Residency in Motherhood*, 2016



Figure 13. Jess Dobkin, *Lactation Station Breast Milk Bar*, 2016



Figure 14. Alejandra Herrera, *Testing the Waters*, 2016

The mother-artists who participated in another key U.S. exhibition *Complicated Labours: Feminism, Maternity, and Creative Practice* (2014) sought to investigate the problem of the maternal in 21st century art theory and practice being associated purely with identity and sentimentality, rather than as representative of larger concerns of ethics, care and labour (Lusztig 2014). The exhibition brought together historical and contemporary work that addressed maternal labour to stimulate questions about the status of contemporary feminist art (UCSC Complicated Labour Research Cluster 2014). *Complicated Labours* included the artists in *New Maternalisms: Redux*, as well as conceptual artist Mary Kelly and Myrel Chernick. An Australian exhibition, *Mum* (2016), at Stockroom Gallery in Victoria included contemporary artists such as Erika Gofton (Figure 9), Ilona Nelson (Figure 8), Clare Rae (Figure 15), Nina Ross (Figure 16), and Meredith Turnbull (Figure 17). The artists' work subverted common tropes of motherhood with raw and confronting explorations of parenting and the lived female experience (Needham et al. 2016, p. 2).



Figure 15. Clare Rae, *IC06*, 2014



Figure 16. Nina Ross, *Untitled #1 (pregnancy)*, 2014



Figure 17. Meridith Turnbull & Roma
Turnbull-Coulter, *Kitchen Drawing #1*, 2016

The language used when describing these pivotal mother-artist exhibitions, such as ‘subverted’, ‘political’ and ‘affective force’ highlights their purpose, which is to challenge assumptions of mothering within visual arts practice and assert the critical agency of mother-artists. Other models for mother-artist practice are also emerging. At the recent symposium *It Takes a Village: Models for Mother-Artists* in April 2017, presenters discussed models that enable mothers to continue their practice after they have children. These models included what can be learned from education systems, how fathers and family can support mother-artist’s practice, how the art world could enable fair mother-artist representation, and also included Lenka Clayton’s model, *An Artists Residency in Motherhood (ARIM)*. In 2012, Clayton created *ARIM* as an ongoing project when she had her first child. Through this model, Clayton aimed to counteract the problem inherent in artist residencies which are usually designed for the lone artist; something that may not be logistically or emotionally possible for a mother-artist. Clayton’s initial manifesto for the residency included the following premise:

Set firmly inside the traditionally “inhospitable” environment of a family home, it (the residency) subverts the art-world’s romanticisation of the unattached artist, and frames motherhood as a valuable site, rather than an invisible labour for exploration and artistic production. As the first artist-in-resident-in-motherhood I aim to embrace the fragmented mental focus, exhaustion, nap-length studio time and countless distractions of parenthood as well as the absurd poetry of time spent with young children as my working materials and situation, rather than obstacles to be overcome (Clayton 2012, para. 2).

Clayton created resources required for a residency including formal funding, a website, appointed mentors, and childcare, and shared the resources online for other mother-artists to ‘make art *from* motherhood, not *about* motherhood (Clayton 2016). Clayton’s work is useful for my own project because it provides an exemplar for ways in which I can form networks with other mother-artists online and engage in practice that is based on the motherhood experience inside the home. However, while the MAM also provides a conceptual framework, it goes further in providing a conceptual starting point for practice through a role that I have developed as central to the MAM, which is the role of ‘Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper’. Increasingly, mother-artists are formulating ‘communities of practice as social learning systems’ (Wenger 2016) of support that are available to anyone online, thus creating further networks and reducing the potential for isolation.

An online based network which enables collective connections between mother-artists is *Mothers ARE Making Art (M.A.M.A.)*. *M.A.M.A.* is a bi-monthly exchange of ideas and art by mother-artists, whose aim is to intersect academic and scholarly discourse with the everyday through art (M.A.M.A. 2015). *M.A.M.A.* is now part of the *Procreate Project*, which is an arts organisation that supports artists who are mothers, working across art forms. The organisation works to conceive new models and platforms that facilitate artistic development and increased visibility and social change that benefits women and their families (*Procreate Project*, 2018). Models for artistic practice for mothers from the *Procreate Project* include *M.A.M.A*

publications, art prizes and an online art shop. *Procreate Project* also facilitates productions as models, such as *Oxytocin - Birthing the World*, which was a symposium fused with a program of performances about mothers, mother art and health. Other productions by the organisation include *Left Overs Art Show*, a multi-media exhibition by twenty mother-artists that voiced the diversity of motherhood, and *The Mother House Studios* as a reprisal of the *Mother House* of the 1970's, which is the UK's first ongoing artist studio with integrated childcare (*Procreate Project*, 2018) (Figures 18 & 19). Arguably, mother-artists use their experiential knowledge of nurturing connections with their children and apply this to strategies of creating collective networks of support. Accordingly, the advent of online communication has strengthened connections between mother-artist networks worldwide. These networks of support represent resiliency strategies for strong and sustainable practice, even when the artist resides regionally.



Figure 18. *Procreate Project*, Motherhouse Studios 2018



Figure 19. Procreate Project, Motherhouse Studios 2018

In an effort to engage with fellow mother-artists locally, I curated an exhibition entitled *Mother* in 2015, using the curatorial premise to locate subject matter between their roles as artist and mother. The artists involved included U.S. artist Courtney Kessel, Australian artists Danielle Hobbs, Christine Mills-Kelly, Peta Chalmers, Kirsty Lee and I. Performance artist Kirsty Lee's work, *Clean Sheets* (2015) (Figure 20) was made in direct response to the curatorial premise of the exhibition. In *Clean Sheets* (2015), Lee portrays a sense of play and stillness, and states that her role as a mother and artist is indistinguishable, 'it is not only a love and nurturing of your child, but of yourself'. In making this work specifically for the *Mother* exhibition, Lee articulates through video performance, an implicit aspect of her mother-artist-child relationship in an explicit way. The impact that the exhibition had on myself as an artist and curator was that I felt buoyed and validated by the participation and connection with other mother-artists. This sense of connectedness related to the subjective premise of exploring interrelationships as a strategy to maintain resilience in the challenging motherhood role that exists in my own work. Through this

exhibition, I realised that exhibiting diverse individual works together through a shared experience resulted in an overall strengthening of the artwork's premise and a sense of support for the mother-artists and their practices. This realisation underpinned the consequent development of the collaborative element with other mother-artists in this research project.

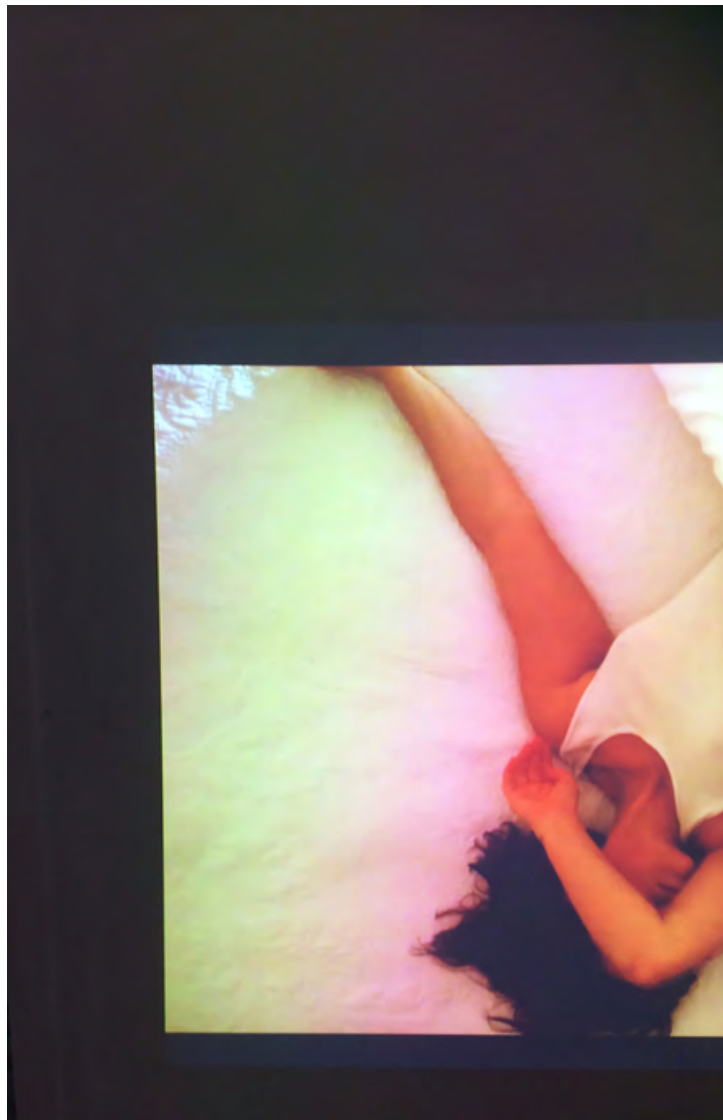


Figure 20. Kirsty Lee, *Clean Sheets*, 2015

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology:

Three Phases of the Mother Artist Model

While I have formed the Mother-Artist Model (MAM) as a way for developing creative practice from inside the mother and child relationship, I have also designed and applied the model as an innovative methodology within itself. In this way, the significance of my project is that it explores applying adaptive strategies inherent in mother-artist practice. Further, the MAM facilitates working from mother-artist and child relationships through art practice itself, in order to build more powerful visual arguments by mother-artists.

Utilising an overarching visual arts practice-led research methodology (eds Barrett & Bolt 2014; Sullivan 2010), the project is underpinned by a qualitative methodological approach using an interpretivist paradigm.⁵ According to art theorist Graeme Sullivan (2010), practice-led research involves a rigorous exploration of ideas and problem solving where the creative work is a form of research and a methodology within itself. Practice-led research is not always linear, quantifiable or easily explained linguistically (Robinson 2009, p. 3). As a result of its complexity, practice-led research is not always understood or 'fully recognised' in some broader parts of academia. Artist researchers who utilise this methodology within academic contexts have been required to justify it as being as important to the generation of knowledge as more 'theoretically based' research methods (Smith & Dean 2009, p. 2). In order for practice-led research to be carried out and tested for its contribution to knowledge, new research paradigms have been developed that offer alternatives to traditional academic research methodologies. While these new paradigms clarify the philosophy and concept of practice-led research, documented applications of the paradigms are required to increase understandings of their evolution (Haseman 2006, p. 9). The MAM paradigm also incorporates 'performative research' (Haseman 2006) which involves facets of 'traditional research' methods. These methods are tailored to creative practice research through, 'reflective practice, participant observation, ethnography, biographical or the autobiographical narrative inquiry, and the inquiry cycle from action research' (Haseman 2006, cited in Ansari, Ansari & Jafri 2014, p. 105). The corresponding findings in performative research are not

⁵ Also underpinned by Haseman's performative research paradigm as a more suitable research methodology for practice-led research than a purely qualitative paradigm.

conveyed through quantifiable numbers but rather, through a 'self-generated commentary,' with 'artistic expression becoming the research (outcome) itself' (Haseman 2006, cited in Ansari, Ansari & Jafri 2014, p. 6). These methodologies focus on data creation as well as data collection (Sullivan 2009, cited in Ansari, Ansari & Jafri 2014). Therefore, verification is determined through artefact, reflexive and reflective inquiry. In this way 'circular verification' is avoided because the focus is on the creation of artwork as data.

My choice of a practice-led research project is succinctly explained by Komal Ansari, Sanaullah Ansari & Saima Jafri:

The current move away from "qualitative" discourse analysis or "quantitatively" analysed numeric data for capturing creative research outcomes is due to the unlikelihood of capturing the richness, multiple shades and intricacies of individual behaviour inherent in practice or artistic forms due to the quantitative constraints imposed on "data-analysis length" or the qualitatively discussed process of research' (Ansari, Ansari & Jafri 2014, para. 32).

In the context of this creative study, my role as researcher is viewed through the lens of an interpretivist research paradigm. This paradigm is defined as when 'subjective research devices such as phenomenology and hermeneutics emphasise the researcher's active involvement in the problem domain and require them to adopt a creative or speculative stance rather than act as an observer (Ansari, Ansari & Jafri 2014). These complex creative practice-led methodologies also have the potential to be utilised in other research fields. This is further noted by Patricia Leavy (2009, p. 2), 'Arts-based researchers seek to create engaged, holistic, passionate research practices that bridge and not divide both the artist-self and researcher-self with the researcher and audience and researcher and teacher'. In this way, arts-based researchers are creating their own research tools that allow them to not only show the relationship they have with their work, but to embody the complexity of the research (Leavy 2009). Further, the intertwining of practice and theory, of the knowing, thinking, doing and making within these methodologies, leads Leavy (2009)

to propose that arts-based research methodologies can be utilised in scientific, social and educational academic research. The acceptance of these alternative qualitative methods in academic contexts can be linked to feminist approaches to research. As Shulamith Reinharz (1992) purports: feminist research can be characterized by valuing multiplicity in methods, openness to critique and a belief that research can create social change. Similarly, this research project participates in the purpose of feminist research which is to address the omissions and misrepresentations of women's perspectives by seeing diverse stories through women's non-traditional research outcomes (Ropers-Huilman & Winters 2011, p. 674).

This chapter describes the development of the MAM as a methodology within the three chronological phases of the project. As outlined in the *Introduction*, these three phases which I have identified, are used to provide data on how the project was actually performed. All three phases of the project involve a combination of collecting, making and analysis. The subset of methodologies that are employed in the data collection, making and analysis include autoethnography, narrative analysis and collective autoethnography. During all three phases of the project, I employed an autoethnographic approach in my own practice, in my interactions with the participants, and during analysis of the data from reflections and transcriptions. I have employed autoethnography as a storytelling approach which allows for both creative and analytical practices to interact and positions myself as the researcher as central to the research (Austin 2005; Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Haseman 2006). Inherently, it is 'the process as well as the product of writing about the personal and its relationship to culture' (Scott-Hoy & Ellis 2008, p. 130). Autoethnography is constructed of three major components: a description of the Self, an analysis of the Self, and a re-presentation of the Self (Austin 2005). The artworks created through the MAM provide important artefact-elicited prompts to my personal thoughts at the time they are produced. Other data that is utilised to work in an autoethnographically descriptive way includes diaries, photographs, documents, sound and artworks. Through this range of evidence, I make sense of who I have become in light of my mother-artist identity. It allows me to identify patterns or

regularities across the range of evidence and also to consider what is missing. As categories begin to form, I connect these with existing theoretical literature in order to demonstrate that my artistic journey is 'implicated in larger social formations and historical processes' (Russel 1998, cited in Austin 2005, p. 24).

Laura Ellingson and Carolyn Ellis (2008, p. 448) reveal that autoethnography enables critical reflection on ordinary aspects of our lives to become spaces in which 'an individual's passion can bridge individual and collective experience to enable richness of representation, complexity of understanding, and inspiration for activism'. The re-presentation of my 'Self' utilises visual forms of presentation and allows for images and text to be enhanced by each other, allowing for a seamless integration between the artworks and the exegesis (Smith-Shank & Keifer-Boyd 2007). Karen Scott-Hoy and Carolyn Ellis (2008) reveal that some arts-based autoethnographers 'include the artists' subjectivity and present their work as embodied inquiry' with the expectation that their research evokes a range of new possibilities, meanings and avenues of inquiry. From my perspective, one of the new meanings that an autoethnographic approach has enabled is that I have exposed my work publicly, which disrupts hierarchies concerning motherhood as being 'private' and peripheral, or regional. My own exposure of 'private' mothering allows other mother-artists to collectively subvert the notion of motherhood as located on the periphery.

Through my development of the MAM, I have recontextualised maternal regionalism as a potential site for creating a collective support network, rather than as a problematic site that isolates mother-artists. This experience has led me to extend the MAM into a collective autoethnographic methodological space with the five mother-artist participants. The emerging practice of collective autoethnography has been utilised throughout this project to provide important insights into whether the MAM allows renegotiation of the mother-artist identity to address maternal regionalism. Collective or collaborative autoethnography involves two or more writers/artists and provides a means to explore culturally significant experiences from multiple perspectives (Guyotte & Sochacka 2016, p. 2). The process of sharing

personal and shared experiences, as part of a collective autoethnographic approach, enables us to reflect, learn and understand from one another in a reflexive and critical way (Ellis & Bochner 2011).

Importantly, throughout the study, I maintain my voice as a practice-led researcher while upholding the voice of my children as participants. As outlined in the *Introduction*, the project includes my own children, my daughter Ella Clark, and son Riley Clark, as *Participant Group #1- Children*. As these participants are my own children, the USQ HREC - Approval No: H16REA140 ethics application outlines risk management strategies. These strategies include the allocation of a 'participant advocate' to each of my children. In my children's case, their school deputy principal was nominated to whom they can voice any concerns regarding coercion, or if they wish to terminate their participation in this research project. As the children are teenagers, they have also signed a participant consent form on their own behalf. There are perceived benefits for the child participants. The approved USQ HREC Human Ethics application states:

It is expected that this project will directly benefit you (the child) by increasing your skills and interest in the artmaking process, and by giving you a voice within this process. However, it may also benefit the researcher and other participants by increasing their artmaking research and production.

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the project also includes the following artists who represent *Participant Group #2 – Mother Artists*.

Jessica⁶ is a professional female mother-artist from Tamworth (NSW, Australia) who has one primary school aged daughter, one primary school aged son and one teenage daughter. Jessica works across mediums including scraperboard, aerosol, charcoal, acrylics, collage and mosaics, with works depicting a range of subjects from her own experience and imagination.

⁶ Pseudonyms have been employed for the adult mother-artist participants only, to protect the privacy of participants as per the Human Research Ethics Approval document.

Sally is a female professional artist and academic from Saskatoon, Canada who has one nineteen-year-old son. In her practice, Sally explores works in mixed-media and sculptural installation to explore embodied ways of knowing. She is interested in ritual and gesture, and the ways in which art arises from these and becomes a cultural performance.

Cadee is a female professional artist from Redcliffe, Queensland who is a mother to three adult children, two step adult children, and grandmother to eighteen children from newborn to sixteen years old. Cadee works with sculpture and ceramics to investigate narratives surrounding her indigenous heritage and familial bonds.

Renee is a professional artist and academic from Toowoomba, Queensland who is a biological mother to children aged 4 and 2, and stepmother to children aged 11, 9 and 7. Renee works primarily in the fields of Printmaking, Artist's Books and Mixed Media arts and is interested in the formation of everyday narratives, and how these can be disrupted or subverted visually. Renee investigates visual cues that can punctuate an environment, object or space of perceived meaning, and in doing so, may allude to subconscious methods of processing information. She explores these concerns through smaller scale book, paper and canvas works, through to large-scale mural works.

Amber works as a professional artist from Toowoomba, Queensland and has a son aged two, and a school age daughter. Amber works primarily with mixed media on canvas, exploring abstracted self-portraits through animal icons and mind mapping.

I (Linda) am an emerging professional mother-artist and researcher from Springfield, Queensland. As previously mentioned, I have a teenage daughter and teenage son who are also research participants in this project.

The USQ HREC H16REA140 ethics approval also applies to the mother-artist participants. As the participant's children are not part of this research project, I

chose to de-identify the participants through the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of their children.

I also contribute to the collective voice of the other mother-artists as an insider researcher, a position which provides critical and creative insights into our unique challenges and highlights. The role as insider researcher applies to my interactions both with the mother-artist participants and my children as participants. As I have previous and/or professional relationships with some of the participants, I acknowledge that there is a need to negotiate the role of what Jodie Taylor (2011) describes as 'intimate insider'. Taylor (2011) examines Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and Robert Labaree's (2002) arguments that the insider researcher must distance themselves from their culture in order to prevent a myopic position within the research that overlooks 'second nature' understandings that can exist in prior relationships. As an insider researcher I pay particular attention to adopting a reflexive standpoint during the collection, analysis and discussion of the data.

As the insider researcher, I also conducted narrative analysis, which as David Michael Boje (2010) posits, is the process of deriving analysis retrospectively from narrative audio and visual data. While conducting the narrative analysis, I considered the data in the context of how the past shapes the present and how, as the author, I value events and elements differently to others. In an attempt to negotiate the insider researcher role in my interactions with the mother-artist participant group, I maintained consistency between interviews by adhering to the previously determined list of interview questions discussed below, a strategy that I also applied to the focus group, although a little more fluidly. The role of insider researcher became more complex in the research interactions with my children as I was keenly aware of 'relational ethics'. 'Relational ethics' calls for me to acknowledge interpersonal bonds with my children, and take responsibility for my actions and their consequences, particularly because my children are implicated in the narratives of my artwork (Ellis 2007). With these ethical considerations in mind, I considered my child's standpoint and opinion on artworks and interview data as being of the

utmost importance and urged them to consider how they may feel about their data remaining publicly available in the future.

The personal nature of this research has required attention to issues of ethics and confidentiality in relation to accountability and self-disclosure (Ellis 2007; Ngunjiri, Hernández & Chang 2010). These have been outlined in my approved ethics application. This deeply personal engagement through collective autoethnography with other mother-artist participants and my children provides an important opportunity to illuminate this often taken-for-granted aspect of some women's lives.

Ethnography draws on a family of methods, involving direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions (O'Reilly 2012, p. 4).

I have chosen not to employ an ethnographic approach alone as a methodology of observation. Doing so would remove the possibility of obtaining valuable data from myself and the mother-artists as a participant sharing personal and shared experiences as part of a collective autoethnographic approach. This would also remove the ability to reflect, learn and understand from one another in a reflexive and critical way (Ellis & Bochner 2011).

Phase One of the MAM project was conducted from March 2016 until February 2017. During this phase, I concentrated on analysing and clarifying my approach to practice through a combination of practice-led research and investigations into methodological approaches. Through this analysis, I decided to involve mother-artists and my children as participants. Further, I decided that in *Phase Two*, I would employ reflective journals, interview, focus group and an exhibition as methods of data collection to investigate the use of the MAM by other artists. In *Phase One*, I also used artmaking utilising the MAM framework as a data collection method. *Phase Two* of the project was conducted from April 2017 until February 2018 and was primarily a data collection and making phase. This making phase involved

investigating the use of the MAM in practice. The data collection in *Phase Two* involved collective autoethnography when participant interviews and a focus group were conducted. Further data collection occurred through the participant's completion of their reflective journals, and my transcription of the interview and focus group audio. *Phase Three*, which was conducted from March 2018 until December 2018, involved reflection on the MAM as used in my own practice and further artmaking in response to these reflections. This phase also focussed on thematic analysis of the MAM through the data collected and how it was utilised by the participants.

