'Being-in-the-world' as a mother

Hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration of lived experiences of eight new mothers' transition to motherhood

Within the theoretical frame of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'

Submitted to the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University Psychology Department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DCPsych in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis is written by Victoria Garland and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology

Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. The author is wholly responsible for the content and writing of the thesis and there are no conflicts of interest.

Abstract

Despite a raft of literature on the transition to motherhood, little research has focused on this as an ontological journey involving all Four Dimensions of Existence (van Deurzen, 1997). The aim of this study was therefore to phenomenologically explore, through semi-structured interviews, the lived experiences of eight first-time mothers' (postnatal) transition to motherhood. Van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach, in combination with the framework of The Four Dimensions of Existence, was employed to guide and analyse the research process. Five main themes were found: 1. Life before motherhood: *It was all about me;* 2. Physical Dimension: *Embodied Responsibility*; 3. Social Dimension: *Relational Responsibility*; 4. Personal Dimension: *Personal Responsibility*; 5. Spiritual Dimension: *Motherhood as Self-transcendence*. |The findings evidence the existential endeavour and ontological transformation at the heart of the transition to motherhood. Emergent was the potential for more authentic ways of being for new mothers as a result of *choosing* to take existential responsibility for the life of an Other (her child). The vicissitudes of postnatal experience can therefore be reframed in terms of 'existential crisis' rather than pathology and a useful framework is suggested through which both professionals and

mothers themselves can reinterpret, demystify and make sense of the transition to motherhood.

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1. Introduction

1. *Motivation for the study*

Seven years ago, in late September, I was sitting on a bench in the park. I could feel the velvet touch of the sun on my face. Trees were still a juicy green and a strong smell of freshly cut grass had taken to the air. I could hear children playing, a dog barking and birds sharing in autumn song. I could see the peaceful, adorable little face of my eight-week-old son who was sleeping in his pram. My heart filled with an indescribable love for this new life. At that moment, I felt a sharp pain in my breasts, my body shaking with a rising fever, the result of bad mastitis. Then another dull ache in my abdomen - the legacy of a caesarian birth - joined the orchestra of pains that seemed to have taken over my sleep-deprived body. I was aware that my core was filled with feelings of anxiety, sadness, guilt, anger, loss and loneliness. I felt confused and could not rationalise my feelings; I felt guilty and embarrassed to be having them. I could not share them with anyone because I could not understand or explain them, even to myself. I was shocked by the sudden realisation of how little I was prepared for this 'new' me and this 'new' life.

I had made a choice and fought hard to have this baby, I was dreaming and

preparing for my life with the baby, so why did I feel completely unaware and unprepared for the reality of my new 'being-in-the-world' as a mother?!

I was shaken to the core. I felt paradoxically the luckiest, happiest woman in the world, whilst simultaneously I was being overtaken by waves of pain, exhaustion and ambivalence about my new existence as a mother. My darker feelings belied the picture-perfect scene of the new mother in the park on a beautiful day, in love with her newborn. A snap-shot of the image would have failed to capture the internal story which jarred with the objective reality of the moment.

The psychotherapist in me decided what to do next. For me it was the right time to go back to my personal therapy and examine more deeply this new me. I reflected on how fortunate I was to be able to draw on my knowledge and experience as a psychotherapist and my mind turned towards other mothers, who, I surmised, could similarly be feeling as displaced and dispossessed as I was. It was at this point that my personal experiences and my research interests became fused and my curiosity was stimulated to turn to the literature in an attempt to understand firstly myself and then hopefully other mothers. The birth of my research question, therefore, followed soon after the birth of my son and triggered a passion in me to find a way to

support other women during the transition to motherhood. I have been doing this ever since, always prompted, informed and motivated by the process and praxis of this research journey.

As an existential therapist and counselling psychologist, my view of myself, 'others' and the world are framed by the theories of an existential philosophy. There are many existential philosophers and much has been written about human existence from an existential perspective.

One of the aims of an existential philosophy is the understanding of what it means to be alive (van Deurzen, 1997; Binswanger, 1963; Frankl, 1946; Yalom, 1980). The famous existential philosopher, Martin Heidegger pointed out the complexity of investigating and understanding an individual's lived experience (*lifeworld*); the complexity of the experience of 'being-in-the-world'.

The existential philosopher, psychologist and writer, Emmy van Deurzen (2005), tells us that the outlook of human experience is so immense and diverse that it is impossible to do it justice, and she argued that a transition to motherhood is one of those experiences. She postulated that people cannot be seen, examined, analysed, classified and treated as separate units because of the reality of people as organisms, as parts of a unified system, existing only in relation to a wider context and an environment (van Deurzen, 1997).

Human beings are complex *bio-psycho-socio-spiritual* organisms and need to be understood or examined in relation to all four dimensions of the lifeworld (physical, personal, social, and spiritual).

Paraphrasing Heidegger, van Deurzen (1997:95) expounds the view that:

> *(…) we are always in relation, always in context, always connected to what is around us, always defined by what we are associated with. We need to pay careful attention not to what we are, but how we are and how we reshape and form ourselves by connecting and disconnecting with our environment.*

When becoming a mother, a woman is in a new relationship with her child. Through this relationship she is gaining a new identity, which is newly contextualised. She is defined by others and by herself in association with her child, as a mother. A woman is not only defined by *who* she is, 'a mother', but also *how* she is, her 'mother*ing*', the way she is choosing to re-shape her 'being-in-the-world' by connecting to her new 'environment' or her new position in the world.

Furthermore, as van Deurzen (1997) suggests, all our decisions and choices are influenced by a multitude of factors, past experiences, present and future expectations. The transitional road to motherhood is paved by determining factors such as history, culture, class, hormonal, genetic and characteristic

factors, as well as situational, contextual and interpersonal elements. Each situation reflects a new combination or pattern of factors.

I believe, therefore, that the transition to motherhood is a phenomenon that needs to be examined and understood as a web of complex constellations that have multiple *bio-psycho-socio-spiritual* influences and which, in turn, position each woman as a unique 'being-in-the-world' as a mother.

1.2 *Existential framework*

Binswanger (1963) was one of the first practitioners to apply Heidegger's philosophical concept of human Being as '*Dasein*'. He argued that '*using the concept of 'being-in-the-world' gives human existence a structure*' (van Deurzen, 2005, p. xix). Binswanger's aim was to shift the medical model of addressing human issues, to describe the ways in which people relate to their experiences of the '*lifeworld*'. He developed a framework that was based on Heidegger's concept of 'being-in-the-world' that later Rollo May (1983:126) clarified as *'Umwelt'* (physical world), *Mitwelt* (social world), *Eigenwelt* (personal world). Later, the framework was espoused by Emmy van Deurzen-Smith (1984) who implied a fourth dimension *Uberwelt* (the world of our values, beliefs and meaning in life). She widely used this framework and demonstrated in her numerous books how this theory can offer a

methodological framework from which to map out an individual's world of experience.

Table 1. *Diagram of the Four Dimensions of Existence*

Physical Dimension
Life< >Death
Throwness;
Limitations & Possibilities
of Embodiment

Spiritual Dimensio
Good< >Evil
Values, Beliefs,
purpose &
meaning of life

Social Dimensi
Love< >Hate
Isolation &
Belongings

Personal Dimension
Identity< >Freedom
Authentic & Inauthentic
mode of living
Freedom of choices &
responsibilities
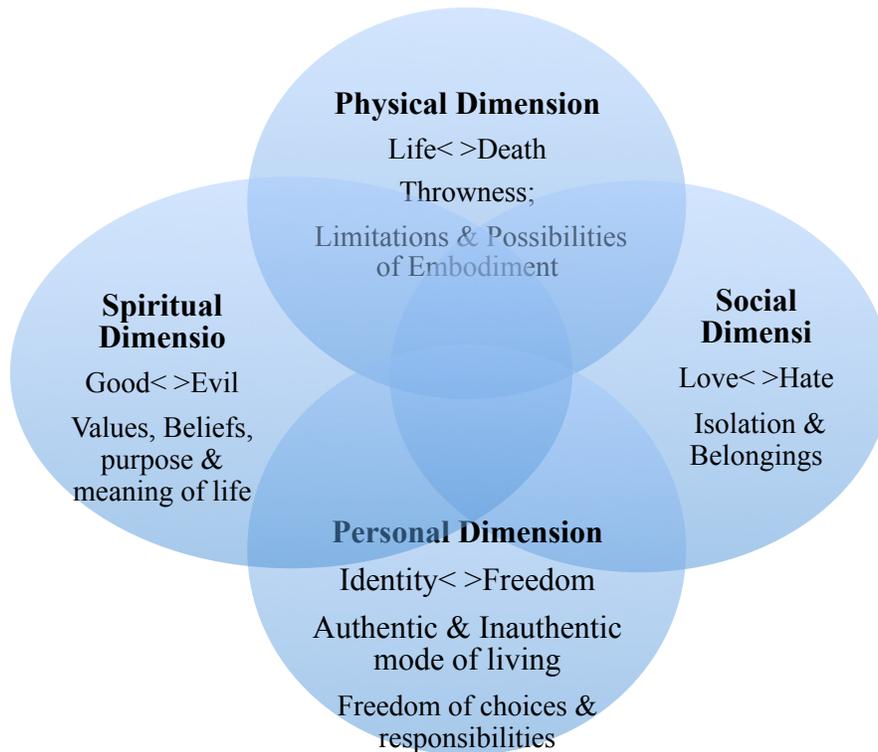
The four dimensions are interrelated and intertwined and people usually are preoccupied with many aspects of the world they live in. However, van Deurzen argues that:

> *All of known human experience can be mapped onto a world map that*
>
> *contains the dimensions of: firstly, the physical, natural, material*
>
> *domain; secondly, the social, public, cultural domain; thirdly, the*
>
> *private, personal, psychological domain; and fourthly, the spiritual,*
>
> *interpretive, ideological domain. We all recognise our bodily*

existence, our existence with others, our existence with ourselves, and our existence in relation to a system of meaning (van Deurzen, 1997:98).