3.1 Phase One - Understanding my Practice Through Researching Methodology

In this first phase, I sought to clarify the project's methodologies by researching on the practice-led methodology. The MAM encompasses practice-led methodology in every application of creative practice. Therefore, when using the MAM, I respond to my project's central questions through creative practice research beginning with the visual research of texts, images and exhibited artworks. This process involves a 'constructivist' understanding of practice, whereby knowledge is produced as a result of integrating theory and practice (Sullivan 2010, p. 100). In this way, in *Phase One*, I conducted material research through making by experimenting with materials such as video, fabric, sculpture, sound and sketching. This process was informed by the visual and theoretical research. Further, I utilised 'transformative' understanding practices, where knowledge creation is recursive and changes during the art making process when new experiences talk back to me as the artist (Sullivan 2010, p. 100). I experienced this during visual, theoretical and material research when new responses to my central question were gradually revealed, thereby the idea for the artwork that embodies this response comes from this practice. For example, in my practice, I visually articulated the complexity and challenge that I experienced as a mother within the liminal space. My research on liminality contributed to my understanding, including Cody's (2012, p. 46) liminality as a 'suspension of identities', Turner's explanation of liminality as a transitional stage in my child's development and social status from child to adult (Wels et al. 2011) and the

Deleuzian framework that examines liminality in terms of traversal and becoming (Summer and Clark 2015, p. 236). With these theoretical explanations of liminality in mind, I later conducted visual research and investigations of materiality through experimenting with the medium of glass as a mediator and metaphor for our traversal of that liminal space.

As part of investigating the use of the MAM in this phase, as previously discussed, I decided to recruit my own children as participants. I also recruited five regionally-based practicing contemporary visual artists who are mothers and included one participant from a regional area overseas, as mentioned in the *Introduction*. My choice of local and international artists was crucial to consider local to global dialogues, and whether mother-artist perspectives shift across cultural boundaries. I also investigated different models of collaboration in regional areas, and how and why I wanted to share the MAM with other mother-artists. A phase of 'reflexive action' followed which included decisions about the identity and recruitment method of participants, formulation of interview questions, focus group structure, method of data recording and subsequent submission of the ethics application. To facilitate a richness of data from the mother-artist participants, the project includes four methods of data collection. These methods include an interview, participant's one-week journal reflection, focus group and a synopsis of the final exhibition of the work produced with the MAM. The ethics application was approved 12 January 2017, and I have adhered to the conditions of this approval throughout the project, with an amendment approved to use the online collaborative tool *Trello* with my research participants.

Phase One also involved an artist residency at The State Library of Queensland 'The Edge' in March 2016. The residency enabled me to focus on the way I undertake practice-led research through an autoethnographic approach, within a broader industry context. Perhaps more importantly though, the residency experience brought a surprising insight into my experience of maternal regionalism. At this early stage, I was used to the familiarity of the 'private' space of mothering my children at home, being on the periphery of art and society. During the residency, I experienced

separation anxieties as a result of being away from my children (and home). This separation contributed to the contextual experience of this project as I was able to reflect on the reasons for my maternal anxieties. These reasons were that I was beginning to use the MAM to begin the important process of subverting the 'private' tropes of the mother, re-framing regional periphery as a space of powerful practice where I could investigate the complex feelings surrounding this separation, through practice.

During the residency, my autoethnographic approach included paying attention to practice cues of identifying challenges inside my mother and child relationship, such as the separation, and written journaling in response to these challenges. The process also included methods of 'image journaling', which is my system of recording and consolidating ideas through a combination of sketches, digital images and words. Following this, I undertook the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role that is central to the MAM. Throughout this phase, I intentionally recorded ('kept') conversations with my children, paying particular attention to problems that they had, or problems that existed within our relationship, such as my inability to 'let go' and allow my daughter to have some independence. When researching during this phase, I paid attention to imagery that articulated the 'constructed' solution to the problem with my child and 'kept' that imagery as an 'image journal' (Figure 21). Then, I made a sculptural work that was used by my daughter in a video work, culminating in the installation work *Lost/Found* (2016) (Figure 22). A discussion of the creative and autoethnographic process underpinning *Lost/Found* (2016) is discussed in *Chapter Four*.

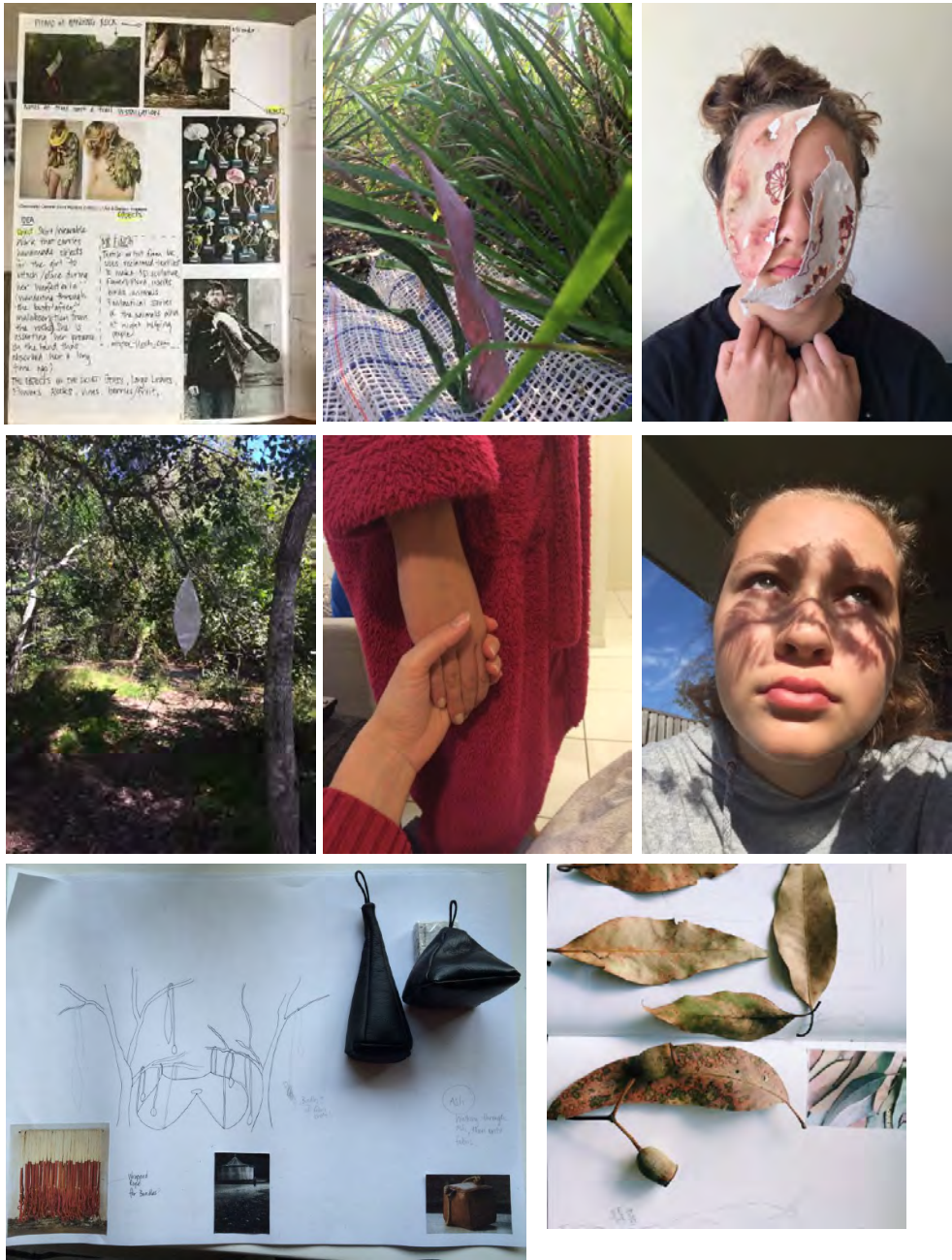


Figure 21. Linda Clark, *Visual Journal Images Phase One*

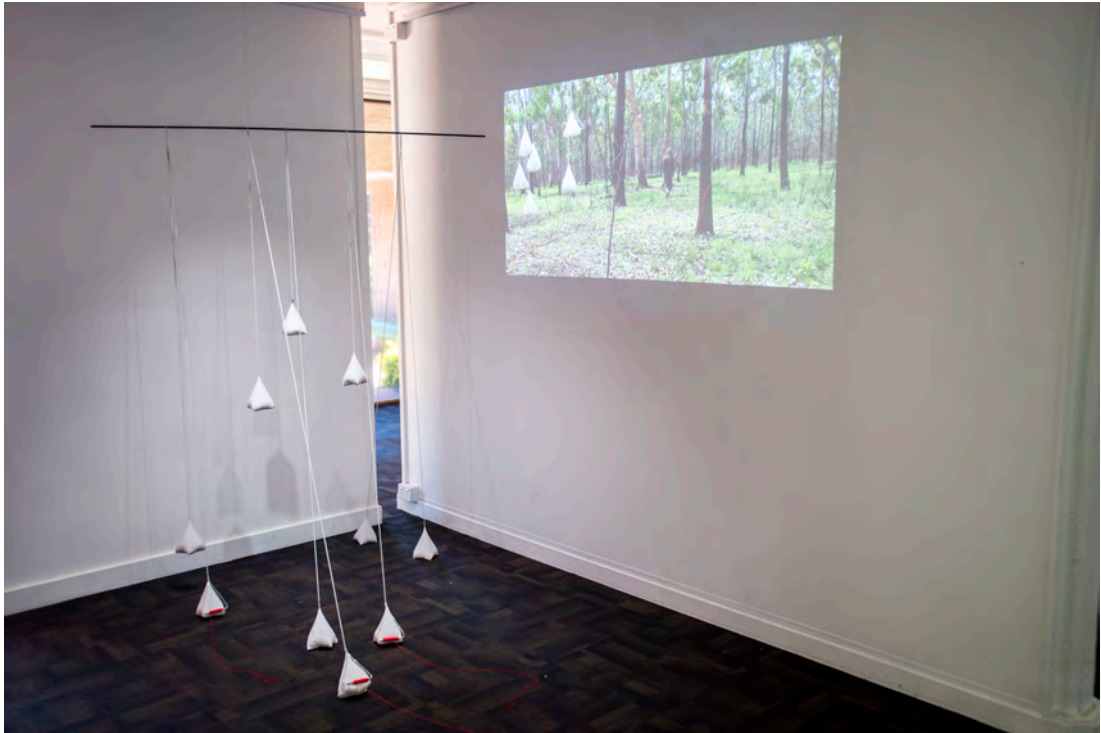


Figure 22. Linda Clark, *Lost/Found*, 2016

3.2 Phase Two - Using the Mother-Artist Model in Practice and Collective Autoethnography

Phase Two concentrated on practice and data collection as performed in a collective autoethnographic framework. My practice continued along similar practice methods by utilising the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role. In this phase, I researched ways to 'construct' a narrative through video, based on my own journal reflections of my motherhood role. This included research into construction of a video studio at home to reduce barriers to practice, researching videography techniques, obtaining video editing skills, and researching and testing glass as an art material (see Visual Journal Images, Figure 23).



Figure 23. Linda Clark, *Visual Journal Images Phase Two*

My children, Ella and Riley, were involved in the project through four informal discussions of fifteen minutes each about everyday rituals and problems, from which I then conducted my own reflective journal observations. The children were also co-constructors in my practice when they were involved in the production of, and appeared in, the video artwork that I used to make subsequent artworks *Threshold Obscured* (2017) and *Bearing Witness* (2018). In this way, I 'facilitated' and 'kept' their narrative through video. Subsequently, the children completed individual reflections in a journal, detailing their ideas for further development of the video works in response to questions that I had written in the journals for them, such as: 'What did the videos (that we created together) make you think about?', 'If you had

another chance, what would you do to the glass (that we used in during the video shoot)?'; 'What would you change about the videos?'; and 'What colour should the videos be?'. Using the children's reflections as a conceptual basis, I then created the video installation *Threshold Obscured* (2017) and *Bearing Witness* (2018) in *Phase Three* of the project.

To further refine the study, I then discussed the MAM model's purpose with the five mother-artist participants. This involved explaining that the MAM is based on the mother-artist adopting the role of 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' as a conceptual basis for practice that explores everyday issues, rituals and problems within mother-child relationships. Following this, I provided mother-artists with a written explanation of the model (see Appendix A) as follows:

The basis of the 'Mother-Artist Model' is the role of 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper'.

The mother-artist uses this role by beginning with a problem, concern or positive message for her child.

The mother-artist and child 'facilitate' memory by together choosing particular activities, rituals or experiences for the child.

This approach allows both mother and child to 'construct' a new narrative or mythology which may highlight undercurrents or tensions that exist for them both. This new narrative allows for the complexities of the relationship to unfold conceptually through play to create work that interweaves daily activities in the current social and cultural context in which they are immersed.

The mother-artist then records or 'keeps' the ritual or experience as both process and product of their artistic practice.

Interviews were then conducted with each mother-artist participant. The interviews were audio recorded and based on the following list of questions, which were written specifically to gain information about how each participant navigates their mothering and artist roles.

Participant Interview Sample Questions

- *How did you first develop an interest in becoming an artist?*
- *Tell me about your arts practice.*
- *What are you making at the moment?*
- *Tell me about what you are researching. This could be about anything, including everyday activities, visual art, children, education.*
- *How did you first develop an interest in becoming an artist?*
- *How would you describe your artmaking process/ how do you go about making artworks?*
- *How do you make time/space for artmaking in your life?*
- *Where do you make your work? Studio/home?*
- *How do you navigate between the roles of mother and artist?*
- *What are the challenges around being a mother?*
- *How do you represent yourself/your identity in your work?*
- *Are you a member of an artist's community in your area?*
- *What would you like to gain from a collaboration with other artists?*
- *How do you think mother/artists could collaborate?*
- *Do you see living regionally as a help or hindrance to your practice?*

Jessica and Sally's interviews were conducted online, while Cadee, Renee and Amber's interviews were conducted in person. Subsequently, I transcribed the interview audio recordings. Importantly, during the interviews, I emphasised that although I requested that each mother-artist consider how they would use the MAM in their practice, I also requested that each artist consider how they may adapt the model to their practice. At the interviews, I advised each participant that I am curating an exhibition of artwork that each mother-artist makes while using the MAM.⁷

⁷ This exhibition was not included in the ethics application because it is optional for participants.

Subsequently, after the interviews, and as per the approved ethics participant consent form, I requested journaled reflections as feedback from the artists in order to explore the MAM's potential relevance for other mother-artists as an innovative adaptive creative practice strategy and as a conduit to forming collective networking communities. Importantly, I gave the participants the freedom to use any medium they chose to record their reflections and I suggested written reflections, photographs, creative writing, drawings, video or a combination of these. I requested that for one week, they record and reflect on any rituals performed by them or their child that interested them. This included any activities that they initiated for/with their child, any concerns or questions about their children that they had, and any symbols or images uncovered through this practice. This documentation culminated in a range of written, drawn and photographic journals that reflect each mother-artist's observation. Jessica wrote in a dated diary form, while Renee's documentation was a journal that included photographs, written poems, children's artworks and Renee's own reflections about their daily interactions. Amber's documentation was a series of photographs which depicted everyday play spaces, children's play, artworks, family interactions and the artist herself. Cadee's reflective journal consists of one week of diary entries documenting everyday activities along with photographs of her children, grandchildren and herself.

In November 2017, I conducted a focus group with all participants which was based on a discussion of artmaking ideas, concerns regarding mothering, children and the way the participants utilise the MAM. Sally from Saskatoon, Canada, and Jessica from Tamworth, both joined the focus group online via Zoom, while Renee, Amber and Cadee attended in person. The focus group was held well after the interviews when the mother-artists had completed their journaled reflections and had time to consider how they may utilise the MAM in their own practice. Prior to the focus group, I organically constructed an agenda to help keep the focus group on track. This structure aligned with my desire, and the ethics approval, to enrich the focus group in order to obtain the most useful data. The agenda structure included the following guidelines:

1. Encourage all participants (including myself) to:
 - Provide a brief discussion about their practice
 - Provide one of their best strategies in relation to how they make time to balance their artistic practice with their family commitments (researcher took notes about how it confirms or provides new perspectives to the MAM).
2. Thank everyone for their time on the project during interviews and focus group.
3. Draw some links which confirm or provide new perspectives to the MAM, from notes taken during '1. Encourage all participants to:'.
4. Provide a brief overview of the MAM project:
 - MAM considers the constantly shifting mother-child relationship as an artmaking process.
 - Aim of the project: if the MAM is useful resource and advocates agency for mother and child.
 - Can MAM help us translate that adaptability of everyday motherhood to our practice?
5. A refresher about the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role as the basis for the Mother-Artist Model.
6. I ask the participants and link back to first discussion:
 - 'What is your understanding of the model?'
 - 'Is the model beneficial, and in what ways?'
Is it something they can use – a theoretical construct – that they can use to in a sense 'validate' who they are?
 - 'How would you be able to use the MAM and what changes they would suggest for their own context?'
 - 'Describe how they could use the model (perhaps with adaptations) as they work towards the 2019 exhibition?'
 - 'Do they feel it would enhance their ability to communicate with other artists towards the exhibition?'

3.3 Phase Three - Practice, Transcription, Data Coding and Exhibition

In *Phase Three* of the project, in my practice I drew upon earlier exchanges with my children to reinvestigate how our perspectives have changed over time. During this time, I transcribed the focus group audio recording. The process of transcription enabled reflexive practice, for example, transcribing my own voice reminded me to revisit my original aims of the project, one of which was providing my children with agency in the practice. On reflection, I realised that I required more strategies for determining whether my children felt a sense of agency through the use of the MAM. Considering this, I decided to ask them further written questions in their journals, such as 'What would you like to do or say during our project and did you feel like you've achieved that?', and 'Do you think the photos that you post on social media show people the real you, and why do you think that?'. Riley answered these questions in the journal, and Ella did not answer these additional questions at all. This led to important findings concerning children exerting their own agency within the project, which are discussed in *Chapter Four*.

To analyse how the mother-artist participant's work was progressing while utilising the MAM, I instigated the use of *Trello* which is an online platform for project collaboration. The mother-artist participants and I utilised the online platform *Trello* to share information such as images of work in progress, ideas, website and research links and insights into visual arts practice using the MAM. *Trello* requires each participant to create a password protected login, and each participant requires a personal invitation from me to join and view the private online project boards and cards. The participants are able to hide project boards if they do not wish the other participants to see it. On the *Trello* application, if a participant has made a 'board', they can select 'Change Visibility' to 'Private' which advises the user that the board is private. Only people added to the board can view or edit it. Other options available for visibility include 'Team' which a participant can select so that only the other participants and myself can see the board, and 'Public' which can be chosen if the participant wants the board to be able to be seen by any member of the public. I advised the participants to hide information that they do not wish to reveal in the

research data. The time frame required for use of *Trello* is up to the participant's own discretion. Examples of our communication on the *Trello* platform are as follows:

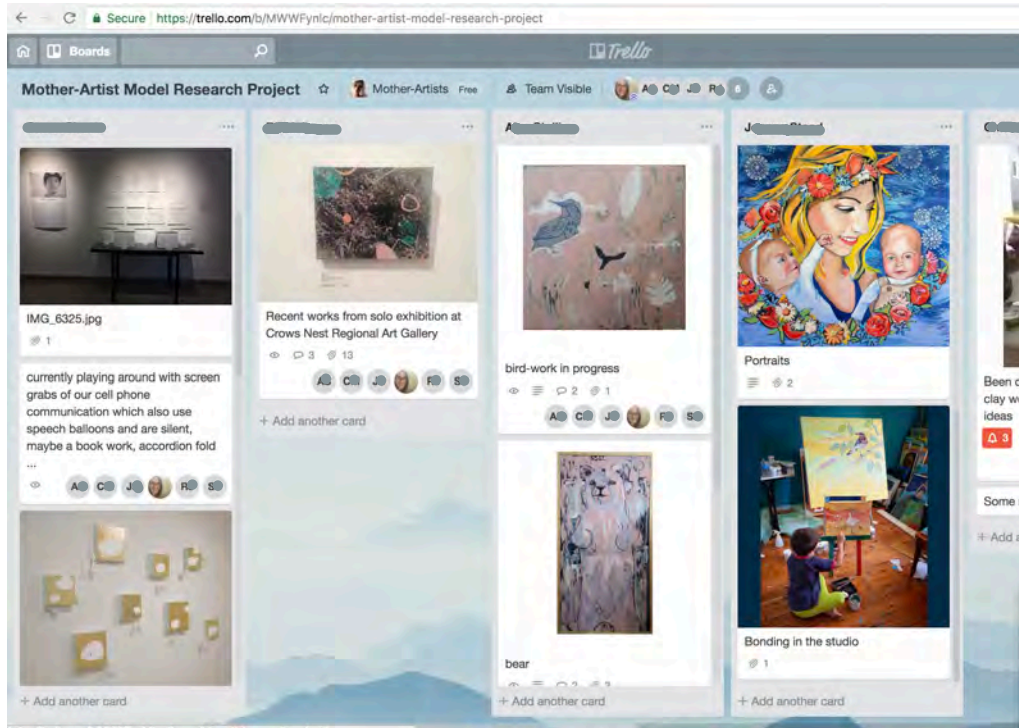


Figure 24. *Trello* Board Page One

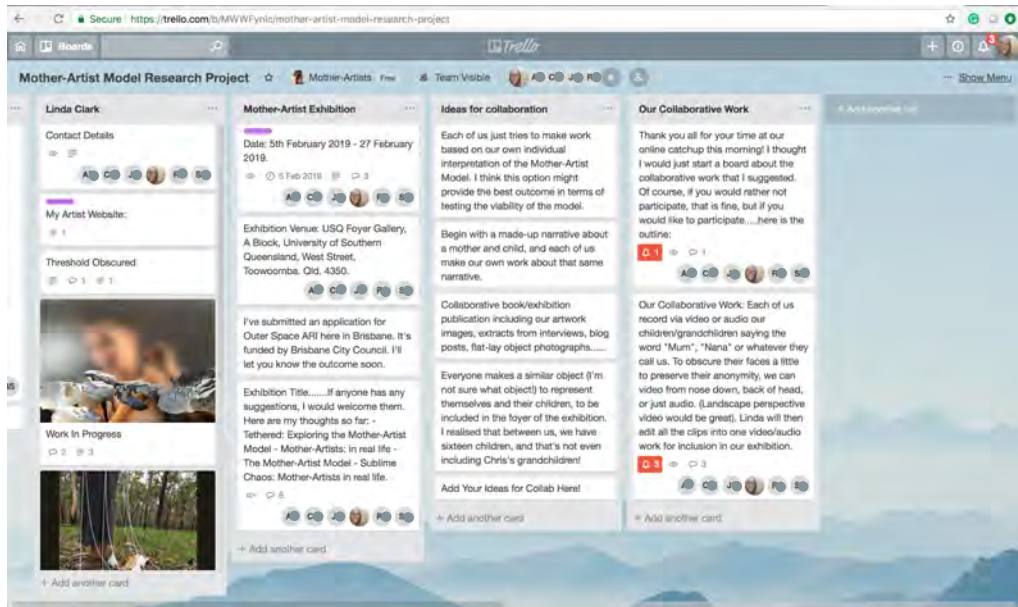


Figure 25. *Trello* Board Page Two

An exhibition of my three key bodies of work that I completed utilising the MAM throughout the project will be held in the USQ Toowoomba Red Door Gallery from 5

February 2019 until 27 February 2019, as one of the final outcomes of the project. The other outcome is a group exhibition with the mother-artist participants, to be held at the University of Southern Queensland Toowoomba in the Artsworx Foyer Gallery during the same period. This venue was chosen because of my close affiliation with USQ throughout my undergraduate and honours studies, and because the Red Door Gallery allows some freedom for site specific installation, including hanging capacity and video projection. As curator of the exhibitions, one of the criteria for my initial choice of the artists as participants was that they are contemporary professional practicing artists, and therefore their work is already of a high standard. I have designated a space in the gallery for each mother-artist's body of work.