Following van Deurzen's work on the theory of four dimensions of existence provided me with a useful framework (or map) to guide me in understanding of my own experience of the transition to motherhood and of my new way of 'being-in-the-world' as a mother. This map also provided me with a structure that allowed me to reflect on the changes and experiences within each dimension of my lifeworld, when I felt overwhelmed by the tsunami of changes that I had to face and make sense of. Moreover, this way of working with my experiences provided me with the possibility of observing my transition to motherhood from a 'helicopter' point of view, a view from above that allowed me to see the bigger picture. I was able to observe the vastness of my life transition into motherhood, appreciate the complexity of it and at the same time focus on separate experiences within each dimension. This hermeneutic way of addressing the transition to motherhood, of seeing the whole and zooming in to the details, prompted an understanding of the transition to motherhood as an *existential* transition (or crisis) that could facilitate an opportunity for better self-awareness and self-growth, a more mindful and authentic way of living.

The experiences of my own journey or transition to motherhood and my knowledge as an existential psychotherapist triggered my interest, my passion to investigate whether a map of the four dimensions of existence could provide a better facilitation or opportunity for other mothers to reflect and understand the changes to their 'being-in-the-world' as mothers. I wanted to investigate the transition to motherhood as an existential journey through which new mothers can gain a better understanding of themselves and their relationship with the world.

1.3 *The research question*

The research question of this study is, what are new mothers' lived experiences of transition to 'being-in-the-world' as mothers, within the theory of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'?'

The primary aim of this study was to apply an existential theory of the four dimensions of existence (van Deurzen, 1997) to investigating eight new mothers' experiences of their transition to motherhood, after the birth. The structure of this study was therefore underpinned throughout by this theoretical concept: The literature review section was addressed and discussed within the experiences of these four dimensions. The participant interviews were structured around questions constructed to capture their

physical, social, personal and spiritual experiences of the transitional journey to motherhood. A hermeneutic- phenomenological research method established by van Manen (1990) was employed to further supervise the hermeneutic investigation of participants' experiences within each dimension of existence.

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of eight first-time mothers' transition to motherhood, after the birth, within the framework of the Four Dimensions of Existence (van Deurzen, 1997).   And to investigate whether, by providing structure and clarity for investigating potentially overwhelming and complex experiences of the transition to motherhood, the concept of the four dimensions of existence could be a theoretically useful framework within which to observe and understand women's experiences of their new 'being-in-the-world' as mothers.

1.4 *Potential Contribution to the Fields of Psychology and Psychotherapy*

The topic of the transition to motherhood has been much researched. However, from my own experience of becoming a mother, as well as from

talking to other mothers and clinicians who work with mothers and reading the available literature, I believe there is a great need for a better understanding of this phenomenon in what is a rapidly changing modern society. Within this changing culture, concepts such as gender, family, womanhood and motherhood are shifting and placing different sets of values and demands on mothers. However, despite the fact that many women in this post-industrialist, developed world aspire to live very different lives to those of their own mothers and grandmothers, womanhood is still nonetheless regularly conflated with motherhood (Hartley, 2005).

In modern society, women experience more freedom of choice, control, autonomy and independence in their lives. Women have become more liberal with regard to choosing whether, and how, to become a mother, or not. At the same time, society places much responsibility on women for their choices, and it could be argued that mothering is highly monitored in Western society. In another words, it could be argued that with widened possibilities and horizons, women experience widened expectations and responsibilities in life.

Prevalent across the literature is a description of the transition to motherhood as *life crises* (Prinds, 2014) where women undergo physical, social,

psychological and spiritual changes in life (Tammentie et.al., 2003; Vick & Hafting, 2012; Prinds, 2014; Athan & Miller, 2013; Arnold-Baker, 2014). As Arnold-Baker (2014) highlighted, the transition to motherhood, like any life transition, may also cause a disruption to a sedimented way of life and a sedimented view of self.

Even though most researchers explored motherhood from mothers' actual experiences, there has been not enough exploration of motherhood from within an existential framework. Motherhood could be seen as an existential journey that begins with the birth of a child, the beginning of a new existence, the beginning of a new mother-child relationship, and I believe this existential journey would benefit from further exploration within an existential framework. Existential philosophy and psychotherapy deal with a number of themes relating to existence, for example being, choice, freedom, death, isolation, responsibility and absurdity. I therefore believe that examining the concept of motherhood within this philosophical framework could provide a valuable understanding of how women experience and overcome their 'givens of existence' and make sense of their new '*lifeworld*' as mothers. This knowledge could benefit not only healthcare professionals working with mothers, but also mothers themselves who may gain a deeper understanding of their novel experiences.

Further, as Barclay et al. (1997:727) argued in their study of early motherhood:

> *what is missing from most studies on motherhood is a framework that draws together women's experiences of early motherhood, conceptualizing the magnitude of change and providing a strategy to help women negotiate this experience.*

Van Deurzen's (1997) existential perspective addresses this point by exploring the bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions of lived experience. When applied to the transition to motherhood, this approach may encourage active questioning of the myriad life transitions women experience. It may also provide both sufficient focus on the transition to motherhood *as a whole,* whilst at the same time facilitating a more detailed lens through which to scrutinize changes within each dimension of existence separately. This exploration and subsequent understanding could provide professionals who work with mothers with a useful tool to assist women to appreciate the magnitude of the changes all new mothers face, and allow them to explore the idiosyncratic changes within each dimension, which will be different for each mother. This can further encourage women to feel empowered by their choices and experiences and support a more mindful and authentic way of

living as a mother. The framework of the four existential dimensions can also help mothers address paradoxes within each dimension. As Nicolson (1999) described, mothers experience a paradox in which they are simultaneously both happy to be mothers but also unhappy due to the experience of loss that necessarily comes with birth: loss of autonomy and time, appearance and occupational identity.

Overall, becoming a mother is a significant life event where existential considerations regarding this new way of living as a mother are reinvigorated. 'The birth of a child has been regarded as one of the greatest acts of humanity' (Ayers-Gould, 2000), and becoming a mother may change the meaning, values and priorities in a woman's life (Nichols, 1996; Thomas, 2001; Gaskin, 2002; Kitzinger, 2005; Prinds, 2014; Athan & Miller, 2015; Arnold-Baker, 2014). As Athan and Miller (2015) pointed out, whilst researches have successfully gathered knowledge about the existential awakening that occurs during significant life transitions such as terminal illness, injury or loss, motherhood has not historically been perceived as a life event that mobilizes similar self-reflection or existential questioning. When conceptualised in this way, the transition to motherhood could usefully be re-construed as an empowered choice to willfully embark on a transformative journey to more authentic way of living, to more mindful

way of 'being-in-the-world'.

In the next chapter I will review the relevant literature that addressed women's experiences of "being-in-the-world' as mothers. The literature review reflects my critical evaluation of these works, presented in correspondence with the theoretical structure of "Four Dimensions of Existence", which will further set the backdrop for my own research rationale.

2. *Literature Review*

From the onset of labour to the destination, child bearing requires an

exchange of a known self in a known world to an unknown self in an

unknown world (Rubin, 1984:52)

2.1 *Introduction*

The aim of this literature review section is to investigate and describe experiences relevant to this research question through an exploration of existing literature that engages with the phenomenon of the transition to motherhood in relation to experiences after childbirth. The intention was to inform myself as a researcher and to prepare the reader for the rest of the research, which focuses on hearing and exploring women's stories about their 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962) as a mother. Throughout the literature search I held in mind the epistemological and ontological position of this research, as I aimed to hermeneutically interpret participants' experiences through an existential-phenomenological perspective, applying the theoretical frame of four dimensions of existence outlined by Emmy van Deurzen (1997).

A wide range of published articles were explored using databases such as Google Scholar, PsychArticles, PsychInfo and Summon. Also, the resources of the British Library, Middlesex University and NSPC libraries were used to explore books and other papers that addressed experiences of the transition to motherhood. The search terms entered into these databases corresponded to experiences of "being-in-the-world" as a mother within the four dimensions of existence: qualitative, phenomenological; hermeneutic; motherhood; transition; lived experience; existential crisis; postpartum embodiment; breastfeeding; parenthood; relationality; identity; responsibility; meaning-making and spirituality.

The search and formation of this literature review section was a creative process. Initially, an extensive amount of qualitative research was identified that examined varieties of complex and multilayered experiences of the transition to motherhood from different perspectives. Rather than isolating variables, qualitative research seeks to reveal core components of the maternal transition, the commonalities and differences amongst women and more specifically, the meaning and significance of these experiences in women's ordinary day-to-day lives. Many writers and researchers demonstrated the complexity of the transition to motherhood, however, I found that little has been written about the journey to 'being-in-the-world' as

a mother from existential perspectives, and how those experiences intertwine across all four dimensions of existence.

As a next step, the focus was narrowed onto literature that used a phenomenological methodology and addressed the experiences of motherhood that reflected and referenced more specific experiences that were identified, described and interpreted by the participants of this research. As a result, this section was edited throughout the research journey to reflect the findings of this research.

The findings of the literature review were presented within the structure of four dimensions of existence that set the foundation for this research investigation.

2.2 *Motherhood*

Defining the meaning of motherhood is a complex task. A Cambridge dictionary definition of a mother is 'a female parent', the definition of the English suffix –hood denoting 'state or condition of being, character or nature', and the definition of motherhood is 'the state of being a mother or the qualities or spirit of a mother'. This research is aiming at observing,

interpreting and describing the qualities of the phenomenon of Motherhood as a 'state or condition of being a mother' in another words, 'being-in-the-world' as a mother.

Arendell (2000) argued that mothering can be defined as an act of nurturing and caring for people, by women or men, whereas motherhood is one of the few universal roles assigned to women that still has remained a central aspect of most women's lives.

The above descriptions indicate that motherhood is much more than just a physical happening. There are many women who do not give physical birth to a child, yet have taken up the responsibility of being a mother in the most beautiful way. Also, there are women who become mothers by giving birth to children, but who do not accept responsibility for their children, and I could argue that, in so doing, they are not *choosing* motherhood. Further, O'Reilly (2010) argues that motherhood could take on different meanings for different mothers. The meaning associated with motherhood varies across historical, socio-cultural, and political demographics. Allen (2006) addresses some historical and cross-cultural differences of motherhood. In his study, he demonstrates how different forces (feminist, historical or socio-political) could shape the meaning and practices of motherhood.

2.3 *Transition to Motherhood*

The phenomenon of motherhood is a subjective and complex concept to understand and interpret, and a transformative journey to motherhood also can be viewed and understood from many different perspectives, and it is very individual experience for each woman.

Naomi Stadlen (2014:13) compares the transition to motherhood to emigrating to a new country, "like emigrants, newly pregnant mothers have already left a familiar country and have started a journey towards somewhere new". Further, she argues that this transformative journey begins when a woman makes a decision to have a child. As a woman is imagining, contemplating and making plans for a life as a mother, she is already making a 'heartroom' for their imagined baby (Stadlen, 2014: 18). Bergum (1989:39) also asked questions like, "where does transformation begin? Is there a beginning?" and she also suggests that a decision to have a child is a transformative experience towards motherhood.

During pregnancy, when a child is growing in a woman's body, they are connecting in all possible ways, and a woman transitioned into a 'being-in-the-world' as a pregnant woman or a mother-to-be. Stadlen (2014) and Bergum (1989) both argue that the relationship of mother and child begins at conception, and it is an important part of the transition to motherhood. When

a woman becomes pregnant, she leaves the familiar 'being' before motherhood, and it could be argued that her 'being-in-the-world' as a mother-to-be is already transformed on every dimension of existence. For example, on the Physical dimension through a woman's experiences of sharing her body with a growing baby; on a Social dimension when she is 'being-with-others' as a pregnant woman; on a Personal dimension when she is preparing herself for a new role as a mother; and on a Spiritual dimension through her growing interconnection and interrelatedness with her child. It is not within a scope of this research to explore further the experiences of this stage of the transition to motherhood.

As Bergum (1989) argues, through experiencing her changing body, and through the interrelatedness with the child in pregnancy, at birth, and daily care, a woman begins to see herself as a mother. With the birth of her child, a woman enters a new 'being-in-the-world' as a mother. Through childbirth, a child who was once a living, breathing part of her begins to exist outside of her embodiment, and becomes a separate 'being-in-the-world', the world that a mother cannot control. After this separation, a woman begins to learn how to act in the world as a mother with a child who is now a separate embodied being, how to take responsibility for the 'Other', her child, while trying to make sense of where she begins and ends with the child. With the

birth of a child, a woman, now a mother, arrives to a new country called 'motherhood', where she has to understand and find her bearings, learn a new culture and language, learn how to be at home in this new unfamiliar 'being-in-the-world' as a mother. It can be argued that when a child is thrown into this world, a woman is thrown into motherhood, and the focus of this research is to examine the experiences of mother from this point on. Smith (1996) stated that whilst the act of giving birth establishes a biological sense of being a mother, the emotional and personal sense of 'motherhood' could take some time.

Nelson (2003) proposes that the transition to motherhood can signify a period of great disruption for women and this is echoed in Woollett and Nicholson's (1998) study which suggests that even if the transition to motherhood is considered a 'normal' and positive life event, becoming a mother irreversibly changes a woman's life. He further suggests that, regardless of race, socio-economic status, occupation, ability or other differences, women's lifestyles and routines change radically when they step into motherhood. Many other researchers similarly highlight that motherhood is a journey of emotional, physical and psychological challenges that are entwined with fundamental changes to mothers' social and personal identity (Bergum, 1989; McMahon, 1995; Barclay et.al, 1996;

Barlow, 1997; Stadlen, 2004; Hartley, 2005; Ruzza, 2006; Woollett and Nicholson, 1998; Darvill, 2008; Vick & Hafting, 2012; Prinds, et.al., 2013; Athan and Miller, 2013; Arnold-Baker, 2014).

Following on from this, other researchers found that the changes triggered by the transition to motherhood are not easy to adapt to and are not bound by any time frame (Oakley, 1980; Mercer, 1986).

In her hermeneutic-phenomenological study of early motherhood Sevon (2009) argues that having a child transforms the mother's everyday life quite totally; it changes how a woman understands her body, her 'self' and her relationships. Therefore, the transition to parenthood could be researched within the concept of life-transition and turning-points of lives. She posits that the concept of 'turning-point' is defined in psychology as a point where life fundamentally changes: decisions concerning one's own life are re-evaluated, one's way of living changes and new role expectations are met. Sevon (2009) further suggests that the concept of life transitions and turning points may offer a personal developmental *crisis* that has positive impacts on the personal values, life goals and wellbeing of the individual (see also Rönkä, Oravala & Pulkkinen, 2003). From an existential perspective, crisis occurs when one's characteristic ways of being and behaving in the world are re-evaluated and re-constructed, and more authentic ways of living

emerge as a result (Bugental, 1987; Ruzza, 2008, Jacobson, 2005).

When Stadlen (2004:27) recounts the reflections of some mothers on their arrival to motherhood, 'It's like being in a different country', 'on another planet', 'in a separate orbit', 'in a parallel universe', she highlighted that in Western cultures most women are stepping into the world of motherhood as unprepared adults, and most mothers are experiencing 'shock' at the reality of motherhood. She suggests that 'part of the shock is being uneducated for such a change of orientation' (Stadlen, 2004:31). Arnold-Baker (2014) in her existential-phenomenological study of the transition to motherhood also describes the experience of being 'in shock' by the reality of motherhood, and highlighted how this may be due to differences between the expectation and the reality of motherhood. Belsky et al. (1985), for example, claimed that unmet expectations of the childbearing process may be associated with a more difficult adaptation to parenthood.

Conversely, impressions from popular media indicate that having a baby seems to be taken lightly in many families. Birth is represented as something that simply occurs while life continues as previously, and mothers have time and additional energy to see friends and carry on with career building and marital life as usual (Vick & Hafting, 2012).

Allan (2008) in her book, argues that becoming parents for the first time has

become a more complex endeavour than before. Allan (2008) indicates that,

even though identification with womanhood can be traced back to the

beginning of human history, in the 20th Century motherhood has become one

of the most challenging dilemmas for women in Western societies as the

result of women having more choices in life. Allan (2008) further argues

that motherhood becomes a journey when women face and need to

accommodate the very contradictory cultural expectations, roles and

responsibilities that are circulated in cultural narratives (also see Beck-

Gernsheim, 2002). Motherhood has been seen as an individual's

responsibility in Western countries, even if it is an illusion that a mother can

be all-powerful, tireless and ever-managing (Chodorow & Contratto, 1992;

Choi et al., 2005; Fox, 2001; Hays, 1996; Parker, 1997). Hays (1996)

observed that women have had greater freedom of choice in their lives, but

at the same time greater responsibility.

In contemporary Western societies, freedom of choice is valued highly

(Giddens, 1991; Stadlen, 2004). This challenge constitutes a heavy burden of

responsibility when mothers are suddenly confronted with questions of

dependency, obligations, rights, ideals, principles, aims and authority, which

are ethical by their very nature (Sevon, 2009). In the case of becoming a

parent and a mother, parenthood embodies an assumption about taking

responsibility for the baby (Murphy, 2000; Tronto, 1994).

Hill (1949), in an early research study of parenting, showed that new parents experienced the birth of a first child as a crisis, a profound change when established ways of behaving are inadequate and new attitudes and responses need to be established. The transition to motherhood embraces physical, psychological, social and spiritual changes for a new mother and her family (Vick & Hafting, 2012). All women who give birth to the first baby have to negotiate this transition and the range of reactions to motherhood varies immensely (Hartley, 2005).