Throughout this project, the key overarching practice-led methodology is integral, as it allows for a more recursive approach that allowed me to generate, and answer, questions from the process and methods of the creative work itself, which leads to more concepts for the basis of practice. Through narrative analysis within an autoethnographic framework, I was able to retrospectively consider my own past written reflections and visual outcomes from practice-led methodological approach to reveal insights which would not have been possible otherwise. Further, my analysis of the interview, reflective journal, focus group and exhibition synopsis through narrative analysis within a collective autoethnographic framework provides important insights into how my participants and myself each value elements of the MAM's methodology in a different way. These unique insights include that the MAM can be adapted as children grow older and more independent, that both mother-artist and child agency are facilitated by the MAM to subvert mothering stereotypes, and that a collective network of mother-artist creates connections through practice to overcome maternal regionalism. In this way, the project has created an opportunity to further develop and extend the MAM as a meaningful practice-led framework into a collective space.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Mother-Artist Model: My Creative Practice

4.1 The Mother-Artist Model as Creative Work

The purpose of this chapter is to explore my practice and its positioning in relation to *Chapter Two – Creative Practice Literature Review* and *Chapter Three – Methodology: Three Phases of the MAM*. This chapter focusses on the application of the MAM in the production of my creative work and those of the participants. In my development of the MAM, I have observed that my practice is embedded in my need to explore through making, thinking, researching and interacting with my children through the intertwined roles of the mother-artist. Within this exploration, I do not merely engage with the subject matter of motherhood, rather my practice is located in everyday ritual and complex exchanges between myself and my children.

As a central investigation, this chapter addresses my practice-led research outcomes which involve conceptually-driven installation art that incorporates video, sound and sculptural objects. When using the MAM, the constantly changing dynamic in the multiple everyday exchanges between my child and I are the basis for my practice. Within these exchanges, artist and child agency are negotiated. As an outcome of the MAM, through everyday exchanges with my children, I uncover stories, tensions and rituals in our family that I then respond to through artistic practice. Cultural and social questions surrounding our identity formation are also uncovered through these exchanges, enabling my children to contribute to their own viewpoint about these issues. The nature of this negotiation examines the definition of agency as discussed in *Chapter Two*, related to the power relations between my children and I, and, how agency is measured and achieved in the context of this project. These exchanges enable my children to have agency, a key precursor to gaining independence from their own family to find their own way in the world. Therefore, to provide context, this chapter investigates how the MAM facilitates child agency through examples of how my own children assert their agency within the MAM.

In this space where the MAM facilitates child agency, one of the findings of this study is that it is also a mother's preparation tool for letting go and allowing her child to be independent. This finding represents Kosmala's argument in *Chapter Two* that a

dislocation of self, such as this changed mothering role, can also inspire the formation of new understandings for creative practice and engagement (Kosmala 2017, p. 94). This preparation for letting go begins when I employ these interactions as a method through the MAM in my role as 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper'. Through this role, my child and I 'facilitate' memory together by choosing particular activities. This facilitation is not me controlling my child's activities, rather, it scaffolds an enriched situation for exploration and play, to enable my children to learn about their identity in a way that provides ownership of the experience (Kawka 2009, p. 47). As the mother-artist, I then record, or 'keep' the ritual or experience as both process and product of the artistic practice. This approach is a co-construction with my children, enabling us to edit or 'co-construct' the depiction of the ritual to create a new narrative, to highlight potential undercurrents that exist for us both. This narrative allows for the complexities of our relationship to unfold conceptually through play and conversation, to create work that interweaves daily activities into the current social and cultural context(s) in which they are immersed. By creating hospitable spaces through the MAM, involving 'play, conversation and collaboration,' I also disrupt predictable approaches in artmaking and my practice (Graham & Zwirn 2015, p. 219). To provide examples of this finding, this chapter considers three key bodies of work as outcomes: *Lost/Found* (2016), *Threshold Obscured* (2017) and *Bearing Witness* (2018). Each discussion about the conceptual development and making of these key works begins with a personal reflection about my role as a mother in my relationship with my children. As 'keeper' of these personal reflections, I provide examples of my practice approach, key to which is my adoption of the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role that is central to the MAM.

4.2 *Lost/Found*

Ella 15 years old, April 2016

In a phone call while I was on residency, Ella said, "We have to dress in cultural dress for Harmony Day at school. I have no culture, what should I wear?". I said to her, "Culture for you might be more about belonging,

community and identity. It's not only about what you wear, but why you wear it" (Linda Clark Research Journal, 2016).

This quote is from one of the informal discussions with my daughter, as discussed in *Chapter Three*. In this interaction, Ella was concerned that she could not wear 'Australian' cultural dress as she does not identify with Indigenous Australian culture, or white European culture. When asked what she thinks Australian culture looks like, she answered that it looks like the plants and animals in our landscape, and also that our culture signifies freedom. Using this exchange between my daughter and I as a basis, I used the MAM during *Phase One* to develop one of the key bodies of installation and video work titled *Lost/Found* (2016) (Figure 22).⁸ The concept for this work began through use of the MAM which framed this conversation with my daughter about her concern regarding a 'lack' of cultural identity. As part of my practice-led research, I considered my own perceived lack of ability to assist her with this problem and proceeded to use the MAM to examine the problem through practice. By dissecting this challenge that I had as a mother and applying my perceived solutions to a conceptual premise for *Lost/Found* (2016), the work carries my own autoethnographic perspective, providing insight into both practice, and our relationship.

The central premise of *Lost/Found* (2016) is a constructed narrative of my daughter, who leads the viewer into an unknown destination in the landscape, leaving weights and threads in her path as metaphorical clues. As a response to our exchange as detailed above, I undertook the role of 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role. Using this, I 'constructed' and 'facilitated' a narrative of my daughter walking through the landscape. The process of this construction included making the weights from cotton and stones and adding sterling silver spools for red thread. During the process of video recording her journey through the landscape, my daughter carried the weights over her shoulder, dragging them through the undergrowth, while the red thread unravelled from the spools on the weights and created a 'path' through

⁸ Please follow this link to view video work:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ay08b6ks3xgj1z4/Final%20Lost%20Found%20.mp4?dl=0>

the landscape. In this way, she carries the metaphorical 'weight' of expectation to be the 'good daughter' but is asserting her freedom (and agency) by walking away. Through this action, my daughter is exerting her power to walk away from the boundaries that I have placed on her in the actual making of the video work. By facilitating the video recording, I maintained my role as 'keeper' of the memory by recording her experience. However, because of the co-construction between us where Ella exerts agency, this work is also a metaphor for the constantly evolving dynamic of our mother and child relationship. Through making this work, I am learning about her emerging identity, while she is leading me into an unknown landscape where there is tension surrounding her need for independence, and my reluctance to let go. In making this work together, Ella and I each had a chance to understand each other's perspectives and challenges as related to our generational differences. Consequently, this work shows how the MAM is used in everyday life as a resiliency strategy to overcome tensions within our relationship. This relates to the discussion in *Chapter Two* about Erika Gofton's exploration of her changing sense of self in relation to her *child's* changing adolescent identity in *Liminal* (2015) (Figure 9) (Gofton, cited in Needham et al. 2016, p. 6). *Lost/Found* (2016) was exhibited in 2016 as part of the *Subversive Spaces* exhibition in the USQ Art Gallery. The *Subversive Spaces* exhibition was recorded in the USQ research repository e-Prints as: Batorowicz, Beata and Younger, Jay and Porch, Debra and Clark, Linda and Bezer, Ali and Ko, Christine and Coleman, Ellie and Carkeek, Amy (2016) *Subversive Spaces*. [A Visual Arts Collection].

4.3 Threshold Obscured

Ella, 15 years old, March 2017

Yesterday she told me that she had to help a little boy at school who had slipped in the rain and hit his head on the stairs. She said there was blood being washed away by the rain, and the little boy was screaming. She said she picked him up and took him to the office. I asked her if she said anything to him. She said, 'Yes, I said "You'll be okay"'. I said, "That's pretty amazing, some girls would just stand there, not knowing what to do, panicking". She shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "well, that's what I did". So, every now

and again, in between the push and pull of our relationship, the obscurity lifts and I see the ways she will channel that strong will, and what seems to be unemotional thinking is turned into helping someone.

Every day, both of my children stand at a new threshold. The threshold always seems to be moving away from me or obscured by my own ideas of what they should be. I have to remember that, for them, they encounter some new challenge every day, that they stand at the threshold every day, making a tough decision (Linda Clark Research Journal, 2017).

This journal reflection was the catalyst for the development of the conceptual premise that underpins my second key work, *Threshold Obscured* (2017) (Figure 26). Using the MAM within my practice, I created *Threshold Obscured* (2017), a video installation work. This phase of practice explored a new and unfamiliar dynamic in my relationship with my children. They are now adolescents, and consequently they are pulling away from their dependence on me and asserting their own independence and world-view, as in the journal reflection above. I have had to face this 'reality' that my mothering role is changing. This relates to the previous discussion in *Chapter Two* surrounding 'good-enough' mother identity (Pedersen 2016, p. 38), where I now have a more sustainable visual arts practice by mining the 'realities' of the mother and child relationship, whether those realities are societally perceived as good or bad. Predominantly, my children experience the world through a glass screen via technology. Occasionally, they even find it easier to communicate with me through text message, rather than have a face-to-face conversation. *Threshold Obscured* (2017) explores the concept that a sheet of glass can act as a 'mediator' between my child and I, enabling us to communicate without words by conveying a message through the glass in an 'exchange'. The glass as 'mediator' may transform tensions that a face-to-face discussion generates. In turn, I found this process useful in exploring how glass can enable us to communicate our message to each other through directly applying physical drawing, collage, objects or movement to the glass with our hands.



Figure 26. Linda Clark, *Threshold Obscured*, Video Still, 2017

To facilitate the video recording session of the actual exchanges I attempted different ways of hanging glass and interacting with glass as discussed in *Chapter Three*. For example, I experimented with ways to secure the sheets of glass that we use as ‘mediator’ during the ‘exchanges’. Figure 27 shows experiments for securing the material by making a timber support base for the glass to slot into so that it is freestanding and secure, or by hanging the glass from the ceiling and securing it to a base on the ground. Amidst these experiments, I also manipulated materials by digitally layering photographs of my children before printing (see example in Figure 28). From this process, I layered the printed images on the glass itself (see example in Figure 29). My children and I also recorded some experiment ‘exchanges’ in video footage (see <https://vimeo.com/208620155>) (Figure 30). This experimental process generated further ideas about the positioning of the glass as ‘mediator’ and the materials and processes that could be applied to the glass in future ‘exchanges’. On reflection, through this initial videography process, I determined the lighting and camera angles required to prevent or create reflection on the glass, and that the materials and concepts used by my children in this ‘exchange’ need to be initiated by them.

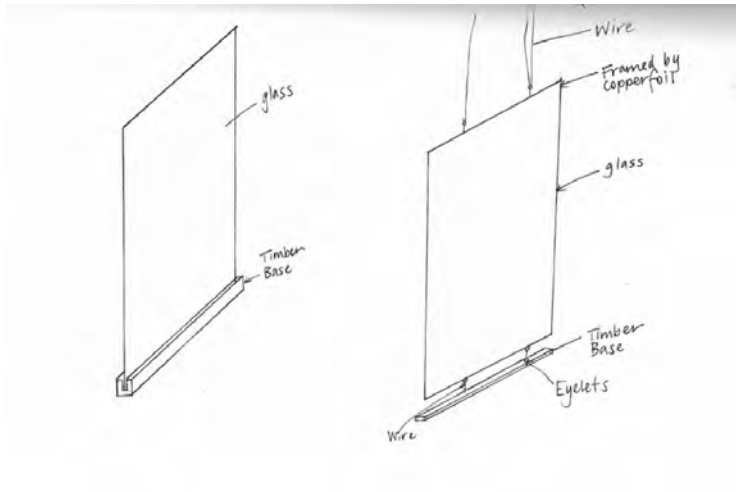


Figure 27. Glass Hanging Experiment Image



Figure 28. Experimentation with digital layering of photographs



Figure 29. Layering of digital prints on glass

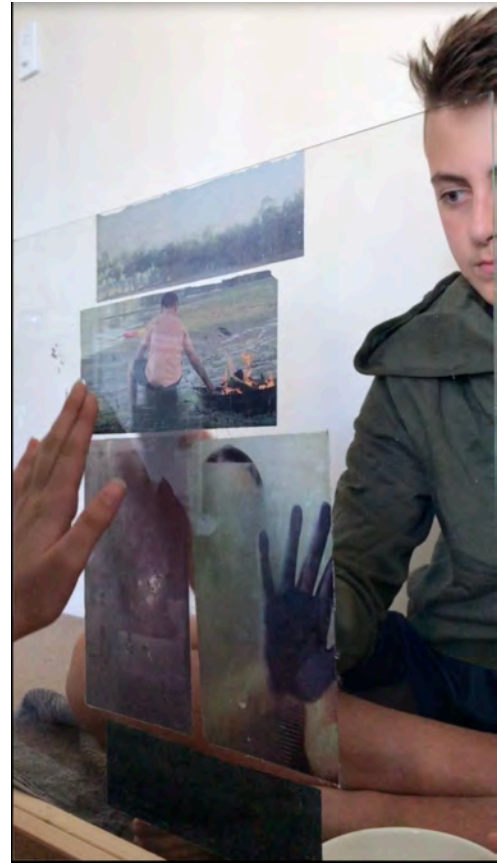


Figure 30. Experimentation video exchanges with glass (Video Still)

Ultimately, I ‘constructed’ a home videography studio which required backdrops, lighting, tripod and video camera (Figure 31). The actual video shoot exchanges involved sessions where my children and I sat on opposite sides of a hanging sheet of glass (Figure 32) and the children were ‘allowed’ to interact with me in ways that are normally forbidden. For example, they spat water at the glass, performed ‘blowfishes’ on the glass with their mouths, lit incense and captured the smoke against the glass, and drew with their fingers on steam that fogged the glass (Figures 33 & 34). At this stage, I found that the children were able to assert agency by choosing how they interacted with me through the glass, and for what period of time. Then, I video recorded these exchanges in the home videography studio. It was important that this exchange occurred in the home, because the interactions between my children and I are increasingly fleeting as they become more independent, so the home studio allowed short and instant exchanges between us. This removed a barrier to practice, because we did not need to delay exchanges to go offsite.



Figure 31. Home video studio.



Figure 32. Video shoot exchange between Linda and children



Figure 33. Riley performing blowfish on glass



Figure 34. Ella performing smoke on glass

After the video footage was captured, I considered how I would ‘construct’ narratives from the raw video footage and ultimately, how I wanted the videos to be installed. Ella and Riley also responded to my questions in their reflective journals.

My questions to the children included: 'What would you change about the videos?' and 'What did the videos make you think about?' To the latter, Ella answered,

The videos make me think about being creative, passions and favourite things, future aspirations, freedom, adulthood and coming-of-age.

However, some of my questions to her in the journal remained unanswered which I perceived as an assertion of her agency to choose not to answer. Riley's response to this same question was to create an abstract collage, almost surrealist. The children's answers gave me insight into their identities, and while they seemed abstracted from the video making process, they reflected their point of view in relation to the conceptual premise being constructed. To dissipate a conflicted situation, these exchanges could be used to clarify each other's point of view. For example, as the lighting reflected the children's reflection back from the glass to themselves in the in-between times where they thought I was not paying attention to them, I was able to observe their reactions to 'seeing' themselves, a revealing of truths that is normally only between themselves and a mirror.

Through this observation, I uncovered a clear narrative to explore through video and installation, which would survey Riley's expressions and reactions while spitting water at the glass in relation to my own reactions. At this stage, I determined that I should 'construct' a narrative in installation which explored the footage of myself and Riley in a collective autoethnographic way, as a 'keep'-sake of our relationship during his liminal stage. The second key work *Threshold Obscured* (2017) (Figure 26)⁹ is the result of this practice. To test this narrative, the videos were installed on opposing walls in a space, with the glass sheet itself hanging between them (Figure 35) as part of a work in progress critique at the Doctor of Creative Arts 'Divergent Impacts' conference. Brad Haseman was the keynote speaker at the conference, and provided a critique of my work in progress, and feedback on my conference presentation.

⁹ Please see Dropbox link for *Threshold Obscured* video work
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ote67a3tqehkz85/THRESHOLD%20OBSCURED%20Linda%20Clark.mp4?dl=0>

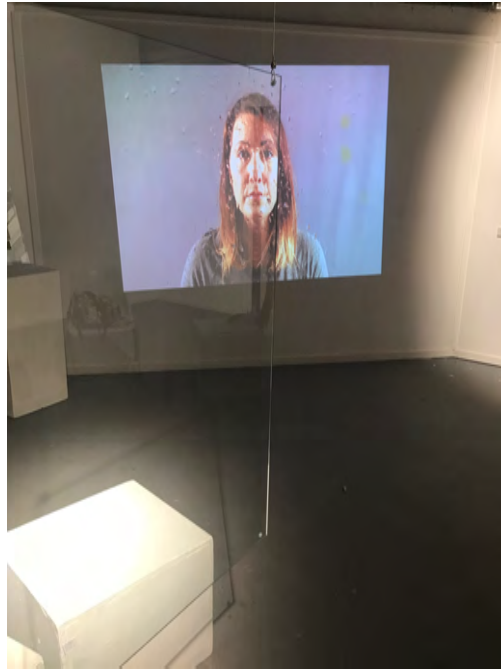


Figure 35. Test of Threshold Obscured projection
Divergent Impacts Conference.

4.4 Bearing Witness in Installation Art

4.4.1 Witnessing

Ella 16 years, Riley 13 years. June 2018.

Know this: that you will have to learn to love them in a different way. The old way of loving them, which your body and mind made you do, the fierce and protective love – that has to change whether you like it or not. Now you have to love a little more at a distance. You have to love them like you love your sister or brother who you do not live with, and do not see every day. You can be there for them, but only when they ask, only on their terms. That is part of the witnessing. This part can be difficult - difficult like all the other parts were, but this is more so, because changing the way you love your child doesn't come naturally like the other parts did. The disquiet, arguments and slammed doors are part of this, they are the very things and moments of untethering. They are violent things though, not gentle, and are difficult to accept as necessary. What can I do to make this easier? Easier for who? Easier for myself (Linda Clark Research Journal, 2018).

This journal reflection was written in response to my own challenges in accepting the natural process of 'untethering' from previous childhood bonds with my children, and my struggle to accept change within our mother-child relationship. On reflection, I realised that this 'untethering' process moved me from being central to my child's construction of identity, to the periphery. This space of periphery enables me to experience the process of 'witnessing' where I may reflect on who my children are becoming and my role in their changing identity. Critical art theorist Susan Best (2016) describes 'witnessing' as signalling the artist's efforts to present a truthful representation of events and a therapeutic role for art. This prose by writer Elease Colcord conveys the way that a mother gradually becomes an outsider to her child's life, a witness:

The shift in responsibility from us to them.

The most simple and mundane of days.

Bearing witness to growing up. It is intimate and lovely. (Colcord 2018)

From my own perspective, being a parent is a strange dichotomy of being both inside and outside of witnessing. In this case, it is a witnessing of my children growing up. While I am observing from this space of 'witnessing', I consider the extent to which everything I (think) I have taught my children assists them in the challenging transition to adulthood that they are currently living. Existing in this witnessing space allows healing of the loss of my nurturing role through an observation of my children's successful negotiation of challenges, and through acceptance that I have done all I can. My finding here is that, rather than seeing the periphery as a negative space, I have unlocked the potential reflexive power of the periphery (Batorowicz 2018, para. 2). This stage of the research represents a methodological approach which embodies Jon Austin's (2005) point that autoethnography involves a description and an analysis of the Self, and a re-presentation of the Self, in that I have described and analysed my experience of untethering and have re-represented myself through my work as a witness to this. In the same way, this stage also involves a re-representation of my child's perspective in the work, as independent from my mothering. After experimenting with layering images of my children on mirrored

perspex (Figure 36), I began to consider the mirror as a metaphor for the process of ‘witnessing’ from the periphery. From this, I commenced ‘constructing’ a narrative, and exploring my response to this narrative through a visual argument, which is discussed below.