Nicolson (1999) indicated that many new mothers define their experiences of the perinatal period as a paradox in which they are happy to be mothers, but at the same time unhappy due to the losses of autonomy, time and freedom, appearance, femininity and occupational identity (Sethi, 1995). Stern (2004) states that women in the ante- and post-natal period are in a life crisis that dis-organises and re-organises much of their psychological life. Brudal (2000) also sees the period of becoming a mother as an existential crisis. It is a period where new identity is about to be formed and where inner conflicts and anxieties encompass important issues of purpose, responsibility, independence, freedom and commitment. Therefore, the

transition to motherhood could be considered as a turning point, an opening and an opportunity for new development. For new mothers it is the period that generates existential considerations regarding the meaning of new life circumstances and context, which is the essential motivation for living (Frankl, 1978; Yalom, 1980; Jacobsen, 2007).

Following Hartley's (2005) analysis of mothers' narratives, it seems that the transition to motherhood (whether it includes a period of 'depression' or not) could be better understood as a process of encounter, during which different women's experiences are located within a similar framework of disintegration and re-emergence. These encounters do not occur in any sequential order but instead 'all at once', a tapestry of interwoven experiences that sometimes stand out in sharp relief and sometimes blend together.

The transition to motherhood is therefore a complex and multilayered phenomenon that is a unique transformative journey for every mother. Even though it was taken into consideration that each mother participating in this research had her own unique experiences from the moment she chose motherhood, such as experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, the aim of this research was to address and interpret the mothers' experiences of 'being-in-the-world' after giving birth.

The scope of this study therefore did not address their experiences prior to the birth of their child. The presented literature review focused on examining first-time mothers' experiences of 'being-in-the-world' as mothers solely *after* the birth, within the four dimensions of existence.

Whilst it is impossible to talk completely separately about any sub-strata of human experience, to follow the aim of this research I have attempted to organize and present a critical analysis of my literature review findings under four sub-headings related to the concepts of the physical (*Umwelt*), the social (*Mitwelt*), the personal (*Eigenwelt*) and the spiritual (*Uberwelt*) dimensions of existence.

2.4 *The Physical Dimensions of Existence*

Human beings are first and foremost bodies in a material world

(van Deurzen, 2005).

It could be said that the most apparent areas of changes associated with childbirth are in the Physical (natural) dimension of existence. Pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding are all physical experiences during which a variety of biological and hormonal changes occur. Emmy van Deurzen (2002) highlighted that the physical world is the foundation of human

experiences and can affect functioning in other areas of life. For example, she explained that a new mother's relationship to self and others may be affected by the physical changes associated with motherhood.

Our lived experience is embodied in the gender and society that we are 'thrown' into. We perceive our being-in-the-world through lived embodiment (ourselves, other people and the world) (Taylor, 1991), and the quality of our life influenced by the qualities of our embodiment. McCarthy (2015) in her hermeneutic-phenomenological study of mothers' embodied experiences, highlighted that during the post-natal period, new mothers experience a fundamental renegotiation of boundaries between themselves and their bodies, and a negotiation of the experience of the spatiality surrounding their bodies. Neiterman (2012) and McCarthy, (2015) both found that women undergo emotional, psychological and physical adjustment to their post-natal being. Just as during pregnancy women had to adjust their bodies to accommodate such physical considerations as fatigue, morning sickness and posture, the postnatal body also requires attention and adjustment (engorged breasts, cracked nipples, contracting uterus, backache, sleep deprivation, adjustment to post pregnancy size).

Carrying a child, giving birth and caring for a newborn all contribute to the mother's experience of endless fatigue. Stadlen (2004:110) described how

the baby's need for frequent feeding, and the different sleep rhythms of babies and adults, put new mothers in a position of experiencing a tiredness which is 'in a league of its own'.

Barclays et al. (1997) used the term *drained* to convey women's descriptions of having given everything and being emptied out. The physical part of being drained results from recovery from birth, lack of sleep, and the mental and emotional demands associated with motherhood. Arnold-Baker (2014) allocated a theme called 'All-consuming' when she describes the nature of looking after a new baby. The mothers in her research described experiencing there being no space or time for the mothers to be concerned with anything else, and their whole 'Being' was directed towards taking care of their babies. These new demands, according to McCarthy (2015:172) 'requires a renegotiation of physical tasks in order to cope with discomfort and pain and this becomes part of the private, invisible, corporeal work of new motherhood'. She demonstrated how the transition to motherhood incorporates mothers' embodied experiences in the post-natal period as a time of significant and multifaceted adjustment and potential ontological vulnerability.

McCarthy's (2015) findings further highlight that the experience of breastfeeding is an important part of post-natal embodied experience, whilst

also being deeply embedded in socio-cultural practices and subject to moral and ethical scrutiny (see also Shaw, 2004). A number of studies showed how breastfeeding as an embodied practice is highly emotionally charged and has been associated with grief, sorrow and guilt (Battersby, 2000; Ryan and Grace, 2001; Shakespeare et al., 2004). Breastfeeding, therefore, can be seen as a complex subjective-corporeal activity open to historical and cultural changes and transformations (Grosz, 1994). Also, in their study, Schmied & Lupton (2001) showed how breastfeeding was experienced as either a pleasurable, intimate and 'bonding' experience, or as a difficult and painful experience. Further, mothers reported struggling to reconcile the embodied practice of breastfeeding with notions of (Western) identity that value autonomy, independence and control.

Bergum's (1989) hermeneutic-phenomenological study argues that the journey of becoming a mother involves a woman taking responsibility for the birth and life of another person, her child. This responsibility is embodied and monitored by health professionals, family and friends who encourage and expect a mother-to-be to look after herself.   The responsibility to look after herself for the sake of her child falls to the pregnant woman: ′to have a healthy baby, the pregnant woman must be healthy′ (*ibid*:84). Further, Bergum points out how, through this awareness

of responsibility for her child's life, a woman becomes conscious that something could go wrong; she is facing an awareness of mortality, both her child's and her own. This heightened sense of mortal responsibility throws a mother into a renewed attention to how she should live (also see Arnold-Baker, 2014).

Burgum (1989:83) argues that becoming a mother involves accepting responsibility for the 'Other' (her child):

> *To have experienced birthing pain offers the possibility of self-knowledge, knowledge of limitations and capabilities, knowledge of new life as mother, and of a woman's place in the mysterious cycle of human life: birth, death and rebirth.*

Therefore, it could be argued that, in accepting responsibility for her child, a woman accepts responsibility for herself; her 'being-in-the-world' becomes more mindful, more authentic. This is also echoed by Prinds et.al. (2013) and Arnold-Baker (2014) who highlight how, just as when confronted with a new life mortality may appear more present, or when confronted with death life may become reinvigorated, the experience of becoming a mother may trigger an ability to live more fully.

Price (1988) similarly captured how experiences during pregnancy and delivery reinforce the mother's awareness both of myriad possible dangers

to the survival of her child and the centrality of her role in ensuring her child's survival. Consequently, by the time their babies are born, many mothers have often become acutely aware of how fragile life is, how vulnerable the child is, and how acute their sense of responsibility for protecting their child and preventing its death is. The sense of responsibility a mother carries for her child and the strength of the connection between them, surfaces an alertness and awareness that death could happen at any time (Arnold-Baker, 2014). This awareness of an existential '*given*' is in contrast to a pre-pregnancy ontic state where we often behave as if death were not a part of our lives. Parker (2005:12) echoes this important point when she says that the mother comes to realize that 'she is not only the source of life for her child but also of potential death'. Parker (2005) suggested that the combination of high anxiety and vulnerability stimulated by responsibility for, not only the survival, but the thriving of her child, triggers for the mother an internal shift from the ontic to the ontological mode which reinforces the mother's experience of ambivalence.

Hartley (2005) also identified a heightened awareness of mortality as a theme during the transition to motherhood. She used the term *'anxious loving'* to denote the level of fear mothers feel in the face of the possibility of their children's death or disappearance, the mother's awareness of

mortality. Hartley (2005) describes how new mothers' being-in-the-world'
essentially relates to the development of their new '*becoming-a-mother-change-of-body*' subjectivity, and re-ordered in all its existential dimensions.
The new mother's lived experience of spatiality and temporality are rapidly
changed: 'time' become 'babytime' and it may feel that there is no 'space'
between the woman and her infant:

> *The child is 'under her skin' and even when physically separate, her*
> *'being' is inextricably entangled with that of the child and much of*
> *her familiarity of life before motherhood is obscured by a sense of*
> *chaotic disorganization, both literal and ontological* (Hartley,
> 2005:124).

The physical and psychological demands of caring for a new-born may leave
very little time and space for a mother's own physical needs. As McCarthy
(2015) highlighted, when a mother's body is no longer 'hosting' the child,
the focus and responsibility are shifted to the newborn's physical wellbeing.
The mother is allowed to have her body 'back'. In addressing the
experiences of women's post-birth bodies, Roth et al., (2012) discovered
what she termed a 'racing back', wherein any signs of having carried or
given birth to a baby must be eliminated as quickly as possible, illustrated by

headlines in magazines such as 'Best Baby Comeback Ever!'

Crossley's (1996) research explored experiences of motherhood through three generations and highlighted the work of Foucault (1973) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) who identified the body as a socio-historical construct. Body size and ideals of 'beauty' have changed over time and placed unrealistic demands on new mothers to appear glamorous during pregnancy and quickly regain their pre-pregnancy shape. McCarthy (2015) argues that the female body becomes a kind of 'currency' that can be used for acceptance and integration into society.