Figure 36. Digital image of Ella layered on mirrored Perspex

4.4.2 Dark Rituals

In 2018, I was included as an artist in the group exhibition *Dark Rituals, Magical Relics: From the Little Art Spell Book* (2018). This significant exhibition included the work of six female artists from Australia and abroad and explored how regional practice can provide a space for ‘peripheral power’ to subvert dominant narratives surrounding patriarchal power and gender norms (Batorowicz and Williams 2018).¹⁰ With this conceptual premise, *Dark Rituals* provided an opportunity for me to create a work that used the MAM to reinforce the notion of women-artist’s ‘peripheral power’ as a resiliency strategy. In this space of subversion, I embraced the opportunity to explore mirror both as material and metaphor. The *Dark Rituals* exhibition, held at the University of Sunshine Coast, Australia, and during 2019 at the

¹⁰ *Dark Rituals, Magical Relics: From the Little Art Spell Book* exhibiting artists included Lisa Reihana, Beata Batorowicz, Susan Shantz, Amalie Atkins, Margaret Baguley, Linda Clark and Ellie Coleman.

University of Saskatchewan, Canada and University of Tasmania, includes the publication of the *Little Art Spell Book*.¹¹ As one of the artists, I ‘constructed’ the following spell for the book, which became the basis of my visual argument:

Mirror, mirror, mother

a spell by Linda Clark

*Mirror, mirror, threshold of truth
Tell me a story of mother-artist and child.
Clear the confusion and conflict and fear
Mirror reflect what I need to hear.
Our story is bound up here in this work,
Through the keeping of tales, the construction of myth
Let me bear witness to my authentic child.*

*Mirror, mirror, mother
Make it clear that I am other.
Let me rise up and away from this dance
of ambivalent mothering, it’s far from romance.
Let it be right that sometimes I’m wrong,
I never had lessons or words for this song.*

*Mirror, mirror, child
So beautiful, yet so wild.
Let these lessons I teach
Be within your reach.
Mirror, mirror, child
Look back as you leave
I did it all, so you could be free (Dark Rituals Magical Relics from the Little Art
Spell Book, Artist book 2018).*

In responsive exploration of the liminalities of my relationship with my adolescent children and to explore my ‘witnessing’ from the periphery, I extended the video work *Threshold Obscured* (2017) into a new installation work *Bearing Witness* (2018) (Figure 37). This work articulates the idea that my ability to understand my adolescent children is obscured by their constant changes, growth, social interactions, moods and technology. These obscurants are also a barrier in my

¹¹ Dark Rituals, *Magical Relics: From the Little Art Spell Book*, Artist Book, 2018, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs.

everyday exchanges with them. From a subjective standpoint, my understanding of my children is also obscured or confused by my own lens which includes my preconceptions, beliefs, hopes and fears for them (Reid, cited in Chernick & Klein 2011, p. 328). The installation *Bearing Witness* (2018) (Figure 37) is my solution for this 'problem'. However, this is not actually a problem because this obscured, confused and changing view of my children that I have is actually a necessary and positive aspect of untethering and 'witnessing' from the periphery.



Figure 37. Linda Clark, *Bearing Witness* 2018, Installation view

To construct *Bearing Witness* (2018), I manipulated digital images of tree branches to represent an obscuring 'mask'. The digital images were then transferred onto a sheet of clear perspex which was then hung from wire in a corner of the installation space. The video work was projected through the perspex and subsequently, was reflected

on to the opposite wall, while a mirror underneath reflects the whole interaction. This method of installation caused the images included in the installation to be deliberately confused, fragmented, intimate, suffocating and distanced all at once, similar to my experience of 'witnessing'. In this way, the viewer may also participate in the 'witnessing' as 'the observing of and being participant to an experience, being a witness to people's stories' as we come to see the other in ourselves (Allegranti & Wyatt 2014). The viewer sees themselves in their actual reflection in the mirrored panels, or themselves as they were adolescents and now adults witnessing a generation growing up. This example of autoethnographic critical reflection on the actual experiences between myself and my child supports Ellingson and Ellis's (2008, p. 448) contention that these ordinary aspects of our lives become spaces in which 'an individual's experience can bridge individual and collective experience to enable richness of representation, complexity of understanding, and inspiration for activism'. Further, this work is an example of how I utilise performative personal narrative as a form of activism against patriarchal motherhood tropes. This relates to the previous discussion in *Chapter Two* about Christopher Grobe's (2017, p. 12) assertion that confessional art is both a work and an act – an artistic form and an activist social function. This work also relates to Langellier's (1999, p. 135) discussion that performing personal narrative questions cultural and social taboos that restrict whether their stories should be told in public, or not.

During the initial video recording sessions in the home studio, there was a previous disagreement and resulting tension between Ella and I, and as a result, she was reluctant to participate in the video shoot for part of the time, while Riley was an active participant. Further, Ella opted not to complete the second round of journal questions that I requested. These instances were examples of her assertion of agency. This was a turning point in my use of the MAM in my practice as I realised, through the process of 'attunement', that I must allow her to strive for autonomy (Allen et al. 2003) and respect her (unconscious or conscious) decision to no longer participate in the co-constructions that the MAM instigates. Consequently, I determined that portraying Ella's absence as a representation of her agency should

be a consideration in the third key video work *Bearing Witness: Absence* (2018) (Figure 38).¹²

After considering why I ‘facilitated’ the ritual of my daughter capturing smoke against the glass in the initial video recording session, I concluded that it was to convey my perception that she obscures herself from my view by shutting her door, looking at her phone, protecting her privacy. However, she also does these things to protect her own growing independence. The process of creating *Bearing Witness: Absence* (2018) involved layering two video clips depicting Ella manipulating the smoke and playing with her hair, and another video clip of a heavy smoke screen. Another video clip depicts my own face fading in and out. The first three video clips were layered over each other to deliberately confuse Ella’s image to ‘construct’ a narrative of obscurity and her new desire for absence from my practice, the MAM, and from me.



Figure 38. Linda Clark, *Bearing Witness: Absence* 2018, Video still

¹²(<https://www.dropbox.com/s/uhj973zyrvffpc/ASSESSMENT%20EXTENDED%20BEARING%20WITNESS%20ABSENCE%20Linda%20Fading%20Hearbeat.mp4?dl=0>
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/24hzxkqo0nfcodx/Assessment%20Extended%20Bearing%20Witness%20Absence%20ELLA%20.mp4?dl=0>)

4.4.3 The Final Installation

In the final installation, I extend the conceptual premise of the video work *Bearing Witness: Absence* (2018) into a site-specific installation that incorporates video projection, hanging sculptural object and sound. The installation takes the form of a deconstructed small-scale house structure with opaque walls and a partially mirrored back wall. All parts of the structure are hung from the ceiling, enabling the viewer to walk beneath and inside the structure, to be immersed in the work. The video work depicting Ella's obscured image is projected onto one side of the structure, while my own fading video work is projected onto the other. The two images meet in the middle to convey the concept of relationship confusion. An example of another installation work that incorporates sound, object and movement in an immersive environment is American artist Ann Hamilton's work *the common SENSE* (2014) (Figure 39) In this work, Hamilton instigated reciprocal exchanges between the audience and the work, through a series of 'invitations' to interact with cameras, to touch and remove printed images, to listen to the sound of air moved by twenty mechanized bullroarers, or to contribute or remove texts. Hamilton's work is significant because, like my work, it begins with the conceptual premise of an 'exchange' and is spatially installed to both depict and facilitate further exchange (Hamilton 2014, p. 4).

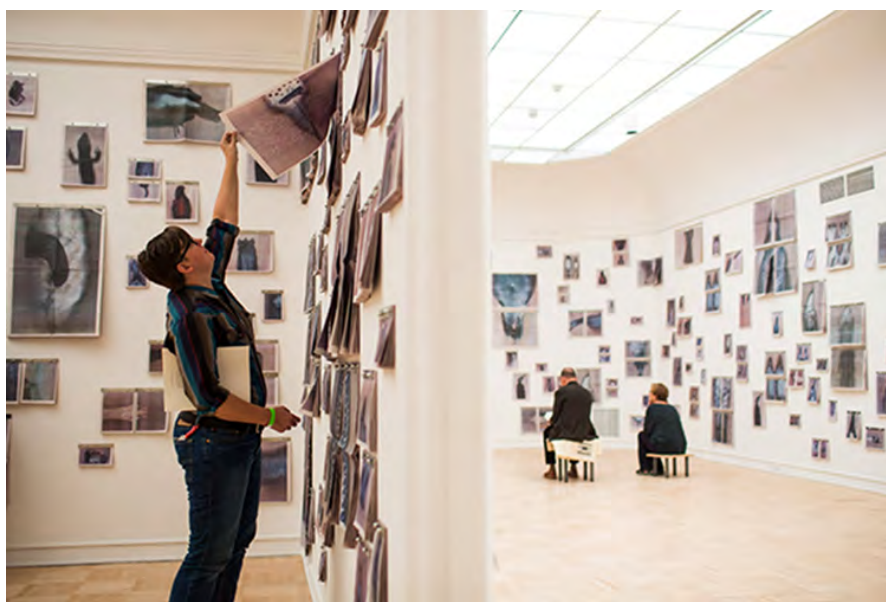


Figure 39. Ann Hamilton, *the common SENSE*, 2014

The conceptual premise of the final installation is threefold. The first is that the installation space 'facilitates' an exchange between the viewer and the work. Whether the viewer is aware or not, when they walk under the structure with video works projected on all sides, it is a form of witnessing. The viewer experiences a state of being present with another as I tell, show, perform, and respond to our embodied stories (Allegranti & Wyatt 2014, p. 536). The second premise is that the immersive nature of the installation engages an active relationship between the work, audience and site (Parker, cited in Tickner 2003, p. 368). Therefore, my role as the artist to create an immersive installation environment can be paralleled with the mother that creates a 'nurturing' environment within a home (Clark 2014). The third premise is that the house structure is similar to 'cubby house' structures which children construct in order to create their own independent space. I have used this 'cubby-like' structure to signify how children create their own spaces as an assertion of agency (Spencer Scott 2016, para. 6).

In the interactions between my children and I, sound can represent tension or harmony. For example, if family members each play different music or talk at the same time, there is a 'battle of the sounds' that can cause tension. Conversely, the sound of laughter and singing can represent harmony. In this work, I use sound as its own entity, that is, it exists separately from the video and sculptural work, but contributes to the overall narrative or theme of the individual works. I recorded sound during the 'exchanges' as well as in everyday interactions and experimented with manipulating those sounds. This has culminated in a sound work that mimics womb sounds as heard by a baby or in the ears in times of stress. This sound work is incorporated in my final installation.

My production of these key works through use of the MAM embodies the study's central assertion. These bodies of work have made the authentic and intersubjective relationship that I have with my children visible through visual argument. Exploring the dichotomies of uncomfortable truths and the times of bonding triumphs through constructed narratives has created a powerful space for agency for my children, and a voice for myself as a mother-artist that subverts societal norms about perfect motherhood. By making these works public, I have contributed to the disruption of

the previous 'private' concerns of motherhood as being peripheral or regional, and brought them out into the open, so they may become a source of power for mother-artists collectively.

4.5 *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model Exhibition – A Collective Autoethnography*

As a final outcome of this research project, I have curated a group exhibition showcasing the creative practice that has resulted from the collective exchange with my participants. The title of the exhibition is *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model*. The word 'tethered' has been employed to articulate the way that a child is literally attached to a mother in the womb, an experience which continues on a metaphorical level because of the bonds throughout childhood between a mother and her child. The 'tether' becomes tested and is cut by the young adult when they are asserting their independence. I wrote the exhibition summary to provide context to the audience, which is published on the USQ Art Gallery website as follows:

Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model brings together six contemporary female visual artists who have made work from motherhood as part of a practice-led research project by USQ Doctor of Creative Arts candidate Linda Clark. Embracing Clark's developed 'Mother-Artist Model' the artists have responded to their own authentic mother-artist experience within their shifting and complex mother-child interrelationships as a sustainable approach to contemporary art practice. Exposing the complexity of being tethered to another through motherhood, the artist's work creates an alternate narrative around birth, caring, communication and child agency. (USQ Art Gallery 2018).

Utilising the MAM as a conceptual framework for practice, Renee, Cadee and Amber created work inside and from their mother-artist experience, while Jessica and Sally also chose to include their children as co-constructors. Sally created works which explore the complexity of her communication with her son. Sally has used the MAM by 'constructing' a new narrative that re-orientates what could be a communication

challenge with her son into a narrative that asserts their ability to negotiate communication through their own silent constructed language. Her work asserts that co-construction as a strength in their relationship. Sally's use of the MAM in this example provides further understandings of how autoethnographic insights that are gained from the process of arts practice can have implications for understandings in a collective autoethnography. By understanding a new narrative such as Sally's communication with her son through the MAM, other mother-artists can see a fellow mother-artist re-orienting a challenge to a positive. The collective sees that it is possible to turn something that they once saw as a potential negative into a positive reflection of their mother-child relationship by exploring this through practice.

Mum, Mummy, Nanny (2019)¹³, a sound and video work in the *Tethered* exhibition, is a collaboration between the mother-artist participants. The work is a video and sound compilation of all of the children and grandchildren of the participants saying the word 'Mum' or their own version of the name they call the mother-artist. This collaborative work is a further example of how we as collective participants explored the culturally significant experience of being named 'Mum' from multiple perspectives (Guyotte 2016). This has enabled us to understand one another's experiences in a critical way (Ellis & Bochner 2011) and apply the shared understanding that we are each known by a collective noun 'mum, mother' which has very personal and individual value assigned to it by each child and each mother. This work, and the individual works by the participants in *Tethered*, illustrate the central assertion of this study. Through collecting the voices of our children as we hear them, we enable their agency by representing their individual nuance. Once again, using the MAM as mother-artists in a collective networking community, we utilize the very strategies for resilience that we have learned through overcoming motherhood's everyday challenges. In this way, we bring visibility to these everyday mother-child relationships, relocating them from the periphery to a normalized dialogue.

¹³ <https://www.dropbox.com/s/tjdje5sqnq45y6e/Mum%2C%20Mummy%2C%20Nanna.mp4?dl=0>

CHAPTER FIVE

Creative Outcomes and Conceptual Findings

This chapter presents the findings, learnings and insights of this study as they address the project's central research premise. This study reveals that my model responds to a lack of discourse in literature and practice for mother-artists to discuss an authentic, fluid experience of mother-artist engagement. In this engagement, the mother-child relationship is the central catalyst for creative exchange and co-construction. The model's significant innovation lies in this mother-child creative exchange as a very methodology for art practice in itself. For instance, a finding from my own practice is that the model draws on the constantly changing daily actions, rituals, tensions and stories of my mother-artist and child engagement as a creative process for co-constructed artmaking. This process enables both myself and my child to edit or 'construct' the depiction of the daily action to create a new narrative, which may highlight undercurrents or tensions that exist for us both. The model's uniqueness lies in embracing this authentic, shifting and complex mother-child interrelationship as a sustainable approach to contemporary art practice (Clark, Batorowicz & Baguley 2017).

In designing this research, I have employed an interpretivist paradigm to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and myself. This approach allows me to not only show the relationship I have with my work, but to embody the complexity of the research (Leavy 2009). Through this process I have gained insights into my own identity as a mother-artist both through my practice as well as within a collective autoethnography. Throughout this study I have paid particular attention to maintaining criticality in my 'insider' role as a researcher (Taylor 2011). As the principal researcher and also mother to the two children in *Group #1 - Children*, my autoethnographic approach has converged with the collective autoethnography of the participants. This meant that at times, I was central to the observation of mother as 'self', while at other stages, I observed my children's viewpoint in relation to my own positioning as a mother-artist, and that of other mother-artists. In turn, the findings from my own practice are converged with the findings from the two groups of research participants in my study.

My adult research participants, *Group #2- Regional Mother-Artists*, include Jessica, Sally, Cadee, Renee and Amber.¹⁴ Throughout the study, I adopted four different methods of gathering data including individual interviews, reflective journals, focus group and an exhibition synopsis, which has enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon of mother-artists. The findings and insights have been analysed through thematic analysis which focused on key themes in the data. The following nine key themes were identified from the individual interview transcripts, the reflective journal, focus group transcripts and the final exhibition synopses. These include:

- transformative practice-led approach
- model for resilience and adaptability
- mother-child co-construction
- authentic, experiential practice
- agency for mother-artist
- agency for child
- traditional 'private' stereotypes of mother
- regionalism or periphery; and
- collective/collaborative networking community.

These themes are briefly explained as follows:

- **Transformative practice-led approach** – statements where the mother-artist discussed how their mother-artist strategies are transformative approaches to practice.
- **Model for resilience and adaptability** – statements that show how the mother-artist adapted strategies of resilience in motherhood to strengthen her art practice.
- **Mother-child co-construction** – statements where the mother and child co-construct an art concept or work.

¹⁴ Pseudonyms have been employed

- **Authentic, experiential practice** – statements where the participant referred to the term ‘authentic’ in relation to practice through experiences from the perspective of mother and child, each with a different cultural or social perspective.
- **Agency for mother-artist** – statements where the mother-artist acknowledged the need to achieve autonomy by exploring their authentic and intersubjective mother-child relationship as a way to assert mother agency and identity.
- **Agency for child** – examples of where the participant’s child had the ability to exert power in a mother-child relationship context in order to develop their own independence.
- **Traditional ‘private’ stereotypes of mother** – statements where the mother-artist subverts stereotypes of ‘perfect, always engaged’ mothering with ritual and practice that embraces authentic ‘good-enough’ mothering. This premise involves love for children and times of ambivalence, leaving room for child agency.
- **Regionalism or periphery** – statements where the participant acknowledged whether they experience regionalism or isolation because they are mother-artists who live in regional areas.
- **Collective/collaborative networking community** – instances where the mother-artist worked collaboratively either with fellow artists, or with fellow mother-artist participants while utilising the MAM in this study.

The individual interviews were conducted early in *Phase Two* of the project, directly after I gave a detailed explanation of MAM to the participants. The interview questions were written to ascertain the similarities and differences between the practice of the mother-artist participants, including myself, which would indicate whether the MAM would be beneficial. Further, I asked the questions to prompt the mother-artists to consider how to integrate the MAM into their daily situations. The reflective journal was completed by mother-artists in the months leading up to the focus group, while the exhibition synopsis was written by participants while they engaged with the MAM after the focus group during *Phase Three* of the project.

5.1 Thematic Analysis

In this thematic analysis, the thematic count is defined as the number of times a sentence related to one of the themes described above appears in the interview transcripts, reflective journals, focus group transcripts and exhibition synopses. In this process, each sentence which contains the theme is counted once and is tallied in the thematic count (Table 1). When comparing the methods of data collection, there were significant differences between the counted themes in relation to models for resilience and adaptability (21), authentic experiential practice (27), agency for child (48), traditional ‘private’ stereotypes of mother (27), regionalism or periphery (9) and collaborative networking community (56). The comparative analysis of participant’s responses within these themes is described in Table 1 below. These themes and how they relate to the focus of this study will be discussed in the following section. The direct voices of the participants are denoted in italics.

Table 1. Thematic Count

THEME	INTERVIEW	REFLECTIVE JOURNAL	FOCUS GROUP	EXHIBITION SYNOPSIS	TOTAL
Transformative practice-led strategies	20	6	26	3	55
Model for resilience and adaptability	15	1	4	1	21
Mother-child co-construction	7	4	15	10	36
Authentic, experiential practice	18	4	3	2	27
Agency for mother-artist	57	7	36	4	104
Agency for child	10	3	26	9	48
Traditional ‘private’ stereotypes of mother	15	1	4	7	27
Regionalism or periphery	9	0	0	0	9
Collective/collaborative networking community	49	4	3	0	56

5.1.1 Transformative Practice-led Approach

Statements where the mother-artists discussed how their mother-artist strategies are transformative approaches to practice are evidenced in the thematic count. For example, the mother-artist's number of responses related to transformative practice-led strategies was relatively high in both the interviews and focus group, in comparison to responses that related to traditional 'private' stereotypes of the mother. In this way, the model offers a counter-argument to the idea of the mother-artist as a limitation because mother-artists clearly focus on their role as transformative rather than as perpetuating limiting stereotypes.

The dynamic between parent and child changes constantly, and never more so than during the adolescent years (Steinberg 2001). I have determined that in my own practice, the changing mother-adolescent dynamic has transformed the way I utilise the MAM. For instance, the focus of the MAM with older, more independent children moves away from their participation and co-construction in the actual final artwork. Instead, a key finding from my own reflective journal and most strongly in the focus group (26 responses), is that the co-construction exists in the development of the work's conceptual premise, still utilising the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role that is implicit in the MAM. In response to this changing dynamic, my own practice has now moved into a mother-centred approach in which I begin in the space of the conceptual premise with a concern, problem or positive message that has emerged in my relationship with my child. Then, I 'facilitate' practice, for example by using images or objects that my children passively create, such as iPhone images, to 'construct' a new narrative as a solution to the initial problem. At this stage, I construct sculptural objects that convey this new narrative to the audience, for example the house installation structure in *Bearing Witness: Absence* (2018). Therefore, I 'keep' the artwork as a final resolution of the initial premise.

My request that the mother-artists each complete a reflective journal in the early stages of the research has given insight into how each artist thought in relation to their mother-artist identity before they were fully exposed to the MAM. For example,

Renee's reflective journal is an account of her mothering role in a creative visual journal style. Each day, Renee recorded an activity that her children were involved in and her creative response or reflection on that activity. For example, one entry included lyrics from her children's 'Kindermusik' lesson, writing attempts from her children's 'Reading Eggs' lessons, and drawings and anecdotes as reflections by Renee which creatively built a narrative on the page about their shared experience. In another entry, Renee wrote her son's question: 'Mummy, can I water my garden?', and her answer, 'Stop watering your brother', and responded to this by including a bug collage from her son and her own collage with the word 'Resist'. Her use of the word 'Resist' represents her assertion of mother-artist identity to say 'Resist' (the urge to water your brother) into this space of reflection. As in my own practice, I draw from everyday happenings and interactions with my children which can take various visual forms. A key finding is that giving the mother-artists the freedom to record their motherhood role through their personal choice of medium was the gateway to encouraging them to think as a 'mother-artist' specifically, instead of a 'mother' and an 'artist' separately. I observed that it also began the shift in their mindsets to an observational intentionality of integrating motherhood in practice and a propensity to look at everyday motherhood in a new light. An example of this is in one of the focus group discussions, when Renee said:

I think what you're saying makes sense. It's [MAM] definitely of interest to me as being this reflective and planned, and everything, is very much to my personality, and its actually helping me to consider it [mother-artist] a bit further, whereas I was sort of in survival mode for a couple of years [before]. So, it's only really the start of this sort of consideration for me. You know what I mean? Like, trying to be reflective rather than just responsive. So, it does make sense, and I think that as the kids get older, and become more independent, it will give me a chance to be more self-aware, if that makes sense. Although, if I concentrate on it now, which this is helping me to do, I can start to do that.