As Butler (1997:402) pointed out the body has 'both an appearance and an expression in the world'. Bailey (2001) identified the ways in which women after birth refer to their bodies in a more functional manner and report less of a tendency to 'dress up'. She argued that a woman's new identity as a mother is expressed through having a certain kind of body, which is viewed more in terms of functionality than appearance.

Further, Bailey (2001) spoke about how mothers viewed and described their bodies in less sexual terms, some women identified themselves more as 'someone's mum' rather than as a 'woman'. Bailey argued that the desexualisation of women's bodies during the transition to motherhood led

to a redefining of their embodiment as existing for 'Other' (the child).

The transition to motherhood, from pregnancy to post birth, is a period that involves many internal and external changes to the self, implying a complex relationship between body and mind. In contemporary Western society, mothers' identity has changed from playing the role of housewife to that of professional (Haynes, 2008; Stadlen, 2004). This more complex identity has created more demands for women to manage their motherhood role.

Stadlen (2004) also addressed how changes in modern society have influenced the level of mothers' tiredness. In traditional societies, mothers' responsibilities were routinely shared by other female members of the family or community, a support system that is often unavailable to mothers in modern Western society. The role of a modern woman who is educated, independent and shares equal opportunities with a man, places high demands and expectation on a mothering role. As Stadlen highlights, "Modern society is not organized to facilitate the transition women have to make when they become mothers." (Stadlen, 2004, p.123). The social expectation of new mothers are expected to be able to balance the conflicting roles of a modern woman and a traditional mother, contributing to the level of a mother's tiredness in many ways. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which addresses mothers' experiences within the Social Dimension

of Existence.

2.5 *The Social Dimensions of Existence*

Looking through the lens of the social dimension encompasses our emotional response to other people. We are born into the world of others and most of the activities that we undertake lead us to interact with others. We are evaluating who we are and what we do through observation and comparison of others and their responses to us and, as Sartre (1946) pointed out, we can either be with others in a competitive way or in a co-operative way. Heidegger (1962) highlighted that 'being-in-the-world' is 'being-with-others', irrespective of whether we are in public or in private. Just as ourselves are in a state of constant fluidity, our relations with others are changing from moment to moment and from person to person.

Becoming a mother may create changes in the social dimension as a woman's daily tasks and roles in society are changed with motherhood (Adams et al., 2006). When a woman becomes a mother, her existence is reconstructed and her relationships with others also change. For example, her existing relationships with her partner, family, friends, work colleagues and many others are restructured. Moreover, the mother is in a position of creating new relationships. Transition to motherhood changes women's

locus of being-with-others and relationally her being-in-the-world is inevitably shifting.

One of the aims of Sevon's (2009) hermeneutic-phenomenological research was to investigate maternal responsibility at the beginning of motherhood through relationality, that is, to pay attention to whether and, if so, how, maternal identities are born and created in relation to other people. She argued that the relationality of being means that 'being-in-the-world' is fundamentally 'Being-with', therefore, our identities and agencies are co-created through relationships with others.

Even though each woman experiences motherhood in her own unique way, as Ehrenreich & English (1978) highlight, motherhood cannot be understood separately from the society in which it occurs. This complex experience manifests within core values and cultural principles that are inevitably internalized by members of any society. It can be argued that within Western cultures health care values are different to a more integrative/holistic approach (Davis-Floyd, 2003). These values are mostly positivistic, risk-oriented, male-dominated, institutionalised and technology-focused, paying very little attention to personal experiences and feelings (*ibid.*).

Butterfield (2010:67) spoke about how the experiences of mothers raise philosophical questions regarding the complex relationship between

individual and the social aspects of being. She stated that:

> *We are never completely alone as individual, but we are also never completely lost in the social – the reality is in the tension of experiencing both at the same time.*

She argues that the concept of '*ideal mother*' (just as in '*ideal feminine*') is a social construction that varies historically and culturally. We are always fundamentally social, we are living and moving within the social realm via language and culture which give us the tools for understanding ourselves and the world we live in. The social realities of being a mother depend on those understandings, therefore our freedom of choice is situational and 'being a mother' concept is socially positioned in a specific way, within a specific social context in the world. However, it is down to each woman's choice as to how and to what extent she follows or swerves away from the *'*normative, stereotypical expectations of motherhood' (Rich, 1977:12), and to decide for herself how will she mother.

Lee (1997) and Gilligan (1982), similarly to Butterfield (2010), interpreted cultural expectations or an idealism of happiness and positivism in relation to motherhood as a female 'ethic of care' or, in another words, an ethic of 'self-sacrifice'. A perspective of pregnancy and childbirth as natural invigorates the idealism of unspoken demands that a good mother should

master numerous tasks of mothering shortly after childbirth, *'[…] however willingly this is done, the price, loss of sense of self and location in the world can be hard to cope with'* (Davies and Welch, 1986:419).

Moreover, Giddens (1991) recognises how, within our current societal norms, identity depends on the formation of a reflective self that emerges only in the presence of ontological security. Our societal norms emphasize freedom of choice and individual responsibility, which could be seen as threatening to the security formed by family traditions. Vick & Hafting (2012) show that many new mothers experience a lack of self-reliance, loss of control over their lives and loss of identity. Vick & Hafting (2012) argued that the conflict between societal norms, cultural beliefs and demands is the reality for the everyday lives of new mothers, which creates a 'façade' that women hide behind. New mothers often reported confusion and fear of acknowledging and expressing negative feelings because they were frightened of being misunderstood, judged and/or labelled mentally ill (Hall & Wittkowski, 2006; Caplan, 1989; Maushart, 2000). However, Arnold-Baker (2014:166) in her research found that some mothers are able to talk openly about their experiences with like-minded mothers and not hide behind the *'mask of silence'*, which provided a great support to their adjustment to a new role as a mother.

Because in Western culture pregnancy and childbirth are perceived as natural phenomena, mothers are expected to know instinctively how to raise children. Mothering is presented as a fulfilling experience and motherhood is perceived and expected to be an effortless task of emotional giving. Therefore, women are likely to feel guilty if they cannot meet these ideals, and inadequate mothering is usually believed to be a source of children's problems and suffering (Sevon, 2009).

Price (1988) in her book on motherhood reflects on how the reality of mothering tends to remain something of a mystery, leaving the would-be mother with only the images of her fantasies as a guide. Images that mostly come from the whitewashed version of their families and friends' stories of what was involved in caring for a baby on a daily basis:

> *We are often unaware of the images of parenting with which we have been bombarded by the media, literacy, religion and variety of other sources. These images usually stress the loving, caring and happy aspects of the experience of motherhood. Mums on television adverts are not depressed or enraged. These sources are therefore only imparting a partial and distorted knowledge about the experience* (Price, 1988:18).

Price (1988) goes on to argue that when baby arrives everything changes,

both within and around a woman (also see Arnold-Baker, 2014). Those changes can be overwhelming and frightening to even the most capable and supported of women. Moreover, what arrives with a baby is a sense that a mother should respond to its every need. This sense is constructed and encouraged by the ways in which others judge mothering, responding positively to perfectly 'selfless' mothering. As rewarding as it may be for a mother, it may also leave her feeling empty and psychologically fragile before long. Price (1988:128) argues that 'Society, having handed over the entire responsibility of mothering to women, can afford to have unreasonable expectations of what good mothering is'.

The message mothers receive that they should be constantly available, always put the baby's needs first and have no needs of their own contains no room for failure, yet every mother feels that she is failing some of the time, and becomes wracked with guilt, judging themselves against this absolute, unattainable image of the 'good mother'. As Price (1988) points out, although the concept of 'good enough' mothering has been widely discussed in psychoanalytic circles, what 'good enough' actually means remains relative and open to interpretation. Each child has different needs and each mother has different ways of responding to those needs. Further, children's needs are changing and therefore 'good enough' mothering should be seen

as a prolonged reflection over many years. Price (1988) highlights that mothers need time to acknowledge and validate their own feelings and to have those feelings validated by others as reasonable and normal.

The results of Sevon's (2009) study showed how, at the beginning of motherhood, women need to re-orient their identities, not only as mothers, but as wives or partners. She found there was a move towards accepting gender differences between mothering and fathering, and towards creating clearer distinctions between 'parenthood' and 'the couple relationship' that enabled new understandings between partners (also see Stadlen, 2004). As Maushart (2000:218) points out:

> *When partners become parents they might like each other less and less, but they stay together more and more . . . there will be a marked divergence of interests and activities […] a dramatic widening of the gap between 'his' world and 'hers'.*

Motherhood suddenly places women in a position where they not only have to redefine their relationships with others to better accommodate the needs of their growing children (see Barlow & Cairns 1997), but with their partners and immediate families. In their study, Barlow & Cairns (1997) that new mothers reported that renegotiation of their marital relationship was central in their transition to motherhood. Price (1988) also addressed how

the time and space that was previously available for a couple to meet their emotional and practical needs is dramatically changed with the arrival of a third person (their child), 'Space, both physically within the living space and psychologically within the relationship, becomes less'.