The participants thought about new approaches to practice using the MAM which actually incorporates their previous strategies. When asked during the focus group how useful the MAM is to them and whether it is a transformative approach to their practice, one of the participants responses was:

Well, I mean, naturally I think we're going to do it our own way, we always are. So, then, in that respect, I think that it almost is (a transformative approach), and having a discussion sort of grounds that, reinforces it. I might go stick it on the fridge [the MAM poster], and it'll be in my mind, and I'll be more thoughtful about that, more intentional. So, I guess, more than creating more ideas, it has sort of made me think, well I'm kind of doing these things.

(Renee)

The high number of responses referring to transformative practice-led strategies in the interviews (20) and focus group (26) in comparison to the reflective journal (6) and exhibition synopsis (3) can be attributed to the way I chose to structure the interview questions and focus group agenda. For example, the interview questions focussed on practice with questions such as 'How do you navigate between the roles of mother and artist?' These questions instigated responses that focussed on strategies that the participant's employed in that navigation. The lower thematic count for the reflective journal (6) means that for some participants, the journaling process served as a trigger for intentionality about the MAM as transformative for mother-artist practice, while for others it was a purely a reflection on their daily motherhood role.

5.1.2 Model for Resilience and Adaptability

As a finding from my own practice, the MAM has helped me to adapt to my children's need for growing independence by allowing them agency in our artmaking interactions. Similarly, in this study, the mother-artists referred to how they adapted strategies of resilience in motherhood to strengthen their art practice. The thematic responses were higher in the interviews (15) in comparison to one response each in the reflective journal and exhibition synopsis and four in the focus group. The nature of the interview questions themselves account for the higher responses from

interviews in the thematic count. Questions such as ‘how do you navigate between your roles of mother and artist?’ naturally resulted in responses from mother-artists which were based around strategies they had employed in that navigation.

The fifteen interview responses across this theme referred directly to instances where mother-artists adapted their practice as a response to motherhood, which occurred before the participants were fully introduced to the MAM. For example, one participant discussed how her practice changes according to her mental state as a coping mechanism. Another mother-artist detailed how she would continue to investigate her relationships with her children and grandchildren through practice during a new phase of travelling by creating methods of communication over distance. For my own practice, I have used the ‘Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper’ role implicit in the MAM to adapt to the conflict that inevitably arises in the changing relationship with my teenage children by exploring those conflicts through artmaking processes, such as through glass in *Threshold Obscured* (2017).

Cadee discussed the mother-artist collaboration through focus group and exhibition as a strategy for practice adaptability:

It’s really interesting just to be able to discuss your own ideas and methods and things with other artists, because sometimes the littlest bit of information can help change how you might create something or outlook on an artwork that you intend on doing.

It is evident that the mother-artists automatically applied the strategies of resilience learnt while adapting to the life-changing nature of motherhood to develop strategies to strengthen their art practice. Additionally, the focus group discussion(s) revealed that all of the mother-artists felt they would be able to utilise or adapt the MAM to their practice. However, this adaptation was dependent on the age of their children. Sally provided insight into the translation of the MAM for other mother-artists. She posited that using the word ‘Memory’ in the ‘Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper’ role may change the meaning of the MAM to a nostalgia for childhood experiences that are now gone, which may not be appropriate for everyone’s practice. However, she felt the terms ‘Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper’ were

appropriate regarding the MAM and provided scope for people to adapt the model for their personal situation to include, for example:

Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper [...] of independence, of situations, of articulations, of understandings, among many others, according to their own practice approach. (Sally, Focus Group)

5.1.3 Mother-Child Co-construction

The findings from my own practice concerning the co-construction between my children and I in artmaking are that the nature of the co-construction has changed because they are teenagers, and increasingly independent. For example, while in the past we have co-constructed the video work together performatively, now the co-construction occurs when I am developing a conceptual premise for a work, and my children contribute their conceptual viewpoint to the development.

For the other mother-artist participants, thematic statements in the reflective journals revealed how they co-construct creatively with their children. Renee's journal revealed the way she responds to her children's artwork with creative associations. For example, a page from the journal shows a child's cake collage alongside her own snail drawing with words 'No! Don't Eat It! We pretend'. In a further example, Renee included her child's writing from reading eggs alongside her response to these with songs, and drawings which illustrate questions about the planets that arose from their use of 'Reading Eggs'.

The thematic count in the focus group (15) was higher, perhaps because the participants helped to prompt each other regarding their co-construction strategies, and also because by that time, participants were more aware of opportunities to engage in creative co-construction with their child because of their experience of the MAM. Through the MAM, the mother-artists began to recognise opportunities for creative co-construction with their children in everyday situations. For example, in the focus group Renee discussed an interaction with her son:

What you said before about both reaching a goal, it reminded me of last night, I was trying to get some sewing done for the market, which is another thing, and my son, he's three, he kept coming out of bed. And I said, 'Mate, can you just go back to bed', and he said: 'I just want to colour, I just want to sit here and watch you sew'. And I thought, yes ok, so maybe this is a form of collaboration too.

As previously mentioned, as part of this research project, *Participant Group #2 Mother-Artists* will showcase the work they have made utilising the MAM in the final exhibition *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model*. When discussing strategies of artmaking toward the exhibition during the focus group, one participant articulated how she has utilised the MAM to formulate the artwork's conceptual premise from their mother-child relationship:

I've got to work out different communication strategies, different ways of creating and capturing those memories and holding onto them. But through my artwork, I think I can capture my grandbaby's hands and feet now, the new ones, so that I have something to treasure from when they were little. I also want to create something where – like I see the overlap between my children and my grandchildren in the way that I always sang songs, read stories. (Cadee)

The thematic count reveals ten responses in the exhibition synopsis pertaining to mother and child co-construction using the MAM. This count is higher because the participants were engaging with the MAM by *Phase Three* of the study when they wrote the exhibition synopsis. One of the participants has used the MAM in a co-construction with all three of her children to create artworks for the final exhibition. Jessica applied the MAM to her practice by facilitating and constructing a conceptual premise which allowed her children to create self-portraits, some in collaboration with herself.

[My son] painted this whole canvas himself and loved it so much he wouldn't let me to paint anything else on it. We collaborated in the guidance and

support I provided him throughout and he embraced that perfectly (Jessica, Exhibition Synopsis).

Jessica also described her co-construction with her daughters:

She is solid in her core values and has always maintained loyal and long-lasting friendships. I love how her self-portrait reflects that strength. The concept for this artwork depicts her nurturing, motherly side. She has a strong sense of social justice (Jessica, Exhibition Synopsis).

These examples of mother-artist and child co-constructions are interrelated with child agency themes, because as Maria Lahman (2008) suggests working collaboratively *with* the child rather than research *on* the child by adopting the standpoint that the child is an 'expert' who can have input. This leads to fulfilment of child agency. Examples of child agency in the context of this study are discussed in the next section.

5.1.4 Authentic, Experiential Practice

In the findings from my own practice, the main trigger for my own initial development of the MAM was that I found that exploring motherhood through practice was the key to authentic practice. In the focus group, I shared a personal anecdote about one of the most important turning points in my practice which caused me to develop the MAM. This was the recognition that I felt my creative practice was inauthentic because it denied my motherhood identity, and my decision to create a model which actually explored the mother-child relationship as the practice nexus.

Thematic statements relevant to this theme included the participants' reference to the term 'authentic' or 'real' in relation to practice through experiences from the perspective of mother and child. Thematic count responses were higher in the individual interviews in comparison with focus group or written responses in the reflective journal because the participants may have felt more comfortable sharing honest information about what 'authentic' practice meant for them, which they may not have felt would have been accepted by other artists in the focus group setting.

In the interview responses related to this theme, Sally said that she researches a lot around her son's additional needs and was curating an exhibition involving his work. Amber answered that she researches coping strategies for mental health and educational models for children that facilitate health. As an important finding, Amber discussed that these resiliency strategies actually translate to her practice in that motherhood has caused her to adapt her practice to a process that privileges her own practice instead of outside industry pressures and resulted in more 'authentic' work. Interestingly, Amber's reflective journal took the form of photo documentation which offered an important insight into how she interweaves her role as mother-artist with her children's everyday activities. For instance, her reflective journal images depicted her son's destruction of the baby gate interspersed with her own animal totem paintings, images of real-life child's play and household objects.

5.1.5 Agency for Mother-Artist

In my own experience of utilising the MAM in practice, I have found that its capacity to allow me to assert my own mother-artist agency is the strongest outcome of the project. At times, as a mother, I felt emotionally and physically affected by the new feelings of loss through fragmented time with my children, feeling like I was a peripheral witness to their lives and also feeling excited to see who they are becoming. The MAM has allowed me to adopt the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role in an attempt to understand my children's view, heal the loss and assert my own agency as a mother-artist with important viewpoints to articulate through my work.

Interestingly, the thematic count for statements where the mother-artist acknowledged the need to achieve autonomy by exploring their authentic and intersubjective mother-child relationship as a way to assert mother agency and identity was quite high in both the interview (57) and focus group (36). This high number of responses can be attributed to the mother-artist's willingness to share their needs surrounding their own agency in a conversational, interpersonal interaction with myself and other mother-artists rather than in written form in the reflective journal and exhibition synopsis. Importantly, this means that by

introducing the MAM to artists in a collective motherhood-specific setting, I have provided a space for meaningful and necessary discussion surrounding the need for mother-artists to assert their agency and action through practice. Therefore, themes of agency for mother-artists are closely related to themes surrounding collective/collaborative networking communities, which will be discussed below.

In the individual interviews, questions were asked of participants such as: *'How do you navigate between the roles of mother and artist?'* I ascertained from the responses that there was a gap that the MAM could potentially fill for some of the participants. Some made work with their children in terms of hands-on making but did not make work from their mother and child relationship, overlooking the potential to explore mothering challenges and relationships through practice. For example, Jessica's response was: *I don't think you need to negotiate either way between the two.* She then explained that her children make art alongside her, not with her. However, when asked to describe her artmaking process, Jessica stated: *That can be triggered by anything, sometimes something the kids have said.* Therefore, there are actually times when Jessica makes from the mother-child relationship, however not intentionally. This is a situation where the MAM could potentially link the co-artmaking process with her children with the triggers from a child's comment, to sustain practice.

The focus group and exhibition synopsis also provided important insights in relation to the participants' growing awareness of their agency in negotiating an artist identity which can value and draw inspiration from other areas of their life. For example, Renee's involvement as a research participant has led to a greater self-awareness of her role as a mother-artist, and how this role filters through to other areas of her life and art practice. Since the birth of her second son, she has been particularly interested in working with memory, and the recurrence of trauma as it punctuates daily narratives (Renee, Exhibition synopsis). One part of the focus group discussion asked participants how they might utilise the MAM to make an artwork for the *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model* exhibition. This question triggered responses leading from how they might adapt the MAM to suit their

current mother-artist role and in the process explore their own agency. One participant's reflection conveyed how she asserted her agency by exploring a sense of loss through practice:

He went through this little tunnel, and he just kind of disappeared at the end of it and it was like sunlight. It was one of things that just felt really poignant to me, about, kind of now. I'd like to do something with that video now, because what I'm working with is independence and letting go, and so that video -disappearing into the light at the end of the tunnel - is a really resonant image for me now, more than when he was seven or eight or whenever he was riding that trike. So, that's one thing that came to mind, because for me, it's sort of independence and a poignant sense of loss. So, a loss of the role I did have (Sally focus group).

5.1.6 Agency for Child

Thematic statements referred to instances when the participant's child had the ability to exert power in mother-child relationship context in order to develop their own independence. In the context of this study, the child is an active contributor to this process. However, this does not necessarily put them in the position of an artist in their own right, as the model is a cyclic inquiry and returns for final resolution to the mother-artist. MAM does however offer the child a way to creatively convey their ideas through a co-construction of viewpoints. In doing so, the model provides important insights into the child's identity. For example, on reflection through transcription of my own words from the focus group, I considered whether my initial aims of the MAM were still relevant. On further consideration, I wondered whether the MAM had really allowed my children to assert agency within the co-construction, and consequently I was compelled to reduce my attempts to control that child agency. Sally shared a reflection of when her son was six years old about a similar concern. In this reflection, Sally tried to make a video of her son using sign language and he turned his back and refused to participate. This reflection is a good example of a child exerting their agency in the mother-child relationship and artmaking process. When Liselott Mariett Olsson (in Schulte 2009, p. 12) expressed that we give

birth to unfaithful children, that they are never really ours, not even from the beginning, she was attesting to the tenacity by which children flee, and the zest by which they connect and reconnect themselves to others, objects and events.

The *Tethered* exhibition has facilitated an opportunity for mother-artists to utilise the MAM to assert both the mother-artist agency and their child's agency. For example, Sally described her conceptual premise of Artwork 1, a book work containing printed records of text messages between mother and child as:

Texting is the primary way my son and I communicate when he is not at home. My son is a millennial and smart phone technology came of age alongside him; he is obsessed with it, perhaps for more-than-good-reason, as he is deaf/hard-of-hearing which makes verbal communication challenging and texting more accessible. (Sally Exhibition Synopsis 2018)

This is an example of how Sally used the MAM by 'beginning with a problem, concern or positive message for her child', in this case the positive message is that smart phones make communication less challenging and more accessible for her son. Sally continues:

As he is at the end of his teenage years, our text communication reveals his shift to independence and our back-and-forth, daily negotiations in this direction. Our texts are a "secret code" that, read between the lines, reveals some of the dynamics of our mother-son relationship in this transitional time (Sally Exhibition Synopsis 2018).

In this way, Sally and her son use the MAM by 'facilitating' memory by together choosing the rituals of communication as the basis for this work's premise. By exploring their texts as 'secret code', Sally has created a 'new narrative that allows for the complexities of the relationship to unfold conceptually through play to create work that interweaves daily activities in the current social and cultural context in which they are immersed', according to the MAM.

Sally's conceptual premise for Artwork 2 follows:

This work uses empty, white speech balloons to suggest silent forms of communication. The small, gessoed toys are placed as if they are cartoon characters speaking in each panel; they suggest the playful, imaginative communication of childhood. The blank speech balloons also refer to the silent Sign Language communication that I learned to communicate with my son until he was four years old and received his first cochlear implant. Gold leaf, usually reserved for spiritual subjects, is used here to suggest the sublime in everyday communication – something one is more aware of when it is not automatic, but consciously trained and learned, as well as “secret” and silent.
(Sally Exhibition Synopsis).

References to the theme of child agency were higher (26) in the focus group compared to the interviews, reflective journal and exhibition synopsis. The structure of the focus group encouraged participants to share strategies for balancing mothering with artistic practice. As well, I asked the participants to consider the constantly shifting mother-child relationship as an artmaking process when describing how they would use the model as they worked towards the *Tethered* exhibition. This meant that the participant's relationship with their child, and the importance of child agency in the context of co-constructed artmaking, were foremost in their minds during the focus group, leading to increased references to the theme.

5.1.7 Traditional 'Private' Stereotypes of Mother

The participants subverted stereotypes of 'perfect, always engaged' mothering by engaging in ritual and practice that embraces authentic 'good-enough' mothering that is signified in their love for their children, in addition to times of ambivalence, leaving room for child agency. The thematic count indicates that the mother-artists discussed this theme more often in the interviews (15) in comparison to the reflective journal (1), focus group (4) and exhibition synopsis (7). This may be because the participants did not feel that they had to point out rituals within their mothering role because they may have assumed all mother-artists do the same. To

the mother-artists, there may have also been a sense of hesitation to reveal their ambivalence or even participation in stereotypical 'mothering' because they feared judgement.

The interview questions triggered some responses regarding how expectations of 'perfect' motherhood, which are based on stereotypes, affect mother-artist's experiences. One participant noted:

I had all these wonderful ideas about how I would be an artist and mother, and how everything would look, and how perfect it would be, and how everything would go right, and the birth would go right, and he'd be this wonderful baby, and it'd just be easy and natural. It wasn't like that at all.

As a response to this experience, the same participant explained how she now engages in practice that embraces authentic motherhood:

But I guess now, its entwined, like I wanted it to be. My role as a mother and my kids and everything feed into my art through the experiences I go through, and I teach them things about art, and make work with them around, and sometimes they do little things on the works. It's become one in the end. And I think it took my son's birth for me to realise what I really wanted, and what I really valued.

In terms of my own experience, in the focus group I expressed my own concerns about being a 'good enough' mother:

So, that's when I started to really explore that idea of using those everyday interactions with the kids, and also my hopes for them, and any problems that came up in our relationship, because I'm a real worrier, and I really worry about what I'm doing to them or you know, whether doing a good enough job. So, it's for them and for me to give us a way to have that common ground and have that way of exploring our relationship in a different way, not just having a conversation, but actually working through it with art.

Participants also referred to this theme in their exhibition synopsis. Renee's work represents: 'a 'mind map' of errant thoughts, subconscious experience and everyday distraction'. Cadee's synopsis of her work, *The Hands of Time* (2018) explores stereotypes such as 'A mother's work is never done' and depicts the quick passing of time for a mother. The artwork uses the hand as symbolic of the mother, her hands forever at work. 'The watches symbolise the passing of time as the mother ages, while continuing to provide for children and grandchildren throughout her life'.

5.1.8 Regionalism or Periphery

Perhaps the most surprising findings were revealed in participants' answers to interview questions about whether they experience regionalism or isolation because they are mother-artists who live in regional areas. The thematic count reveals references to this theme in the interview responses only. When asked, "*Do you see living regionally as a help or hindrance to your practice?*", all of the mother-artists saw living regionally as a help, because the lower cost of living enabled them to spend more time on their practice and also with their children, because they did not need to seek additional employment. One participant noted that the lack of art buyers and the transportation costs for sending artwork to city galleries was a significant problem for all regional artists. Despite this however, the mother-artists saw a number of significant reasons for practicing and living in regional and rural areas:

I think there are benefits in (spaces unique to) regional and rural areas. And as an artist, I find those opportunities are more interesting because the play, the things you see, the things around you, are so much different to in a city. When it comes to the mother-artist thing, there's just more opportunities to see different developments in a child in a regional area, rather than a city environment where I don't think they have opportunities – they have opportunities as far as shopping, and takeout, but to me, that's not the ideal childhood because they can't be a natural child that runs around and does their own thing, plays in the mud in the backyard or goes and jumps in puddles out the front, it's just more difficult (Cadee).

It therefore appears that mother-artists are not disadvantaged by living in a regional area, in fact, the lower cost of living and more relaxed lifestyle facilitates practice.

Really, I see it as a help, but mainly I'm talking about the smaller community and knowing a lot of people and having a lot of contacts. I think you need to put more value in the people that you can access here, and the time, the experience and the knowledge they're willing to impart. (Renee, Interview Transcript)

In terms of a feeling of isolation from the community, one participant said she felt very isolated in this way:

New Mums that I talk to feel that initial isolation because of that transition of identity and then trying to find new friends, yes that part is isolating. But also, being an artist, I'm throwing out some broad generalisations, but there's not a lot of other artists that are doing this as well, you know, my own people, I just don't have a lot of artists to engage and interact with, and then when I hang around other [non-artist] mothers, I have nothing to really talk about with them either. (Amber)

Sally also expressed concerns about lack of art networking opportunities in regional areas of Canada, although she preferred the space and quiet for her practice.

My own experience of feeling like I was working from the periphery of the art world has decreased through working with my mother-artist participants through this project. After hearing the other mother-artist's concerns about their children, their obstacles and approaches to practice, and their strategies for balancing mothering and practice were similar to my own, I feel less isolated and more confident to approach even more mother-artists to establish connections and facilitate more exhibition opportunities.

5.1.9 Collective/Collaborative Networking Community

Participants work collaboratively with fellow artists and also see the potential to work collectively with fellow mother-artist participants while utilising the MAM. In response to the interview question “What would you like to gain from a collaboration with mother-artists?”, participant’s responses reflected a range of collaborative models and ideas. Renee discussed her approach to a possible mother-artist collaboration which includes children:

I like conversation, especially with people in a similar situation like mother-artists and I don’t have that many contacts that are mothers and artists, so it’s definitely something that interests me. I’ve done things with people before where we let the kids run wild and we’re making at the same time, and it’s this interesting thing that I never would have thought possible prior to having the kids, but I’d love to do things like that.

Cadee described a collaborative approach based on conversation to invigorate and inform approaches to artmaking:

I think a discussion with other mother-artists would be very interesting, on their take on motherhood, the difference between children, the individuality of children, the different views on parenthood and motherhood in particular. So, it’s really interesting actually collaborating with other mothers and just listen to what their day or their stories about from when their kids were little and the differences in how you approach something to how someone else approaches something. Because I think that it can really benefit again in the artwork process because it gives you a different view on something that you might have a very straight and narrow line of view on, and then they might open up a different pathway.

Jessica’s approach to collaboration focussed on establishing a mother-artist network to facilitate exchange of ideas and ‘be inspired from each other’ as an important element in itself.

The high thematic count (49) for this theme in interviews as opposed to four in the reflective journal and five in the focus group, suggests that the participants in regional areas had already formed networking communities and collaborated with fellow artists before engaging with the MAM. Further, as three of the interview questions referred to how the artists would collaborate with artists and mother-artists specifically, this increased the dialogue surrounding collaboration. However, when considered in relation to previous statements where mother-artists expressed concerns about isolation from mother-artists, I conclude that there is a need for mother-artists to form communities to overcome the isolation that becoming a mother while being an artist can bring. In this light, the MAM project has impacted participants by leading them to consider the collaborative potential of the final group exhibition. During a discussion about the *Tethered: Embodying the Mother-Artist Model Exhibition* during the focus group, one participant posited:

And what the outcome eventually is could look quite different, but still be cohesive in the way that it all started from the same framework. And each person has their own interpretation, but a connection by the same token.
(Cadee).

The collaborative platform, *Trello*, has proven to be a successful space for sharing visual and written mother-artist outcomes. This is because our shared *Trello* space offers the opportunity to share work in progress images, anecdotes and ideas as a collective. Importantly, the mother-artist participants have embraced the opportunity to collaborate together in this study by contributing video for the *Tethered* exhibition collaborative work *Mum, Mummy, Nanny* (2018).

5.2 Discussion on Thematic Analysis

Through my analysis it became clear that a number of the key themes are interrelated and therefore influence each other. For example, mother-artist identity, mother-artist agency and transformative practice intersect, because an artist's investigation of their identity through the MAM may lead to an assertion of their own agency, which in turn can be a transformative adaptive practice strategy in

itself. Similarly, exploring ritual through the MAM can be used by a mother-artist to either perpetrate or deconstruct 'private' stereotypes of the mother-artist. For example, exploring rituals of housework through artwork may be seen as a perpetration of stereotypes of the 'good' mother rather than as a subversion of the stereotype. Also, I observed that the themes of co-construction and child agency are related, as the co-construction between mother-artist and child may consequently result in space that allows child agency. Further, in the interviews, individual responses that referred to child agency tended to increase in number depending on the age of the children. For example, if an artist had older children, the capacity for child agency increased because of both their maturity to create collaboratively, and their independent nature. As well, the references to collaboration mean different things between each data collection method. For example, in interviews, the collaborations discussed were ones previously experienced before this project, while the references to collaboration in the focus group were focused on collectivity and collaboration in the context of this project.

5.3 Supplementary Research Outcomes

Supplementary research outcomes that I have achieved within this project, alongside obtaining my full ethical approval from the USQ Human Research Ethics Committee include the following: In September 2016, I presented a paper titled *Instigating Regional Collaboration: Using a Mother/Artist Model to Facilitate Creative Practice, Engagement and Exchange* at the Australia Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) Conference. This paper was published on the ACUADS website in March 2017 and will also be recorded as an e-prints outcome. Further, I was a contributor to a paper submission that was accepted and presented at the European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) 2017 Conference in Copenhagen.¹⁵ In December 2017, I co-authored an article *Transforming Maternal Regionalism through the Mother-Artist Model (MAM)* which was published in *Australian Arts*

¹⁵ ECER 2017, "Reforming Education and the Imperative of Constant Change: Ambivalent roles of policy and the role of educational research", taking place in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 22 – 25 August 2017; Title of Proposal: Implementing a New Doctor of Creative Arts Program in the Chinese Year of the Monkey

Education (Vol. 38, Issue 2). Practice outcomes to date include: the winner of the Queensland Regional Art Awards - Gray Puksand Digital Award in March 2016, whereby I completed an artist residency at 'The Edge' at the State Library of Queensland. Further, in December 2016, I became a finalist in the 2017 Contemporary Art Awards (a Queensland Government initiative) with my work *Lost/Found* (2016).

5.4 Key Implications for Practice

There is potential for application of the model to facilitate interdisciplinary practice through exchange, and production of knowledge surrounding practice-led methodologies. The 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role that is the basis of the MAM as a methodology asks the researcher to 'facilitate memory' by constructing a new narrative by choosing activities, rituals or experiences. This could be used by the hypothetical researchers to apply alternative narratives or possibilities to explore the problem in detail through the viewpoints of both researchers. For example, the researchers could formulate a fictional narrative that involves young people in an experience that highlights tensions that exist with young people and the socio-political environment.

In the future, the MAM could be disseminated through a program for mother-artists that includes a dedicated website which profiles how participating artists use the MAM in different ways, running in parallel with an annual exhibition and touring to metropolitan and regional locations. An ongoing aim of the project is an organised network of practice-led artists, nationally and internationally, who use the model in their practice.

5.5 Potential Impacts on Community and Across Sectors

Significantly, there is potential for the model to be used by mothers at risk, which could include mothers who have had their children removed from their care. The MAM could assist them with examining problems or concerns within their mothering and to learn more effective parenting strategies. Additionally, mothers with post-

natal depression may be able to use the MAM to make artwork about and from their experiences to aid recovery. A study about effectiveness of art for reducing mother-baby relationship concerns during postnatal depression by Victoria Armstrong and Rosie Howatson (2015) discovered that mothers showed more engagement in their relationship with their baby through artmaking start to recognize difficulties and put strategies in place to overcome them.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has extrapolated insights into the usefulness of the MAM as a transformative practice-led approach in my own art practice and as a broader model for resiliency and adaptability for my mother-artist participants. As such, these insights articulate the benefits and challenges we experienced in the mother-child co-construction as experienced through the MAM, and how this facilitated authentic agency within practice. These understandings also reveal the implications these experiences had for challenging traditional 'private' tropes of the mother through the MAM renegotiation of the mother-artist identity. In using these central questions as a framework for analysis, I have drawn connections between our experiences to reveal insights into how sharing the adaptive strategies of the MAM in our collective group addressed maternal regionalism.

In light of this central question, the *Introduction* defined the study through an explanation of the MAM as a conceptual framework for practice. Further, the chapter detailed the three key functions of the MAM. The first function is as a framework for applying our mother-child interactions as creative process-driven outcomes, the second function is MAM as a methodology within itself, while the third function is to extend the MAM into the collective context by sharing it with five mother-artists. The chapter outlined the purpose of the study as a response to previous art taboos, as posited by Andrea Liss in the seminal text *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (2009). In this context, the *Introduction* asserted that, rather than discrediting the power that exists in the maternal experience, this project expands on Loveless' concept of mother-artists' enactment of adaptability in maternal art practice (Loveless 2018, p. 8). Further, the chapter argued that the MAM privileges the interrelationship between mother and child as a transformative practice-led creative process and exchange, in order to provide both with agency. This assertion builds on Wade's (2016) category for this intersubjective exploration as 'Intersubjective Maternalist Trace', thereby widening the previously limited dialogue on this specific intersubjective approach (Cartwright 2017). This chapter also introduced the participants as my children and the five mother-artists, while identifying the central research premise of the project as detailed above.

Chapter Two - Creative Practice Literature Review, explored the historical bias that relegated mother-artists to the private realm (Irigaray 1985; Battersby 1987). Further, the chapter offered insights into postcolonial theory of 'otherness', feminist theory and psychoanalysis discourses which are involved in defining a contemporary mother-artist (de Beauvoir 1989; Korsmeyer 2012; Spivak 2006). *Chapter Two* also provided context for the re-negotiated mother-artist identity. This was achieved through an examination of strategies used by mother-artists, such as Sally Mann, to subvert 'otherness' by engaging with the realities of motherhood in their work (Parsons 2008). *Chapter Two* also described how the MAM gives mother-artists permission to explore the authentic 'good-enough' mother in a more sustainable visual arts practice by utilising the 'realities' of the mother and child relationship, whether those realities are societally perceived as 'good' or 'bad' (Pedersen 2016; Rubin Suleiman and Chernick 2006). This chapter also discussed collective exhibitions, such as 'New Maternalisms: Redux' as examples of how mother-artists overcome maternal regionalism through networking and practice (Loveless 2016).

Chapter Three – Methodology: Three Phases of the MAM built on the literature surrounding feminist motherhood to identify, contextualise and explain the methodologies and methods employed in this study. Further, *Chapter Three* introduced and justified the use of the overarching methodology of practice-led research in the MAM as posited by Graeme Sullivan (2010) in the seminal text *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* and Patricia Leavy (2009) in the text *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. The chapter also discussed the practice-led research subsets within the MAM of autoethnography (Austin 2005; Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Haseman 2006; Scott-Hoy & Ellis 2008), reflexive practice (Sullivan 2010) and the MAM as methodological framework. To provide context for the MAM as a collective model with a broader social and cultural scope, *Chapter Three* also provided further detail about the research participant groups. Following this, the chapter discussed the application of the research methodologies through three distinct phases. These phases included how autoethnographic approaches were employed to extract focussed details about my practice-led research, the design of participant research methods, and how collective autoethnography (Cord

& Clements 2010) was employed through participant research methods. *Chapter Three* also detailed how reflexive practice (Sullivan 2010) was utilised to extract meaning from the data in order to determine the extent to which the participant's engagement with the MAM.

Chapter Four – The Mother-Artist Model: My Creative Practice explained and interrogated how mother-artist and child agency (Nieto, cited in Short 2012) were achieved through intersubjectivity in my own practice-led research using the MAM. The chapter related extracts from my own personal reflections on motherhood to my explorations through practice-led research using the MAM. An examination of the development of three key bodies of work in *Chapter Four*, explained how their development has furthered understandings of the MAM as a methodological contribution and as a practice-led research model. First, the chapter discussed the key work *Lost/Found* (2016) in relation to how I employ our mother-artist-child interactions as a method through the MAM in my role as 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' to enable child agency (Kawka 2009). Second, the key video work *Threshold Obscured* (2017) was discussed as an example of how I utilised the MAM to explore our interrelationship in my son's liminal stage (Wels et. al. 2011; Summers & Clarke 2015; Cody 2012). *Chapter Four* also examined how the key work *Bearing Witness* (2018) was created through the powerful process of 'witnessing' from the periphery, where my reflections on who my children are becoming and my role within their changing identity was explored through performative narrative (Langellier 1999) in this video work.

While working under the framework of the MAM in my practice, I uncovered unexpected findings. These findings included that the process of 'attunement', that is, being 'attuned' to my adolescent children's internal states, to be well situated to provide a secure base for their exploration by responding appropriately to their search for autonomy (Allen et al. 2003), was a key requirement when using the MAM. For some mothers, the process of 'letting go' is a difficult one because the mother-child relationship is undergoing change of childhood bonds in an 'untethering' process. The moments during the creative practice with my children

when I realised the need to respect their (unconscious or conscious) decision to no longer participate in the co-constructions that the MAM instigated, led me to the finding that the MAM is a powerful tool to instigate the process of 'letting go' to allow my children to strive for autonomy (Allen et al. 2003). It was at these points in the creative practice that the opportunity for facilitating child agency by 'letting go' was strongest.

Chapter Five – Creative Outcomes and Conceptual Findings provided insights into the revelations from my own practice-led research, and that of my research participants, through use of the MAM. Through a thematic analysis, the chapter detailed how nine themes from interviews, reflective journals, focus group and exhibition synopses were analysed. Further, the chapter revealed the findings that were ascertained in relation to the usefulness of the MAM as a transformative practice approach to facilitate agency and create collective networking communities to overcome maternal regionalism. Sharing the MAM with other mother-artists impacted my understanding of the model by reinforcing that other mothers of adolescents could also use the MAM to explore their own process of 'letting go' within creative practice. A further understanding of the model that I gained was that each mother-artist will adapt the model depending on the age of their child, and the individual issues faced by their family. As a result, when communicating the MAM to other mother-artists in the future, I would highlight the usefulness of the MAM for exploring challenges in mother-child relationships. In this way, *Chapter Five* detailed the MAM's potential impacts on creative practice-led research as well as potential cross-disciplinary and community impact.

In light of these findings, my conceptualisation, design and development of the MAM through practice-led research as a conceptual framework for practice, is a significant contribution. As I documented my experience and applications of the MAM as a practice-led paradigm in this project, I have increased understandings of its development (Haseman 2006, p. 9). Through these findings, I have ascertained that the wider impact of the project lies in its a key contribution to cultural and social

theory discourses as a visual arts practice-led methodology (Sullivan 2010; Leavy 2009).

On reflection, my close engagement with the MAM's autoethnographic methods throughout this project has significantly informed and strengthened it as a practice-led approach. As an important contribution, my exploration of the intersubjective relationship with my own children through performing co-constructive creative exchanges using the MAM, has reinforced the MAM as an authentic methodological framework for practice. In this light, I revealed the MAM as a transformative re-contextualisation of practice-led approaches. Performing narratives through the MAM has enabled my children and I to explore undercurrents or tensions that exist in our interrelationship, as an adaptive strategy. Our investigation of this co-constructive engagement, where the MAM facilitates child agency, has revealed a further contribution which is that the MAM is also a mother-artist's preparation tool for letting go, and allowing her child to be independent. For example, as discussed in *Chapter Four*, a paradoxical turning point in the use of the MAM in my practice was the realisation, through the process of 'attunement', that I must allow my daughter to strive for agency (Allen et al. 2003) by letting go and observing as a mother-artist from the periphery. As a significant impact on the development of the MAM, this reveals that there is power in using the MAM from within the periphery (Batorowicz 2018, para. 2).

As a central contribution, I extended and shared the MAM with five other contemporary mother-artists as case studies for further expansion and public dissemination of the MAM as a resource for creativity and method(s) of practice. Through this collective study, I was able to gain insights into my own, as well as broader views on, the mother-artist and child relationship as experienced in Australian and international regional areas. This collective autoethnographic aspect of the study revealed important findings about each mother-artist's subjective experience of the MAM. Therefore, these findings significantly expanded understandings of mother-artist practice resiliency strategies which position maternal regionalism in a powerful new light. In fact, the mother-artist participants

see living and practicing regionally as advantageously providing more time and finances to devote to their children, and to their practices.

Importantly, writing the mother-artist practice of all of us as participants in a collective autoethnography has highlighted that the stories of are not dissimilar to my own, and has reinforced that such a model enables critical practice outcomes. The findings reveal that my request that the artist participants adopt the specific role of 'mother-artist', and to document that role, resulted in their increased awareness of the mother-child relationship specifically as a site for practice. While my own practice within the MAM uncovered that exploring the dichotomies of motherhood through constructed narratives has created a powerful space for agency for my children, and a voice for myself as a mother-artist that subverts societal norms about 'good' mothers, the participant's experience was not dissimilar. Some mother-artists explored their own perspective of loss, family bonds and everyday interactions with their children through the framework of the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper' role implicit in the MAM. We have all learned that our children will claim their own agency in the artmaking process just by asserting their independence. As mother-artists using the MAM, our discussions and artwork outcomes have explored the premise that no mothering experience is perfect, and that a practice led approach which explores the imperfections of mother-child relationships can help us to subvert the 'good' mother stereotype. As a collective of mother-artists using the MAM as framework, my participants and I have brought these normally 'private' tropes of mothers and their children out into the open through strong visual arguments, so they may become a source of power for mother-artists collectively. By making these works public through our own practice using the MAM, we have disrupted previous negative assumptions of maternal periphery as a restriction and transformed it into a space from which meaningful mother-artist and child subjectivities can be explored.

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Figure 30. Experimentation video exchanges with glass (Video Still).

Figure 31. Home video studio.

Figure 32. Video shoot exchange between Linda and children.

Figure 33. Riley performing blowfish on glass.

Figure 34. Ella performing smoke on glass.

Figure 35. Test of *Threshold Obscured* projection on opposite walls - Divergent
Impacts Conference.

Figure 36. Digital image of Ella layered on mirrored Perspex.

Figure 37. Linda Clark, *Bearing Witness* 2018, Installation view.

Figure 38. Linda Clark, *Bearing Witness: Absence* 2018, Video still.

Figure 39. Ann Hamilton, *the common SENSE*, 2014.

APPENDIX A

Mother-Artist Model Explanatory Handout

The basis of the 'Mother-Artist Model' is the role of
'Facilitator, Constructor & Keeper'

The Mother-Artist uses this role by beginning with a problem, concern or positive message for her child.

The Mother-Artist and child 'facilitate' memory by together choosing particular activities, rituals or experiences for the child.

This approach allows both mother and child to 'construct' a new narrative or mythology which may highlight undercurrents or tensions that exist for them both. This new narrative allows for the complexities of the relationship to unfold conceptually through play to create work that interweaves daily activities in the current social and cultural context in which they are immersed.

The Mother Artist then records or 'keeps' the ritual or experience as both process and product of their artistic practice.

APPENDIX B

Raw Data Deidentified Focus Group Transcript

Focus Group 1 September 2017

Lead Researcher: Linda Clark

LC: Ok, so obviously we're audio recording our focus group, and also, I'll be transcribing the audio. So, if you could try to speak one at a time, that would be fantastic. So, I just wanted to start by thanking you all for your time, because I know that it is a time imposition, and you're really doing it for me, so thank you so much. And also, I'm hoping that it'll be enriching for you as well, I'm hoping it won't be just all for me! So, I just wanted to – probably one at a time – give us your name, where you're from, and a brief discussion about your practice at the moment. And as well as that, can you just give us one of your best strategies for how you make time to balance your practice with your family commitments, one of your strategies that you use at the moment. Who wants to go first? Jessica, would you like to go first? You are in the thick of it aren't you?

Jessica: Yes, I am, I'm sitting here making little booklets for my exhibition, which opens next Friday. I'm making all these little books for people to draw in when they're at my exhibition.

Linda: Oh, my goodness!

Jessica: I've got to get them done today. So, my name's Jessica, I'm in Tamworth, New South Wales. I'm just preparing for my third solo exhibition, so my first one was in February last year, and I had another one in August last year and this is the first solo that I've had this year. So, it's getting down to the pointy end at the moment. Most of the works in the exhibition are acrylics on canvas, and some of them have scraperboard elements collaged onto the canvases as well. And my best strategy for finding time is probably just avoiding housework responsibilities, putting that last. I try to do urgent things obviously, because we need clean dishes and clean clothes and things like that every-day, but not so much (inaudible).

Linda: Good strategy. And so, I know you've told me about your practice, so what is your subject matter?

Jessica: Well this exhibition, I'm focussing on mindfulness, appreciation and gratitude, and that's all around my thinking at the moment about how fast the kids are growing up and how we hold onto that time with them that's so precious and capturing all the little moments. And this year, one of my really good friends passed away from an aggressive cancer, it was only diagnosed in January and she died in August, and she's got kids about the same age as mine, and it's just a reinforcement I guess, about the preciousness of that time. So, the paintings are acrylic on canvas, they have quite a lot of people in them, a lot of figurative elements and I work on a sort of scratchy, abstract background, which I find is quite nice, it keeps with the mindfulness because it's all about playing with the paint on the canvas and just appreciating the process. And then I've done a lot of portraiture, just something that I challenged myself to learn since last May. So, it's something that I really enjoy and it's creating a good income stream from commissions, now that I'm getting better at it, I can get a good likeness and that sort of thing. So that's been a good spin-off of concentrating on portraiture last year.

Linda: Excellent, thank you. Even when you were telling me about your friend, I don't even know her, earlier when we talked about it, I was getting a bit.... There's nothing like a bit of perspective is there? Ok, Sally did you want to share about your practice and about your strategies, and a little bit about yourself that we might not have heard, that you and Jessica were sharing.

Sally: Ok, well I'm in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, this is kind of like mid-point in Canada, so on the prairie, on the plains. And I live by a river, a very big river that kind of starts in the Rocky Mountains and goes to Hudson Bay. So actually, my current project is thinking about a kind of sense of intimacy with place and landscape, and particularly the river. And I've taught a course in the summer, we went to a large inland delta on the river, and I did work with students, but it kind of connected to my own research. And then I went and walked on a glacier this summer, in the mountains, so I'm kind of thinking about where the water starts and where it goes to and whatever communities that are connected along the way. So, I work in really mixed media stuff, I kind of started more in textiles, when I was in high school, I

never really took art, I was just sewing a lot and making clothes and things and I got into the art room because we had to make fabric and I really liked the art room. So, I use a lot of different materials, it's somewhat conceptual, like I start with an idea and then I figure out materials from there. I kind of respond better to found materials and objects. So, one of my projects now, so for this river project, the first thing I worked on was a white business shirt, a white man's shirt, and I embroidered the river like a spine down the back, so I was kind of using my textile stuff there for that piece. But I've used a lot of different things over the years. I'm probably at a really different point, I see a very young child there and a little child behind Jessica there. My son's nineteen, so I'm more at the letting go kind of point, so I think my issues may be a little bit different than some of yours. My son also has some disabilities, he's hearing impaired, but he had cochlear implants at four years old, but he signed for about five years, so we've kind of gone through that. And he also has a bit of cerebral palsy, so some of my experience might also be a little bit informed by that. And, I think I sent you Linda, one thing I've done in the last two weeks, there's an exhibition that opens tomorrow night at our university gallery that is – I kind of co-curated it, there's a woman who's hard of hearing, she's in her thirties, a photographer and filmmaker. Well she did this project and my son was a participant, with deaf and hard of hearing young people, talking about their experience, and she took photos of them, and then I invited some of them that wanted to participate in the project in the exhibition. So, it was kind of a way to honour them and bring all the people together, because they'd never met, the participants. And, also, just to raise more awareness of the experience of being deaf or hard of hearing more broadly in the community.

Linda: So, Sally, I've just put up an image of your son's exhibition.

Sally: So that's the portrait of my son.

Linda: Yes, so can you see it?

Sally: So, there's a portrait of my son, and then the story that he told...(inaudible), and then, see how each story translated into sign language via an interpreter.

They're on the video screen. I knew my son had these six or seven sketch books he's done over the years, he's obsessed with cell phones, and he designs them and he writes all the specs for them, he's a little obsessive as you can see. So, I said if he

wanted to, he could show his sketch books, so the sketch books are on the table and then some of them are pulled out of a book and on the board. And then he wrote a text about why he draws and why he draws what he draws and stuff. And a few other people also had painted some objects as creative work that they'd done, in the exhibition. So, there's sort of like six little stations like this in the show.

Linda: Yes, I've just shared his artist statement there.

Sally: The project exists as a website, where you can see each person's personal narrative. And most of them talk about a lot of social isolation from being hard of hearing, especially as they get older, like high school and beyond. So those are all on the website, the only thing that isn't is their artwork or their statement about the artwork, because I worked with them to generate that part.

LC: Excellent, thank you so much.

Jessica: Yes fantastic.

Cadee: Yeah that's excellent. Do you have the website available that we can look at?

Sally: Yeah, if you google – I could send the url too- Linda, I think if you google Sarah Vermette, SARAH, and the last name is VERMETTE. And then it's called Prism Project. But if you just Google 'Prism Project' you'll get some other stuff that isn't her project, but if you put her name with it, I think you would find it.

Cadee: Ok that sounds great, thank you.

Renee: Thank You.

Linda: And so, Sally, how much did you have to... how much involvement in the project did you have, and how much did he take the reins and do a lot of it himself?