Stadlen (2004:213) also points out how:

> *(…) a two-person relationship is radically different from one of three people . . . the three-person relationship can operate as three separate individuals, or one set of three people or three sets of pairs (mother/father; mother/child; father/child).*

Therefore the relationship between a couple inevitably changes and becomes more complex (Stadlen, 2004). Moreover, Price (1988) argues that social expectations of change are deeper and more all encompassing for mothers than fathers. Cowan & Cowan (1988) reported that most of the studies on the transition to motherhood documented a decline in marital satisfaction. Mothers longed for support and understanding, recognition and acknowledgment in their new roles, and often expected their partners to work out for themselves how they could contribute and support (Vik & Hafting, 2012). In fact, the level of satisfaction in partners' support is known to be a strong predictor of mothers' psychological wellbeing and adaptation to motherhood (Lee, 1997; Cox et al., 1989; Crnic et al., 1983; Isabella &

Gable, 1989; Levitt et al., 1986).

The transition to motherhood also involves changes in women's relationships with other women, predominantly with women's own mothers. Support from women's mothers plays a significant role in the transition to motherhood (Fischer, 1981; Parker, 2005; Price, 1988; Stadlen, 2004), and 'when daughters become mothers, mothers and daughters tend to re-evaluate each other's lives' (Fischer, 1981:1).

As Stadlen (2004) highlights, usually a woman's relationship with her mother is the oldest relationship that she has known. It has a long history, and is often complex. Price (1988) concurs that a woman's primary relationship is with her mother, and for many women, this relationship remains the most central and intense of all their relationships. Both Stadlen and Price have described now new mothers have a longing for the support of their own mothers. Price (1988) also argues that, in spite of often challenging and critical relationships with their mothers, on becoming mothers themselves, daughters long for their mothers and trust them with their baby more than anyone else. Stadlen (2004) suggested that this may concern the physical changes that come with pregnancy and childbirth. With her own mother, a woman is often returning to a familiar and tested relationship that now will have an added dimension. All this can lead to

changes in their relationship.

Parker (2005) suggests that the birth of a baby evokes the mother's own experience of being a child and memories of how they were mothered resurface. Stadlen (2004) similarly writes about how many mothers reported looking back at the mothering they had received and re-evaluated their childhoods, which sometimes influenced their own parenting towards their children. Price (1988) argues that it is a mother's ambivalent feelings towards her child that can prompt her search for understanding and ways of repairing the relationship with her own mother, thereby creating a better relationship with her child. Both Stadlen (2004) and Price (1988) described how, in spite of the possibly negative and powerfully detrimental aspects of a mother/daughter relationship, the transformation from mother/daughter to grandmother/mother/daughter often evokes better understanding, bringing love and closeness to surface. Being mothers themselves, women began to re-evaluate their mothers as real people with their own needs, dreams and stories, and not as failed models of 'perfect mothers' (Stadlen, 2004). Daughters see their mothers through a new set of eyes and begin to assess and understand their mothers as only ordinary people, 'Mothers are normal, doing their best in a difficult job. They are just like you and me . . . in fact they are you and me!' (Price, 1988:119).

In addition, mothers expressed the significance of support from other mothers who had recently been through the experience (Arnold-Baker, 2014; Stadlen, 2004). Information sharing and feedback between mothers had the effect of normalising previously overwhelming experiences and in so doing supported each mother's individual self-concept (Darvil et al, 2008).

Support from family and other mothers became most important when new mothers did not experience positive support from midwives and other health providers. Ball (1987) demonstrates how care provided by professionals after childbirth can influence the transition to motherhood. Even though some women find the support of health professionals very positive, other mothers described midwives' advice confusing or intrusive and rough or insensitive, which impacted upon women's self-esteem (Barclays et al., 1996). However, it is noteworthy that some women gained confidence from the fact that there are so many ways of doing things and they come to the conclusion that they need to mother in their own way. '*Working it out*' for themselves boosted new mothers' self-esteem and they began to trust their own judgments and feelings (Barclays et al., 1996:724).

Motherhood brings a new awareness of time and the necessity for balance (Adams et al., 2006; Brown and Small, 1997; Marshall, 1991; Arnold-Baker, 2014). A new mother is challenged to learn how to balance time with a new

child's needs, her own needs, her partner's, household and many other responsibilities. Adjusting to 'confinement and lacking uninterrupted time and freedom to pursue personal interests' (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2002:95) is difficult for many women to practice or accept. Therefore, the nature of social support gained through relationships with the new mother's partner, family, friends, other mothers and health professionals is crucial, increasing the new mother's confidence and reducing emotional and physical stress (Price, 1988; Barclay et al., 1996; Arnold-Baker, 2014).

It can take some time to renegotiate relationships and incorporate a new sense of self as a mother (Barclays et al., 1996). Eventually most women are able to 'tune in' to their babies, gaining experience and confidence in how to be a mother. Arnold-Baker (2014:170) underlined that for the mothers in her research described, 'their real learning about how to mother as coming from their experience and interactions with their babies'.

2.6 *The Personal Dimension of Existence*

Becoming a mother is more than a revival of ourselves, it is a living on through our children. Becoming a mother shows, perhaps, the possibility of renewed life through birth, not only of our children but of ourselves. Is it possible that as a woman becomes a mother she can

truly become herself? (Bergum, 1989:38)

Bergum (1989), in her book, explores how a woman experiences changes within herself through living as a mother. In a chapter called *'One for Another: The transformative Sense of Responsibility'* (p.83) she suggests that to become a mother involves responsibility, responsibility for the birth and life of another person, the child. Bergum (1989) argues that a woman is transformed by a sense of responsibility for her child, for her child's survival and well-being, for the rest of her life. Through this sense of responsibility, a woman is *thrown* into a renewed attention to how she should live: 'What has been a self-regulated, self-defined, and self-contained life is now suddenly broken by the experience of the Other, the child*'* (Bergum, 1989:84).

She considers questions like, 'How does a woman come to live as a mother – for her child- and yet for herself?*'* (p.85).

The sense of responsibility becomes divided and at the same time united responsibility for the baby and responsibility for herself. In prioritizing the responsibility for her baby's needs, there is a feeling of losing herself and the experience of self as a woman can become blurred (*Ibid.*). Bergum (1989) refers to the word "Responsibility" (from Latin *respondere or "to promise in return"*) as a mother responding to the presence of the child (also see Stadlen, 2004) with the promise, as I argue, to *accept responsibility* for

taking care of the child. She goes on to cite Olson's (1986) dictum that 'No longer are we are acting only for ourselves – we are 'one for the other' (Bergum, 1989:85).

Within a motherhood role, the attempt to balance connectedness and separateness, to balance a mother's own needs with the needs of the child, creates the sense of personal crisis which threatens a woman's sense of self. When the 'ethics of care become the ethics of self-sacrifice, with the focus on giving and not replenishing, the definition of self becomes blurry (Barlow & Cairns, 1997:241).

Arnold-Baker (2014) identified a theme called 'Adopting a Motherhood Identity' where she found women experience changes in relating to themselves when becoming mothers. She highlighted that some mothers reported feeling a loss of self, which goes in line with a number of other researchers (see Barclay et.al., 1997; Weaver & Ussher, 1997; Vick & Hafting, 2012). However, other mothers described, not a loss, but a reorganization and transformation of self-identity (Arnold-Baker, 2014; Stadlen, 2004; Bergum, 1989).

Stadlen (2004) points out how mothers themselves often say that becoming a mother has not only changed their lives but changed their actual *selves*. As mothers they now have to share the space and time of their '*being*' with their

babies, not only sharing but mostly prioritizing their baby's interests and needs, this sharing, this new relationship, '[…] calls into question many aspects of herself' (Stadlen, 2004:186).

Sevon (2009) surmises that mothering is an ethical disposition wherein caring for a baby invokes specific kinds of emotionality and morality. She pointed out that motherhood involves questions of responsibility, dependency, obligations, rights, ideals, principles, aims and authority, which are ethical by their very nature (also see Sevenhuijsen, 1998). Sevon (2009) further argues that early motherhood and caring for the baby involves a moral ambiguity, which is related to questions of responsibility and vulnerability. On a daily basis, mothers are suddenly confronted with questions and choice regarding how to understand and be responsive to their babies' feelings, needs and wellbeing. The sense of total responsibility and their ability to fulfill this responsibility triggered vulnerability in mother's evaluation of themselves as good, committed, caring mothers. Sevon (2009:76) goes on to suggest that 'Early motherhood is the beginning of a process towards agency that takes seriously the presence, dependency and needs of the other, the baby'.

Hartley (2005) identified a theme entitled *'The baby filled their vision'*

describing how mothers retained a feeling of overall responsibility for their babies. She reported mothers describing feelings of '*isolation*' and '*ambivalence*' when trying to come to terms with the dramatic changes brought by their new 'mother' identity. Women in her study reported that motherhood was experienced as something from which they could not '*escape*' – even when they were absent from the baby, they always carried the responsibility of their child's welfare with them.

Arnold-Baker (2014:114) also addressed how new mothers' new identities are conceived and changed through re-evaluating values and priorities now as mothers. She spoke about how women, when becoming mothers, re-evaluated their values and priorities in life, '[…] what was once important to her now fades into the background'. A new identity as 'a mother' involved new choices in life, which impacted upon the mothers' sense of self:

> *Motherhood challenges the re-evaluation and re-construction of women's values and expectations of themselves; their needs and dreams now as mothers may be different than before motherhood, and the whole 'being-in-the-world' is reconstructed. Even thoughts of how in control she is of her life are questioned. From an existential perspective motherhood has an impact on the mother's values, beliefs,*

expectations, motivation, meaning and purpose in life.