Sally: Well you know, I stepped back when Sarah was working with him, in the course of hearing the autobiography, the story, I sent them out to my studio. Like he's at the age where he'd rather not have Mom around, right. For some of us. So, it just gave him more privacy to say whatever. And what he wanted to, right. And the artist's statement, I typed, he has a scribe sometimes at school, because his typing is really slow. So rather than having him write it, I just said 'talk to me about these drawings and why you did them, and what they mean to you. So, I typed that up. And I think Sarah probably did something similar with the stories, they probably narrated and

she typed and someone edited them, right, the stories that you see online. Because for a lot of people who are deaf or hard of hearing – my son's not bad - but writing fairly coherently is challenging because you don't grow up hearing the English language. There's an interesting piece you'll see online too, if you go, it's actually Sarah. You will think there's a problem with your audio, because she adjusted the audio on a video of herself speaking, so it sounds like what she hears. It sounds like an audio-gram, right. She tried to drop out what she wouldn't hear, and it just sounds like 'wow, wow, wow, wow)', and you kind of realise how much the brain is actually doing and how much deaf people have to do to make sense of talking.

Linda: That's effective, isn't it?

Cadee: Yes.

Sally: Ok, I'll just quickly show you, this was a project that I did when my son was much younger and, I don't know if you can see it, but

Linda: Yes, we kind of can, yes.

Sally: So, this was an exhibition, and this is the book from it. And the guy who did it, did it a bit like an artist's book, where there's like a cut out, right? Woops! The cover comes right off, as you can see. And it's actually like stickers of little baby things.

Linda: Oh yes, mmhmm.

Sally: Like booties and sleepers, like here's a sleeper. And then some of the artwork was mixed media stuff we did with some of the toys and things. And then xrays – he had a kind of dark beginning, he was in intensive care for a month. And so, I was kind of processing some of that and talking about not very 'hallmark-card' parts of the experience. That's the work that most directly relates to my kid.

Linda: So, what did you say sorry? Did you say he didn't have a 'hallmark-card' kind of beginning?

Sally: I had a little sleeper thing, but I did it with pins, because he had a lot of needles and stuff.

Linda: Yes, ok. That's excellent, thank you. Amber, did you want to speak now, or do you want to wait?

Amber: I don't know if I can answer.

Renee: Just how you manage your time to do art and stuff.

Linda: Or just one little strategy, I know there's probably about a million of them, but just introduce yourself and your practice and just one little strategy if you have any.

Amber: Yes, so, Amber. My practice is primarily abstract self-portraits using animal representation. Before my son, even before my daughter, but before my son in particular, I was really busy, and had like an ok-ish career, like I had a lot of exhibitions, I was curating, I was teaching classes, had a lot of little sub business models, I was mentoring other artists. And then, I discovered that I had to teach myself to pretty much slow down to almost a stop. Like you see me today, this is just him. He's just very active and clingy, and everything that a baby should be. So, that's, I think, the hardest thing, is teaching myself, because my brain's always going. I had to actually slow it right down, and so realistically, in the last two, two and a half years, I've made one work, and I've got two on the go, and it's all just layers. I still find it really messy, I find I don't know when the actual work is resolved at this point, I don't have an end game or a result. It's just when I can, I'll sit down, and it's usually when I'm really tired and really stressed and I need to make sense of everything, that I get in and paint. Yeah, I don't think I have any particular strategies or models yet, it's just kind of grabbing at opportunities when I can get them. And not setting myself up for anything, I was given, initially, opportunities to have a solo show and things like that, and I just had to teach myself that, right now, it's not possible. It will be, he will grow out of this, and I just need to...

Linda: Be ok with that?

Amber: Yes, be ok with that and just not try to rush it either. After having my daughter now starting school, so it does go really quickly, it just feels like its forever.

Linda: It's because it's so intense, isn't it?

Amber: Oh, and he's a Daddy's boy, so I struggle to get him to calm down, he'll be like this for a little bit, and then he'll be screaming, full on again. And he doesn't sleep either, it's just like a constant cycle of sleepless screaming.

Linda: And some happy faces in between.

Amber: Yeah.

Linda: So, is your partner able to calm him down quicker?

Amber: Yes, oh instantly! He'll pick him up and he's just happy.

Linda: That's frustrating!

Amber: Ah, everyone finds it frustrating. And he headbutts, so he like, self-harms.

Linda: It's frustrating that he can do it straight away. They always save the best for Mum don't they?

Amber: I was told it's because they feel safe and secure, so they can really let go.

Linda: Yeah I think that's true, my teenager's like that, she just lets it all hang out with me! She knows I'll still love her.

Amber: So, yeah, actual practice-wise, I don't know, I feel like I'm in a limbo at the moment, I think that's the best way to describe it.

Linda: But it's good that you know that it will get better and it will get easier and ...

Amber: Yeah, and I find actually that's probably better for my work. I did try to rush out a few things at the beginning just to try and keep up with the actual industry, but the work just wasn't good and it wasn't authentic and, yeah, it was becoming kind of commercially driven, painting something for the sake of being pretty, which isn't me. I never create anything with the intent for it to look good at the end, if it does, then happy accident.

Linda: So, I guess your strategy at the moment is just to slow down, and let it come when it comes.

Amber: Yes, exactly

Linda: Because it's busy. Renee, did you want to share?

Renee: Sure. So, my name's Renee, I am usually in the same boat as Amber. We have children very similar ages. I have two boys under three, and three step children, they're all under ten. So, there's usually, well quite often there's five kids in the house, so it can be pretty challenging to even find physical space to do anything. But I guess my greatest strategy is waiting until they're asleep, or doing something that they can even help with, like priming a canvas or spray painting backgrounds and things like that, that they really enjoy, they, you know, think they're helping. My practice is mostly based on dreams and unconscious experiences, and those little moments you get in the day when you're daydreaming, or your mind wanders, or where you're not completely there in the moment. I'm pretty interested in those moments. So, I keep copious dream journals, and notes on how my mind wanders, and I make artist books out of those primarily, that's my primary practice. I also do paintings, and this year, I've done a couple of mural works for the first time. Yeah, so

background in printmaking, I've been doing a bit of lecturing in printmaking. Sorry, what was the rest of the...

Linda: You've really already told us your strategy for how you make time.

Renee: Yeah, so either including them, or waiting till they're asleep.

Linda: Yeah.

Renee: My husband works huge shifts, like thirteen hours, and often night shifts, so a lot of the time it is just the kids and me. And they're not in daycare or anything like that so I've really had to - Amber and I are very similar in that way - you have to get used to taking them everywhere and involving them in everything. The only reason that they're not here today is that my Mum had a morning off. She still works, she's only in her forties, so she still works really often, so she can't do that too much or anything.

Linda: Yeah, I know what you mean, my Mum worked in full time work the whole time I had little kids, so I felt like I could only ask her for special occasions.

Renee: Exactly.

Linda: Thank you. And Cadee...

Cadee: Well, I'm a bit like Sally, and a little bit different, my kids have all grown up, I have adult children, but I have, with my partner, eighteen, well number eighteen is on the way, eighteen grandchildren. So, it's still a bit hectic because I've always had a lot of involvement with my grandchildren and their needs and helping babysit, and up until about four weeks ago, two of our grandchildren lived with us, a seven-year-old and ten-year-old. And we've just recently moved into a caravan because we intend on travelling eventually, when we get a chance, probably next year after our new grandchild is born in March. So, we've had the two little people living with us, but we see...one of my daughters has nine children, and one has five, my son has two and the third one is on the way, and one of my daughters has one. But they all have different issues. I have a grandson that has neurofibromatosis, which involves tumours going on his nerves and that sort of thing, at the present time, he's doing ok. I have a grandson that has Chiari Malformation Syndrome, which is also a problem. One that has only learnt to speak, he's eleven and he's only learnt to speak in the last two years. Several have learning difficulties and ADHD, so it's a pretty full on life with them regardless. So, now that the little two have gone back to their

Mum, I'm sort of finding a little bit more time to do things, but they love to be involved. I've just recently had a bit of a trial run with making some, moulding some hands, and I've used my granddaughter and a cell phone, because for her and I that's – she's fourteen going on fifteen – she lives here in Toowoomba, but I live down in Brisbane, so we tend to talk a lot on the phone and discuss what's going on. She's had some issues, and as I said, I'm a very close and very involved Grandparent with my grandchildren and my children. But my work in the past has revolved a lot around my indigenous heritage. That still plays a part, but I'm more now focussing on the children, the grandchildren, the ways in which we communicate, just things that involve like a lot of the things we do, that we're involved in with them because even though I've got boxes full of keepsakes for my children when they were growing up, and I've handed them on, I still want to make those special memories with the grandchildren too, and be able to hand them on. So, I'm going to do a family mould session of all of their hands, all the grandchildren's hands for each family, so each family has their own little family mould of the children at the particular ages they're at now, that's something I intend on doing over the next few months. I really enjoyed that experience, it's something a bit new. I love playing with my clay, but I haven't done it in a while, but I have bought some recently, so that's the next thing on the list of things to do, and again I just want to play around with the hands, and the ideas of talking and the way in which you use your hands to do so many different things, from communication through to everyday chores such as washing, brushing your hair, brushing your teeth, just all little things, and ways that some of the kids can't manage certain things even though technically, they're normal, but they have problems with motor skills and some of these types of things. So, things that most people manage well, they find quite difficult. And I still am doing my woodwork, I'm getting some wood today. Originally, going back to about 2009, was the first time I touched the wood and I created a lot of stuff then, to do with my indigenous heritage, but it was in the form of clothing, baby's clothing, hats, all those sorts of things. I haven't done that for a while, so I'm wanting to get back into some more of that as well.

Renee: I remember your work.

Cadee: You do.?

Linda: Some of them are in the office.

Cadee: Yes, my slouch hat and bonnet are over in the office.

Linda: They're beautiful.

Sally: I think I saw those, were those in the **collaboration** with us?

Cadee: Yes. They were.

Sally: They were beautiful.

Cadee: Thank you.

Sally: And what was your first name, sorry.

Cadee: Cadee.

Sally: And sorry, the person beside you, is it Renee?

Renee: Renee

Linda: Ok, well I had better share a little bit about myself, even though some of you probably know a bit. So, the way this project came about was, back in undergraduate, I used to make, I did make one work that was about my children, which was a massive puzzle, and I included a video work with that of their silhouettes playing with this massive wooden puzzle. But then I kind of got a bit lost, and by third year I was making a lot of work that was large scale, and timber works that had a lot to do with psychoanalysis and the Rorschach and that sort of stuff, and they were participatory, so I kind of wanted to make that environment that welcomed people into it. But really, there wasn't a lot of myself in the work, it wasn't really, I don't know, I didn't feel authentic, I liked the work, but it wasn't very authentic. And so, in honours, when I was studying honours, I sort of one day took a video of my daughter when I was braiding her hair, and someone else saw it, and said 'why aren't you doing this kind of work, because it kind of gives a bit of an insight into you'. So, that's when I started to really explore that idea of using those everyday interactions with the kids, and also my hopes for them, and any problems that came up in our relationship, because I'm a real worrier, and I really worry about what I'm doing to them or you know, whether I'm stuffing it up, you know. So, it's for them and for me to give us a way to you know, to have that common ground and have that way of exploring our relationship in a different way, not just having a conversation, but actually working through it with art basically. So yeah, I make video, and I like to incorporate objects in the video that I use in the installation afterwards. So, at the

moment, I'm working on a project with glass, because they use glass everyday, you know, their glass screens like Cadee was saying with her granddaughter. So, everything that we do with them is mediated between this glass, with this technology. So, I've made a video where they're communicating either side of a sheet of glass, and I'm planning to install the glass as an installation. Yes, so that's me. So, that is my strategy, to basically use those everyday activities, those everyday problems or those everyday messages that I want them to remember, you know, empowering messages, and use it on my work.

Linda: Amber is going to go because her son has hurt his toe.

Amber: Sorry guys!

All: That's alright!

Linda: Just before Amber goes – Sally are you on Facebook?

Sally: No, I'm not.

Linda: That's ok. I'm just trying to work out a way that we can communicate online and share images and things like that, so I am going to work on that, because that might be easier than shooting emails back and forth, but I do have to get ethical clearance for it. So, I'm just aware that Amber has got to go now, and we haven't really shared images of her work or anything, but I'm working on a way of doing that, just in our little group.

Amber Leaves.

Linda: I didn't know how this was going to work, I thought, we'll just give it a go with kids in the room and see how it goes.

Renee: My youngest son is very similar to Amber's son, and when we have playdates and stuff, they're scaling the furniture and just being terrors.

Linda: Yeah, and my son was the same, so I just thought we'd try it. Amber would have persevered if her son didn't hurt his foot. But like I was saying to Sally, I'm trying to come up with a way of sharing, I thought Facebook, but there's probably other ways like Google Hangout and things like that, that we could just, in our little group, start sharing images of our work and just ideas and things like that online, because it is very, very hard to all get together and have that block of time to talk about your work when you've got kids. So, I don't know if everybody likes that idea?

Cadee: Yeah that's good.

Renee: Yes, that's fine, just let us know what platform you want to use.

Linda: Like I said, I do have to get ethics clearance for everything, so I'm still working that out. Sally, do you have any ideas, do you use anything like that?

Sally: I kind of deliberately not on Facebook because I don't want to.

Linda: No, that's fine.

Sally: I'm much more of an email user, if people throw some images in an email.

Linda: Yes, even if, there's got to be some sort of online website platform that only we have access to, or something like that, I'm still working that out, but I just wanted to get your ideas, you know, if you thought that was a good idea.

Sally: If other people have websites, I don't yet have one, but I could look up other people's work.

Renee: I only have an Instagram for art, so I don't have an actual website.

Linda: Yes, anyway, that's for me to work out, but I just wanted to see if you guys would be willing to, if it was just our group, whether you would like to share your progress and things.

Renee: Sure.

Cadee: Yes.

Sally: You're talking about things people might be working on towards the exhibition idea?

Linda: Yeah, well I am hoping, at the end, it's actually going to be, the exhibition that I'm hoping that we're all going to have work for, it's actually partly my assessment exhibition, so my final exhibition, but it'll be in two separate gallery spaces, so all of our work will be in one space, and then my work will be in another space. So, I was thinking, working up to that, which will actually be in February 2019 now, I thought it was going to be end of 2018, but its February 2019. Working up to that, I thought we could start sharing ideas and just progress of what we're working on and if we're having a really bad month, and just want to blurt it out, or a really good month. You know, if there's something really good going on that you want to talk to each other about it. So that's something I'm working on. Like I said, the focus group is a good idea if everybody's not got kids, but we all have kids!

Jessica: So, Linda, is this the group, or are there more people that haven't been able to come today?

Linda: No, this is it. I wanted to keep it small, because I was aware of just how hard it is. Like it's really not just us, it's all of our kids as well that we've got to take into account in this project, so I wanted to keep it small for that reason. Also, because I think that it's better to share conversations with a few people rather than twenty or thirty people, that gets a little bit impersonal, I thought. Yes, that sort of leads me to get your feedback. First of all, I'll just talk about the mother artist model as I see it, and I'll talk about this document that I gave everyone, the 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper', and then I'm just going to ask whether any of this is making sense to you, whether you think that this model is going to be beneficial for you. Any suggestions on how I might change it, is it even useful, basically. So, a brief overview of the Mother-Artist Model project that I'm doing, like I was saying with my own work, it just considers that constantly shifting mother and child relationship as the actual artmaking process, so you know, we were talking about the strategies that everybody's got for trying to negotiate this motherhood and making work and things like that. And, for me, I don't know if it's going to be for everyone, but I think considering that relationship as a starting point for making work, is something you're already doing anyway, you know, you're already thinking about your kids, you're already doing things day to day with them, so using that as a process, I'm hoping will be helpful for other people. Also, the project is really to find out whether it's a useful resource, but also whether it advocates agency for both mother and child. That's something that I'm interested in seeing whether that's useful, because really, for me particularly, the work wouldn't really exist in some ways without my children, so I'm trying to give them a little bit more agency and set it up as a little bit more of a co-construction. Now that they're getting older, I guess I can do that. So, I'm interested in whether agency can be measured.

Jessica: Can you define that for me, Linda?

Linda: Ah, for me, agency is more about whether you have a say in the end product. Agency is sort of about how it gets you to your goal. So, for me, my goal is to explore our relationship through this artwork, and maybe get a better understanding of my child through the artwork, but for my child, it may be just making something or sitting down with me and getting five minutes of time together, and things like that.

So yes, it's about agency, you know, whether it provides a little bit more agency for your child and yourself to work towards your goal. Does that make sense?

Cadee: Yes.

Renee: I think so.

Linda: Sometimes I explain things and I wonder whether it makes any sense. And also, another aim of the project is to see whether, within this model, it can help us translate that adaptability of everyday motherhood to our practice. So, we already adapt to minute-to-minute things that happen in our lives, and things that happen with the kids, I'm just wondering, you know, my aim is to explore whether that can be also translated to our practice. So, you know, if something's not going right with our practice, is there something that we've learned in our mothering experiences with our kids that can solve that problem or can push our work further. And I just wanted to refer to that Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper poster I gave you. For me, this is the basis of the mother-artist model, so this is the way I make work, so this is the process, I guess, that I go through to make work. So, like it says up the top, I use the role by starting with a problem, or a concern or a positive message that I want my child to know. So, one of my works was similar to one of your works Sally, it was embroidering a backbone on a dress for my daughter and drawing a backbone on her actual skin and things like that. So, it was all about giving her a little bit – empowering her, with the old cliché of 'have a backbone', and it came from that bit of prose that said, 'Daughter, don't wear a wishbone where your backbone ought to be', that's where it came from, from Clementine's little saying. Yeah, and then the next process it that as mother and child facilitate a memory by choosing activities of rituals or things like that. For me, the rituals like the hair braiding idea, but also my last, the work before this one was about the idea of, I sort of sometimes felt lost in trying to understand my daughter and because she's a teenager, it feels like she's going on this sort of journey without me and I don't really get it sometimes. So, that's what my last video work was about. And also, about - because she was carrying weights, these white weights that were heavy, and she was kind of leaving them as bread crumb kind of things through this bushland setting. It was kind of about, you know, she carries this weight of expectation as well as me trying to see what she's going to end up as, and all that sort of thing. It's sort of about

constructing a new narrative or a new mythology that highlights those tensions and those undercurrents that we're all dealing with. And then, you can use that to make up your own, that's where the creativity really comes in, I think, you can kind of make up this story about your child or yourself. And I think, for me, that is the real starting point, making up that story and getting outside of ourselves in a way, but it also deals with the daily activities that are happening. And then, the 'Keeper' of memory is that I keep that ritual or that experience, I keep it in video, or I keep it in object, but other people might keep it in images, photographs or painting, that sort of thing. So, I just wanted to – I don't want to put you on the spot- but I do want to know if any of what I'm saying is making sense, and if it resonates with anyone or whether there's other things you might do, basically centred around this Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper'.

Renee: I'll go. I think what you're saying makes sense. It's definitely of interest to me as being this reflective and planned and everything is very much to my personality, and its actually helping me to consider it a bit further, whereas I was sort of in survival mode for a couple of years. So, it's only really the start of this sort of consideration for me. You know what I mean? Like, trying to be reflective rather than just responsive. So, it does make sense, and I think that as the kids get older, and become more independent, it will give me a chance to be more self-aware, if that makes sense. Although, if I concentrate on it now, which this is helping me to do, I can start to do that, I guess.

Linda: Yeah. And do you think that it's something that you have to be reminded of to kind of remember, I know it doesn't come naturally, I know I've made this, and I don't want it to feel like I'm imposing it on you, on you all. Is there something that would help to integrate it or is it enough to just read that and think, 'Well this is how I can use it'.

Renee: Well, I mean, naturally I think we're going to do it our own way, we always are.

Linda: Ok, that's good, that's what I want.

Renee: So, then, in that respect, I think that it almost is, and having a discussion sort of grounds that, reinforces it. So yes, I don't think there's anything else that you could do, you know what I mean, to reinstate that.

Linda: Ok.

Renee: But I might go stick it on the fridge (the poster), and it'll be in my mind, and I'll be more thoughtful about that.

Linda: Ok, more intentional?

Renee: Yeah, more intentional.

Linda: So, have you had any thoughts about how you would actually use it, or have you tried, have you had any ideas once you've read this?

Renee: So, I guess, more than creating more ideas, it's sort of made me think, well I'm kind of doing these things.

Linda: Yeah, ok.

Renee: Yeah, so it was a bit more like that for me. But what you said before about both reaching a goal, it sort of reminded of last night, I was trying to get some sewing done for the market, which is another thing, and my son, he's three, he kept coming out of bed. And I said, 'Mate, can you just go back to bed', and he said: 'I just want to colour, I just want to sit here and watch you sew'. And I was like, yes ok, so maybe this is a form of collaboration too. And he just sat there, we stayed up till 11pm, and he was just watching me, and he didn't seem bored, and it was just our time together, so it was nice, because I was productive as well, and he wasn't really harming anything, apart from his bedtime, but that didn't matter.

Linda: Yeah, so you're seeing, maybe what would have been a worry before, like 'oh he's got to go to bed', you're seeing it as more of an interaction and a collaboration, rather than a problem.

Renee: Yeah, well that's right, and I thought to myself, 'well what does it really matter, my step kids aren't with us at the moment, so I don't have school run to do, he doesn't have to go anywhere, what's the harm'.

Linda: And it could be, something amazing could come from it.

Renee: It was really nice.

Linda: And it's not often that you get that, because you've got...

Renee: Because my youngest is a tornado,

Linda: Yeah, you don't get that one on one special time.

Renee: Yeah, it was good.

Linda: Yes, thank you. So, Jessica can I ask you what your understanding of the model is, do you have any questions?

Jessica: I don't have any questions. I don't think I'll use it in the way, definitely not in the way you're using it, and not particularly in my own way at the moment, the way I'm practicing either. Often, I'm involving my children in the beginnings of the artwork, because they might inspire the idea, or they might be my models, you know, if I need somebody to sit in a certain position so that I can work from a reference photograph, then it's usually my kids, because they're around. So, there's lots of paintings that are from them modelling for me. And also, when we're doing the public art, often the kids are involved in the very beginning, because they can paint backgrounds that are flat colour and things like that, and then we do the details over the top. So, when you're talking about agency, I've got the sense that they don't have much agency, because they're not involved in what the end product is. They're just involved in that beginning part of it. I have done artworks that focus on issues, concerns and problems in the relationship, but I'm not sure that I'm collaborating with the kids throughout the whole process.

So, the end product is sort of a gift to them, because the focus is on a problem, but it's not like we've created the whole thing together.