A number of studies indicate how new mothers describe the perinatal period as a paradox in which they are happy to be mothers and simultaneously unhappy due to the losses resulting from the new situation: losses of autonomy and time, appearance, femininity and occupational identity (Nicolson, 1999; Aiken, 2000, Vick and Hafting, 2012). Sethi (1995) describes this as a dialectic process in which new mothers' experiences may comprise a dichotomy of feelings between the giving of themselves to the baby and losses of autonomy and freedom, which leads to a re-defining of the self, relationships and professional goals. Stern (2004) terms the period prior to and following childbirth as *'the motherhood constellation'* and states that the mother is in a crisis that disorganises and reorganises much of her psychological life.

Our sense of self is generated in myriad ways: Through the abilities we perceive in ourselves, through the things we do, through our relationships with others and with the world. From an existential perspective we don't see a solid self but rather a fluctuating, transforming, ever-changing experience of 'Being-in-the-world' (van Deurzen, 1998). Sartre (1946) asserts that the existence of a person precedes his or her essence, which means that we are

creating and defining ourselves, and nothing can stop us from becoming and achieving what we want from life. Therefore, our selfhood is always in transformation, and as Heidegger (1962) highlighted, it is important to live an authentic life by being able to affirm our own way of being.

Van Deurzen (1998) described the paradox of human behaviour when we are, on a daily basis, anxiously holding on to the same routines, the same sorts of things, relationships, ideas and beliefs; and on the other hand, how this comforting and essential process creates a struggle and complicates our lives. In other words, things that provide us with the sense of our defining identity, familiarity and security at the same time obstruct us from the flexibility of our ever-changing selfhood and from seeing our own freedom. Van Deurzen (2002:78) described the personal world as the relationship with one's self, *'home world, where one feels comfortable with one's self'*. The feelings, thoughts, values and beliefs that help us to answer the question *'who am I?'* are part of the personal world.

Integrating a new role as a mother to already known and familiar roles as spouse, daughter, friend, colleague and so on, can awaken in a new mother complex feeling regarding her personal identity (Adams et al., 2006). The re-evaluation of values and beliefs, attitudes, priorities and personal characteristics during the process of transition to motherhood encourages

opportunities for a woman's personal growth and development (Barlow & Cairns, 1997; Arnold-Baker, 2014). The search for answers to the question *'How will I mother*?' can provide opportunities to discover unknown aspects about oneself and others, opportunities for expanding oneself and interactions with the world in new, more mindful, authentic ways.

Becoming a mother is a process of uncertainty and constant learning, mental tiredness, loss of time for self and loss of control over one's own life (Barclays et al., 1997; Stadlen, 2004; Arnold-Baker, 2014). Barclays et al., (1997) described how loss of sense of self was exhibited by many women in their research as loss of confidence, self-esteem and a negative perception of themselves as mothers. These losses become more balanced and gains become more apparent as the baby grows older. Babies become less demanding, sleep better, become more responsive and interactive providing rewarding feelings of closeness for the mothers. This allows mothers more sleep and to have more time for themselves, improving their confidence and lessening anxieties (also see Arnold-Baker, 2014). There may still be a sense of loss, but compensations become evident and enjoyment of motherhood increases.

The transition to motherhood and the reconstruction of self is an individual process that depends on each mother's and each child's characteristics. As

Rubin (1984:52) highlights, 'from the onset of labour to the destination, child bearing requires an exchange of a known self in a known world to an unknown self in an unknown world.' This process of change is not bound by a particular time-frame (Rubin, 1984; Mercer, 1986).

Butterfield (2010) highlighted that to be a mother is to hold an identity that is always in progress, both on an individual level, as figuring it out for oneself, and on a larger socio-cultural level, as meanings are maintained or created anew over time. Butterfield (2010) described women going beyond the 'ideal mother' in creating their own identities as mothers. Mothering is one of many factors in her own narrative of development. Just as the child moves from the intense togetherness of infancy towards a more individual self, the mother too is recreated in this relationship. In the relationship between mother and child, there is no ending. The dynamic of the relationship is negotiated again and again throughout our lives. Like a mother herself, the mothering relationship should be understood as a work in progress. For better and for worse, then, a mother's work is never done.

2.7 *The Spiritual Dimension of Existence*

What really matters to us is what we find or make meaningful and this is central to the spiritual dimension.

(van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005).

The spiritual world addresses the part of our existence that reflects our sense of the world, our ideas and perspectives of the world, and how we create meaning. We don't have to be religious to have an aspiration in life (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). Even though some people would strongly deny spirituality, the spiritual dimension is not necessarily a separate entity that we accept or not, it is a part of our existence, our identity. The question 'What is the meaning of my life?' may not be on our mind on a daily basis, but it underpins our values and informs how we navigate our daily lives. Victor Frankl (1978) argued that meaning in life is not *given,* but rather it is something that is searched for and created for ourselves. It is not a dream or a symbol, but a search for one's full life potential with all its paradoxes and complexities.

We are born into (or 'thrown') into a given world view shaped by a particular time in history, a particular society and a particular culture that, to some extent, defines who we are and frames our assumptions, beliefs and values. With time and experience we learn to define for ourselves our own

opinions and beliefs. Certain life events force us to challenge these and re-evaluate who we are and our purpose and aspirations (Jacobsen, 2007; van Deurzen & Arnold-Barker, 2005). The spiritual dimension helps us to question what really matters to us and understand what is really meaningful to us.

As Jacobsen (2007) argued, modern life relies much less on cultural patterns being laid down in advance with respect to the 'rules' of life and where to place meaning. Nowadays in Western society, we have fewer well-defined traditions being passed on through generations and we look less to the local priest, family members or neighbours to explain and help us find meaning in a crisis event. Jacobsen (2007) further argues that in the modern times, our culture offers many possible ways of giving meaning to existence and so the meaning of life has become a vacuum that we have to fill for ourselves, each individual actively choosing their own way to construct meaning in their own particular life. Jacobson defines the term life meaning as:

> *a content with which people fill their lives with form and direction, like life goal, where life meaning and life goal are selected by each individual in accordance with more basic life values* (Jacobsen, 2007:132).

In Victor Frankl's (1978) view, the primary force of a human being is the

individual's will to search for meaning and he notes that people are prepared to live and die for the sake of ideals and values. According to Frankl, therefore, people fulfill their own personal existences by realizing their own values, which necessarily corresponds to the development of their psyches and a whole new way of being in the world becomes possible.

Jacobsen (2007) speaks about how life goals and life meanings tend to change during the life cycle. Change of circumstance may affect a person's way of living, their values, goals and therefore, their meaning in life. Through the lens of existential psychology, the search for meaning is a fundamental characteristic of human nature (Frankl 1978; Sartre 1969; Yalom, 1980; Jacobsen, 2007).

Athan and Miller's (2013:221) reflection on Madaras' (1999) work suggested that:

> *The transition to motherhood, a ubiquitous form of quantum change, has not been explored in depth within a spiritual framework, despite being universally described as a significant achievement of adulthood for a woman marked by acute redefinitions of self, reappraisals of lifestyle choices, and dramatic shifts in ways of thinking about intimacy, love, relationships, the world, and God.*

Motherhood bring changes across every dimension of a woman's life and

triggers the reconstruction of meaning in life (see McMahon, 1995; Nichols, 1996; Prinds, et.al., 2013; Athan & Miller, 2013; Stadlen, 2014; Arnold-Baker, 2014).

Prinds et al. (2013) addressed the way in which the transition to motherhood influences meaning-making in mothers' lives across all four existential dimensions. In the realm of *Umwelt*, experiences of motherhood provide 1) a confrontation with bodily limitations and possibilities; 2) a re-construction of the experience of time and space (Van Deurzen, (2007); and 3) the creation of new perceptions of being-in-the-world (Binswanger, 1963). In the realm of *Mitwelt* the sense of belonging is re-evaluated, new relationships with the child transformed women's priorities and values and reconstructed mothers' relationships with 'Others' (Prinds et.al, 2013). In the realm of *Eigenwelt*, the relationship with oneself is called in question and a new identity as a mother triggers the re-construction of other identities. Stern (2004) called such new understandings of self a new 'motherhood constellation'. Prinds et.al. (2013) argued that the changes created by the transition to motherhood generate new meanings in life, which cannot be prepared for but developed during the transition to motherhood. She indicates that in relation to the realm of *Uberwelt*, becoming a mother is expressed by some as a spiritual experience,

For them, creating meaning in life was also related to transcendent ideals both fulfilling purposes of life, but to some mothers also strengthening the experience of a transcendent dimension, for example in feeling of closeness to God (Prinds et al., 2013:8).

Stadlen (2004) also describes paradoxes about motherly love, where on the one hand, mothers seem to sacrifice their own needs to be able to fulfill their children's needs, and on the other hand, through mothers' acceptance of responsibility towards her child, mothers receive benefits for themselves too. Stadlen (2004:163) describes how mothers reflect on their changes of 'being-in-the-world', 'their love has taught them to become both more down to earth and more spiritual . . . The intensity of a mother's love can feel close to a religious awe'.