Linda: Yes. I might have kind of made it seem like my work is a complete collaboration with them. I call it more of a co-construction, because it's not from start to finish with them. Some of it is about them, and some of it is with them, if that makes sense. Particularly this last work that I made. A lot of it was not with them. A lot of it was creating the environment that I was going to shoot this video in. And a lot of the time, I couldn't, like there were a few days there, because I only had a small window of opportunity because I had all the equipment, one of them was not talking to me for a whole day. So, you know what I mean, it's not always with them, collaboratively, and that's part of the work as well, that sometimes it doesn't work, sometimes it's just a starting point really.

Sally: I could just say a little bit there maybe, I'll come back to the model in a moment, but just what you were saying there about your kid not talking to you, or refusing, I haven't worked directly with my son a lot, sometimes I did like that exhibition, I showed you the booklet, was more about my experience of his birth,

right, not his, and he was an infant, so sometimes I wonder about that in terms of disability, but I'm sort of representing myself as a parent, and an atypical experience of birth and early childhood and growing up and stuff too. There was a couple of times where, I don't know, it was like I noticed something, one was like he was going to go away to a school, so he was going to be away from me for about three or four months when he was about five or six, when he was just learning to speak and he was going to like an aural deaf school. And I just felt heartbroken, right, so I kind of took him to this studio and I wanted to make this video where he would say some things to me in sign language, so I was like a director, right like, 'Tell me this'...you know, whatever. And it was funny because he's usually like a really co-operative kid, but he was sitting on this little stool, and he just kept swivelling and turning his back to the camera.

ALL: Laughter.

Sally: And I just thought, he's totally taking charge of this, and he doesn't want to – he's probably feeling the emotions too, but he's not wanting to give me what I want, like this nice little sign language, like 'I love you Mommy', or something, I can't even remember what I wanted him to say, 'I'm going to miss you', right, I don't know what it was. But I think I've lost that footage, because I kept wanting to work with it, because I thought it was really interesting how he took agency there when I thought I was directing, and he made it more interesting actually.

Linda: Yes, that's right.

Sally: Yeah, there's another video, this was just, like noticing something out of the corner of my eye, he had this adapted bicycle and he was learning to ride it, and he rode through the park. But just the way he rides, he would wobble a bit, right. But to me, behind him, it looked like this really interesting drawing where he kept hitting the different sides of the sidewalk as he went along it. So, it was sort of like this visual trace of the way he biked, which was not a typical way of biking, right. And then another time, he went through this little tunnel, and he just kind of disappeared at the end of it and it was like sunlight, and I never did anything with that either, I don't know where the footage is, but it was one of things that just felt really poignant to me, about, kind of now, I'd like to do something with that video now, because what I'm working with is independence and letting go, and so that video like

disappearing into the light at the end of the tunnel is a really resonant image for me now, more than when he was seven or eight or whenever he was riding that trike. So, when I look at the statement, I guess the question I had was, was the focus on memory, because that seems to be coming out of a source you read, Kawka.

Linda: Oh yes, I've sort of done a more simplified one, but, sorry what were you going to say?

Sally: Well, is it out of psychoanalysis, like what's this source framework for that quote?

Linda: The source for that was more about agency and more about not...it was sort of from an educational perspective, about not taking over, but having more of that co- construction between the two of you, so there's more of a.... it will never be equal, but it was more about creating that space for agency for both rather than telling the child what to do. And I think with that story you were telling about your son spinning around on the chair, that's a really good example of that, you know, that sometimes we have this idea of what our... well sometimes I do, I don't know about you guys, but sometimes I have this idea of what the work's going to be and working with children blows that completely out of the water. Like it's never going to be controlled, and that teaches me a lesson as well.

Sally: Mmhmm. I think, so I might read that - maybe it's just the point I'm at with my son- but I see my role as a 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper of Independence' more than 'memory', right? Like I feel like, particularly at this age, but I think of everything I've worked on with him, which includes like walking, you know, like more than normal, right. Taking him to therapies and stuff, trying to get him to do kind of basic things, it's all with this goal of: 'Okay, maybe sometime you're going to be more independent and need me less, and I'm not going to be (inaudible) like your memory quite so much. Like even reminders, Mom reminder right, like trying to let go of the reminder role. So, I just wondered about that, because for me, I don't know if I'm constructing memory. I might do that with him in other ways that maybe fit your idea of ritual, but for me they're often – like we just finished binge watching this series on Netflix called 'Switched at birth' that's a lot about deafness and teenagers and kind of deaf culture and, I don't know, it's got really interesting characters, so it became – where I used to read him more books like that, like young adult books

about disability – so it was sort of a way to talk about issues that he faces that I really don't know a lot about, so I'm drawing on other sources to have conversations with him. And those became little rituals, like every night we'd read a chapter, or every night we'd watch an episode or two of this Netflix series, and then I'd say, 'Oh, she's a really good role model, you know', and 'what do you think about her as a role model for self-advocacy?', or something like that. So, I don't know, I'm just kind of like talking around in circles here, but...

Linda: No, I think that's good.

Sally: I just wondered about the focus on memory, because memory for me sometimes goes to something nostalgic, and I don't know how that fits with your idea about memory.

Linda: Yeah, I think that's actually a really valuable point that you're making, because that was one of my questions to you all, how you would change it? And how you would adapt it to yourself, so that's really good that you've said that that's how you would change it, basically to call it 'Facilitator, Constructor and Keeper of Independence'. Yeah, so that's actually one of the goals of the project, is to see how you would change it and how you would adapt it.

Sally: Yeah, I don't know if that makes sense to other people, or if it's just having a young adult kid. I don't know if it's autonomy or independence, autonomy fits more with your idea of agency.

Linda: Yeah, but I think it's more about you fitting it with your idea, rather than taking my idea and fitting it with yours. Rather than you trying to fit into mine. You know what I mean? That's one of the aims, is for you to adapt it so that you can use it, really.

Sally: Mmhmm.

Linda: And that's part of the data, is to see how you do change it, and you already have, just then, so that's really good.

Sally: The only other thing I might say is that in terms of co-construction or working with this model, sometimes I just want to go to the studio, and do what I want to do. Like, I don't want to figure out how to do something with my kid, I want a break from that, right, like I want to go do my own thing.

Linda: Yeah, I think that... I have been thinking that, as...particularly because my kids are getting older, I think that might be, not a flaw in the model, but something that might have to be adapted as well. I don't know what you all think, but I'm seeing that the model is possibly changeable according to the child's age, because, particularly in that last work that I made, I was thinking, 'Ah, I don't know if I can do this much longer'. Involving them in the work and maybe it will become more about me and my thoughts about motherhood. Maybe they won't want to be included at all.

Sally: And what triggered that, Linda? What made you think that?

Linda: Particularly that day where my daughter wasn't speaking to me, I can't even remember what it was about, who knows, it was something I didn't let her do, or something. But yes, I was thinking, I don't want to force her to participate. And so, I think I'm still learning as well, about how much of my practice is going to... yeah, whether this model is going to end, you know, when your child is a teenager. Is it even going to be helpful. So, that's also part of the data. Me, wondering whether it's going to work for me as well.

Cadee: For me, I can see like, a connection. It still crosses over in the communication side of things, because with me intending to travel soon, it's going to change the way in which I do things with both the kids and the grandkids, compared to what I brought my kids up doing, and what I have done with my grandkids also. I mean, there's a connection of things that I sort of carried over, that I used to do with my children, and that I have done with my grandchildren too. In the way of, from reading books, telling stories, nursery rhymes, all of that sort of stuff, I've done with both my children and again, my grandchildren. But, when this distance gets bigger, it's going to be more difficult to do that with the newer grandchildren that are coming on. Instead of being able to actually communicate with them face-to-face to create those memories, it's going to be difficult to create those memories because we're not going to see them as often. I'm not going to spend as much time with them as I did with my children. Naturally, they were with me 24/7, so I had all that time, but having three of them close together, I didn't get a lot of individual time with each single child. Whereas the grandchildren came along, and I had a bit more individual time with them, even though I was busy doing things and still studying and lots of other things at that stage I could still create special time, and babysitting time, where

I could recreate what I did with my children. But now this new lot of grandchildren is like, going to pose a different challenge when it comes to creating those memories because I'm not going to have the same amount of time with them as I've had with the other grandchildren.

Linda: So, are you having to change your ways of communicating?

Cadee: I've got to work out different communication strategies, different ways of creating and capturing those memories and holding onto them. Like I mean I've got boxes of keepsakes from my kids, that my kids now have to show their own kids. I've got scrapbooks that I've done for some of my grandchildren that I haven't managed to finish, but I've got started that are about different memories, different places we've been, different things we've seen, huge case of photographs, because I was always photography mad with everywhere I went, I'd take photos of the grandchildren and then everything we did. And then even little things, you know, one day they came out to me, and I'd had my paints out and been painting and I left them out on the table out in the yard, supposedly to go and finish cleaning up, but I got distracted and I came out and my grandkids were painted head to toe, and thought it was fabulous, so they thought I left them out there for them. Well naturally, I had no other way of capturing the moment but a handprint and them on camera. And I've got all these photos, but now I can't take all these photos, so I just don't have the room. So, I've got to work out ways of..

Renee: Digital means?

Cadee: Yes. I'll have a hard drive, a small one, and I'm getting a digital photo frame, to be able to use and relive those experiences. But through my artwork, I think I can capture my grandbaby's hands and feet now, the new ones, so that I have something to treasure from when they were little. I also want to create something where – like I see the overlap between my children and my grandchildren in the way that I always sang songs, read stories, all that sort of stuff.

Renee: I think the hands and feet are really interesting to me, because you reminded me of something. When I was young, three of my siblings passed away when they were really small, and basically what my Mum has is a photograph, clip of hair and hand and foot prints.

Cadee: Well, before I met my partner, my oldest grandchild before then died of SIDS when he was seven weeks and he had pretty much lived with me the entire seven weeks, seven weeks and three days old. He moved out at seven weeks and went to live with his father and his mother. His father had bought them a house. And he died three days later. And, being my first grandchild, I was camera crazy and I have photos from pretty much every day of his life, something now that I'm glad that we did have, because his Mum and Dad and myself, we treasure those items. And she's got certain items of clothes that she's kept, but it's just... there's a couple of little toys and things, and so I've got one of them. And just those memories.

Renee: I just remember, like even as a child myself, and not really understanding the implications, but I would hold those little cards with the prints and the hair clippings and everything, just felt significant.

Cadee: Yes. Well see she had her daughter then, like not even twelve months later, and she was brought up to know that the photo on the wall was her big brother, and her Mum's got like a shelf full of angels, we've always given her an angel for his birthday and that sort of thing. And she knew, even as a toddler, not to touch those things, but always, it was like she had a sixth sense or something. She'd tell her mother, she'd sit laughing, and then run out to her mother and give her a kiss, and her Mum would say, 'Oh that was a lovely kiss', and she'd say, 'No, that was from my brother'. And just little things, she's always had that connection and even though he was never here for her to meet. So, I want to make that connection with the books and...

Zoom disconnection problem happened.

Sally: We're in the evening here, so I have to go out to an event in about half an hour.

Linda: Yes, we're nearly finished here pretty much. I really just wanted to just get you to, very quickly, well Sally I might get you to do that, just describe, if you've had any thoughts about it, possibly how you might use it to make work for the exhibition that we're all hoping to make work for, or how it might influence that?

Sally: Yeah, I really don't know, I have to dig out those two video clips I mentioned, I've always planned on doing something with them, but I might have lost them, right, I mean how many computers have I had since then? So, that's one thing that came to mind, because for me, it's sort of independence and a poignant sense of loss, right, with that. So, a loss of the role I did have. So, I don't know if I'll find those videos or not, but it might be something around that sense.

Something, I don't know quite what medium, I mean given it's so far away, I know when we did the exchange, we somewhat tried to use lighter materials, or ephemeral materials that could be sent by dropbox.

Linda: Yes.

Sally: You ended up sending, Linda, I know that cloth piece you're talking about, you had a video as well, right?

Linda: Yeah.

Sally: When we did the Antipods exchange. So, there'll probably be a bit of material consideration there in terms of what media I might use.

Linda: Yeah, ok.

Sally: I think from what I've been saying and what I've been thinking about it, it's something around independence, autonomy, like a loss of my role, a bit of a shift in that mothering role. The only comment I was going to make when you said the model is depending on the age of the child, because I had my son later in life too, like I was a decade out of grad school, so I had a kind of established career as an artist, and I think that has an impact as well. Because I had a kind of direction in my work that didn't include motherhood, because I wasn't a mother. So that kind of trajectory that you're on already, like I did a couple of bodies of work that kind of connected to that experience, and had some links to my other work, but they were, in my mind, a little bit of an aside or something. Because I always had some things I was working with and it had a conceptual focus, so oddly, it sort of connects with what I'm doing now which I might call something like the culture of nature, right. I've always been interested in future ecology, about the way it's framed culturally and the way it's thought about culturally. So even my son's experience of birth, to me that was like, oh my God, that was so cultured, by hospitals and you know, interventions and stuff, which wasn't part of my natural planned childbirth project, so that was kind of

interesting because it really was like an interference with my idea of what my agency might have been.

Linda: Like a disruption, kind of thing?

Sally: Yeah, yeah.

Linda: And so, do you think that this project or this model, will sort of enhance your ability to communicate with just our group, heading toward the exhibition? I mean I know that once I come up with some way of sharing visually that will help, but do you think having that shared, that common model to start with may help, or do you think it would not really have any bearing on what you would make?

Sally: It's interesting to think into this context a bit with all of you, because I've touched on it in parts of my career as an artist. And the one thing I was going to say about strategies for making art, this isn't so much related to the mother thing maybe, but for the last while, I've been more interested in sort of working collaboratively with other people. Like when I got really busy when I was head of our department here, I hired some students and former students to do the production parts of my work, and I had never done that before, but it was actually a really interesting way to both get work done when you're really busy. But also, kind of see what other people come up with, and looking over other people's shoulders, it gives you, like 'oh, a new idea' or something you didn't think about or see. So, it can be a sort of inspiring process I guess, to see other people kind of riffing off things. Like a jazz composition of something.

Linda: Yeah, I think

Sally: So, I think that might be a fun part of the project, right. Just other people's ideas triggering 'Oh, hadn't thought about that'.

Linda: Yeah, no that's good. And I don't know whether that naturally happens in a collaboration, because I haven't done a lot of collaborations, so this part of it is also a big learning curve for me, but I don't know whether the model necessarily itself will have any kind of effect on how we share ideas I guess it gives us a framework because we're trying to adapt it to our practice, but I wonder if the ideas will kind of move away from that, or stick with that, with the model.

Cadee: I think that will be interesting, though, to just see everybody's take individually on what they feel they get out of using the model as a basis and then

working from it, because each of us being individual artists are going to have our own take on it, no matter what we do. And no matter what framework we're given, we all work in a different way and with different materials. So, it's all going to have a different impact on how we all do it. And what the outcome eventually is could look quite different, but still be cohesive in the way that it all started from the same framework. And each person has their own interpretation, but a connection by the same token.

Linda: Yes definitely, and I suppose that's a little bit what a curated exhibition is like, if you're invited to

Jessica: Can you speak up a bit sorry?

Linda: Oh, sorry Jessica

Jessica: If you're a bit further away from the computer it's harder to hear.

Linda: I'm sorry. Cadee was just saying that we all might use the model in a different way, because we've all got different practice, but we've got that common starting point. And I was saying it's a little bit like if you're invited to participate in a curated group exhibition, you kind of have a bit of a framework to work with anyway.

Jessica: Yes.

Linda: So, Jessica, do you know how you might use it, working toward the exhibition, or whether you will at all?

Jessica: Yes, I'm just thinking on my feet at the moment,

Linda: Yeah, of course.

Jessica: So, I haven't put a lot of thought into this before this teleconference, but I'm thinking about usually I let the kids, they have their involvement in the beginning and the inspiration, and then I take charge of the end product, I'm quite a perfectionist about the end product usually. So, this might be an opportunity for me to let go of that perfectionism and have them involved the whole way through and create something where they are involved in the outcome and what it looks like at the end. And perhaps work on a major, like a family portrait together where they're painting themselves and how they see themselves as part of the family unit, or something like that.

Linda: Ok, that sounds interesting.

Jessica: It would be really interesting to see how that turns out, and it would be an interesting experience for me to reflect on the letting go of what the outcome's going to be as well.

Linda: Yes, definitely.

Jessica: I'm excited about the idea.

Linda: Oh good, that's good, I'm glad. So, what do you think about having the model, do you think it enhances our communication, but just in our group heading towards that exhibition?

Jessica: Yes, well I think it would be good to be in regular contact with each other. So, I hear Sally saying that she's not on Facebook, but Facebook's the easiest for me to use.

Linda: Yes, there's got to be something else.

Jessica: Whatever works for everyone.

Linda: Yes, and moving forward, that's what I'll be focussing on in the next few weeks, coming up with some sort of platform for us all, something that's quick and easy too, because you don't want to be having to spend an hour trying to upload something, that's just not going to work. Have you got anything else to say before we go?

Jessica: While you were trying to fix the connection problem, I was just saying to Sally that when my girls were small, it was really difficult for me to create as well because of their personalities, which are quite different to my youngest son who's more easy going and amuses himself more easily and things like that. Him at the same age, I was having a lot more time to create than when the girls were young. So, what Amber was going through this morning, and what she was saying about really needing to learn to slow herself down and just let it go, that really resonated with me, and I think that we can all learn and share tips and that sort of thing, about how we deal with those issues.

Linda: Definitely. And I thought what Renee said about last night with her little guy, you know, just having that new awareness of turning an interaction into, what were you saying, Renee, that it was sort of more like a collaboration and an interaction?

Renee: I still got what I wanted, and he got what he wanted, and obviously needed at that time, so...

Linda: Yeah, and even if it's just a change in mindset or a change in intention.

Renee: Usually we have to be a lot more structured, because we do have the blended family issues, and the coming in and out of different houses, and not only just one, like my stepdaughter is from a different mother than my two stepsons, so there's a lot going on, and usually we have to be quite structured, or it's mayhem. But sometimes it's just so nice to be able to let go a bit.

Linda: And just that, even that you were, would you say because you've been thinking about this a little bit, that's why you thought of it that way?

Renee: I've been trying to be more mindful, it's something that I've been thinking about prior to this, but also enhanced by this, if that makes sense.

Linda: Yeah, ok. Because I think everyone's got their different degrees of how they think that this model should impact their practice and I don't think it should take over completely at all, I think even that little change of mindset that Renee was talking about, that she experienced, is an outcome. So, I'm really happy about that and it's not like I expect everyone to make work with their kids for the next year and that's what it's all about. I think any little change or any little impact that it has on any of us is an outcome, and I'm happy with that. Sally, did you have anything to say before we sign off?

Sally: Well I was hearing a few people say things about slowing down, right, and it just made me think of, I don't know if I put this in the journal that you were asking us to keep or not, but I had seen a retrospective of work by Bill Viola, I don't know if you all know him.

Linda: Yes

Sally: So, he uses slow motion a lot, right, and I saw this big retrospective and it took like two and a half hours to go through it, because everything's in slow motion. But you get really mesmerised by it. You can sit and watch this really slow motion thing for twenty minutes, half an hour, and I was thinking about that, because I love his work, it must have been a couple of weeks later, I was back home and I was with my son somewhere, and of course I'm in a rush. I was like, we have to return this book to the library, could you get out of the car and run it into the library, and he moves in kind of slow motion. I was kind of like standing there trying to lock the car, waiting for him to get out of the other door, and it suddenly hit me, oh he's moving like a Bill

Viola video! I didn't even have three minutes to wait for him to get out of the car. So, it was sort of like this little self-reflective moment, like I could sit and watch this video art thing, but I get so impatient with his slowness on a day to day basis, I guess I'm always trying to move things along faster than his pace. So anyway, I'm just talking out loud, but it made me think about this slow motion thing, or this slowing down thing, which is part of what many of you that have younger kids are dealing with. You know, because my son has some slower motor responses, that's the sort of thing I deal with a fair bit, not only with the most patience or grace.

Linda: Oh, I don't think any of us are perfect in that way.

Sally: You asked Jessica and I what ideas we had towards the exhibition, I don't know if the three of you want to say something about that before we close? Renee?

Renee: Yes sure, I guess it's hard for me to think that far in advance at this stage specifically, but I think just continuing along the same vein, I mean, because my works are so self-reflective, that also directly links to my children, whether it's involvement with, or memory with, so I mean, I often make books, and maybe little quotes or something might appear in it, or little marks that they've made, and things, its traces of everyday. So, I mean, in that respect, I'll keep just working along my usual practice and seeing what evolves. That's sort of my style, I don't plan too much, it's more intuitive than that. So, I guess that's as good as I can think at the moment. But it's fresh in my mind, so we might go home, and I'll pick the children up and we might go do some spray painting for some canvas backgrounds or something, they'll love it, or go get messy.

Cadee: Yes, that's always fun. Yeah I've sort of got a few different ideas going in a few different directions, so I'm not really sure what the outcome will be, but definitely involve the journey of childhood through to, not only adulthood, but the repetitiveness of the communication, the different things that I've done with them over the years, but also the thing that Linda brought up about, like issues and challenges, and all of that sort of thing. That also rings a bell with me, because there have been so many of them, and even with the grandchildren, not just the children, over the past twelve months, and sort of incorporating that also will be something else that I'd like to consider. I mean we've gotten over most of those hurdles now, but yeah, just sort of being able to communication those issues, those problems

through an artwork, but having the child concerned involved in that process, and letting them decide different aspects of how it's produced, or how it's displayed and that sort of thing, I think could be very interesting, as well as the overlapping communications between children and grandchildren and the impact that that has had on them. Because like Renee was saying about the little quotes and things, I still remember when my grandson was about seven, no he would've been about five, he came in and I said, 'you have to get ready to go to bed', because he was sleeping over, I said, 'you have to get ready for bed', he says, 'yes Nanny, but you've still got to sing me stories', because I used to sing him nursery rhymes, so I had to sing him stories, was his way of putting it.

Renee: I love the way they think of things

Cadee: Just those little things, communicating those things, but those memories from those things also. So, I'm not sure how I'm going to put it into an artwork yet, but all of those things I want to work through and maybe if it's a few different sculptures or something and each one having a different meaning, but all being connected in a different way.

Linda: Sounds good to me.

Linda: Ok, well thank you so much for Zooming in and attending and being so patient with all the tech problems that we had. So, thank you, and I'll be in touch with how we're going to communicate from now on.

Everyone: Bye, lovely to meet you, can't wait to keep talking, all the best, Bye!