She speaks about how mothers often described feeling overwhelmed by the outpouring of love towards their children, and how this love allows them to perceive and appreciate life in a different light, feel 'touched by something beyond themselves, something good and eternal, whole and central. Motherly love seems to combine extremes of giving a lot and receiving a lot' (Stadlen, 2004).

The transition to motherhood can therefore be a powerful and, at the same time, vulnerable period that brings a lot of changes to women's lives,

reshapes their position of being-in-the-world and prompts a search for new meanings in life (Davis-Floyd, 2003; Andersen et al., 2011; McCullough et al., 2005; Becker and Hofmeister, 2001; Athan & Miller, 2013; Arnold-Baker, 2014). Some mothers purport to have experienced childbirth as a spiritual experience, which changes their fundamental understanding of what is meaningful in life (Johnson et al., 2007; Callister, 1992; 2004; 2007; 2010; Semenic et al., 2004).

The ability to make meaning in life provides a powerful motivation for living (Frankl, 1978; Jacobsen, 2007; Yalom, 1980) and can help new mothers find new ways of understanding and valuing their lives. Making meaning of life encourages us to question our values and priorities, which can help new mothers to take responsibility for their choices and increase feelings of competence, sense of control and power (van Deurzen, 1998; Yalom, 1980; Adams et.al., 2007)

In the following chapter I will explain the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodological approach to this research, critically discuss some phenomenological methods that were initially considered and the reasons that I employed Van Manen's Lived Experience research method combined with the theory of four dimensions of existence, for this research.

In the method section, I systematically describe the methodological steps for

the study design, the rationale for the size and criteria of the participants'

sample, the recruitment process, data collection and the steps of the analysis.

I have outlined the careful consideration of ethical issues that may have

occurred throughout the research, such as any potential risk for the

participants and the researcher, providing all of the essential information for

participants prior the interviews and ensuring the confidentiality of their

personal data. Further, I have considered and discussed the importance of the

reflexivity process, and my reflexive statement is presented.

In the findings section, I have presented the isolated themes and sub-themes

that emerged from the process of analysing the interviews and transcripts, in

correspondence to the existential theoretical frame of Four Dimensions of

Existence.

In the Discussion chapter, the findings are discussed and interpreted through

the lens of existential philosophical perspectives informed by the writings of

existential philosophers and theorists. Also, I have critically evaluated the

findings of my research in comparison to the findings of the literature review

that informed this research project. Further, in the conclusion section, I have

articulated the limitations of this relatively small homogeneous study, the

implications of this research for the field of psychology, psychotherapy and

practice development, and consider some possible areas for further research.

3. *Methodology*

All my knowledge of the world [...] is gained from [...] experience of the world. [...] To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: viii-ix)

The aim of this qualitative study was to address new mothers' experiences of early motherhood. The objective was to use the hermeneutic-phenomenological method of van Manen (1990) to elicit themes, with van Deurzen's (1997; 2002) 'Four dimensions of existence' employed as a heuristic to further structure and scrutinize the data. In choosing these, I was attempting to gain insight into the world of eight mothers through using a semi-structured interview process and thematic interpretation of the findings. In this chapter I will outline the key elements of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics and the existential theory of the 'Four dimensions of existence' (van Deurzen, 1997; 2002) that were used for this research project, as well as provide a rationale for this choice. I will go on to review the strengths and weaknesses of my chosen approach and give an overview of how I employed it in practice. I will also explore the relevance of my own reflexive awareness during this process and give consideration to any ethical issues arising.

3.1 *Theory*

3.1.1 *The Rationale for Choosing a Qualitative Approach*

In short, research can be described as an investigation or systematic study of some topic in order to find answers to questions, which leads to the discovery of facts or knowledge (Smith and Brown, 1995). Methodology outlines the principles that guide the research practice and concerns how the researcher completed the study, whereas the methods refers to specific research techniques, tools or strategies that the researcher used for the research procedure.

Methodologically, quantitative research concerns the quantifying measurement of researched phenomena and follows the hypothetico-deductive approach to gain knowledge.

On the other hand, qualitative research is concerned with the qualities, textures and meanings of phenomena. Therefore, qualitative research follows the inductive process in exploring the phenomena 'in its appearance' rather then measuring it against the pre-defined variables or viewing from a particular theoretical perspective. Moreover, qualitative researchers predominantly view the relationship between our perception of the world and the world itself as a complex, multilayered interconnection and reject

the existence of 'definable and quantifiable "social facts" ' (Rist, 1975: 18).

It could be argued that the lived world of participants can be uncovered and understood best when the researcher asks the participants about their experiences directly, exploring how the participants attribute meanings to their lifeworld themselves. Qualitative research involves the collection of text-based data from a small number of semi-structured or unstructured interviews, where the obtained knowledge and meanings of the research phenomena are shaped by the intersubjective interaction between the researcher and the participants.

To conclude, the aim of this study was to explore the subjective nature of new mothers' lived experiences of the phenomenon of their transition to motherhood from existential perspectives, as described by mothers through an interview process. Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was chosen as best suited to inform this research process. The qualitative research methodology recognises the subjective experience of participants and provided the most suitable methodological stance for me as a researcher to explore the lived experiences of each mother, and observe the common experiences shared by all the participants in this research. The topic of this study was chosen because of my personal experiences of motherhood and I

believe that this research was informed and shaped by an inter-subjective process of both my own and my participants' lived experiences of 'being-in-the-world', which was an important part of this research project. I believe that the methodological structure of qualitative research underpins the epistemological and ontological assumptions of this research question and aims.

3.1.2 *Overview of Qualitative Research Methods*

The differences in philosophical values, theoretical preferences and methodological procedures created a number of methodological approaches as applied to research. The emergence of phenomenological research was led by Giorgi and the Duquesne Circle in the 1970's (Hertz, 1987), who aimed to develop a rigorous descriptive empirical phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985). Giorgi follows Husserl's ideas and his project aimed to study 'essential structures' or 'essences of phenomena as they appear in consciousness'. Emmy van Deurzen (2014) also followed the principles of Husserl's philosophy and developed a method called Structural Existential Analysis (SEA). It is a method used for research and for systematically tracking an individual's physical, personal, social and spiritual position in the world.

Phenomenological methods that follow Heidegger's interpretive hermeneutics focus more explicitly on the lifeworld (Ashworth, 2003; Dahlberg et al, 2008) and lived experience (van Manen, 1990). They highlight the researcher's role and horizons of interpretations such as in the Reflective Lifeworld Approach (Dalhlberg et al (2008), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith and Osborne, 2003), Embodied Enquiry (Todres, 2004), Critical Narrative Analysis (CAN) (Langdridge, 2007) and the Dallas' approach to phenomenological research (Garza, 2007). The heuristic approach of Moustakas (1990) focuses on the researcher's role in self-reflection towards producing a creative synthesis by which to explicate lived experience. In a Relational Research approach (Finlay and Evans, 2009) attention is paid to the researcher's journey and the research process, and focuses on how data emerges out of embodied dialogical encounters between researcher and co-researchers. One variant of such relational research is the dialogical research approach described by Halling and Leifer, (1991) where groups of phenomenologists investigate a phenomenon, dwelling in and negotiating layered meanings together.

All the research methods described above share a similar focus of describing lived experience and recognising the significance of our embodied, intersubjective lifeworld. However, the descriptive phenomenological

method of Giorgi (1985) explores the intentional relationship between people and situations, uses phenomenological reductions and provides knowledge of psychological essences or structures of meanings immanent in human experience through imaginative variations (Hertz, 1987). Other phenomenologists see the use of phenomenological reductions as less central, and the explicitly hermeneutic approach and idiographic approach of IPA downplays or even rejects these features.

Some scholars, including van Manen's (1990) approach, see description and interpretation as a continuum. Van Manen (1990) believed that when description is mediated by expression (action, artwork or text), a stronger element of interpretation is involved. He described two different types of interpretation: interpretation as pointing to something and interpretation as pointing out the meaning of something by imposing an external framework. He argued that phenomenology is an immediate description of the lived-through quality of lived experience, and at the same time sees it as an intermediate description of a meaning of the expression of that experience, in symbolic form. Van Manen (1990) points out that when applied to the quality of human science research, a phenomenological text is descriptive in the sense that it names something and interpretive in the sense that it mediates between two parties.

3.1.3 *Definition of Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is difficult to define and many great thinkers have tried to outline the core of it. Phenomenology has been described as a study of a phenomenon as it unfolds, or the *appearance* of things (Cohen, 1987); it has also been described as the study of both the thing and 'thing*ness*' (Morse and Field, 1996; Robert and Taylor, 1997). Polit and Hungler (1999) view phenomenology as a qualitative research tradition with roots in philosophy and psychology and a focus on the lived experiences of human beings.

The word 'phenomenon' is derived from the Greek word '*phainomenon*' and means 'that which appears or presents itself to consciousness'. Van Manen (1990) argues that anything that presents itself to consciousness is potentially of interest to phenomenology, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measured, or subjectively felt. According to Osborn (1990) phenomenology is not a research method but a methodology that is rather an orientation.

A phenomenological methodology combines disciplines of epistemology (*how do we know?*) and ontology (*what is being?*) (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Those roots were important to both Husserl and Heidegger, respectively, and the philosophy of phenomenology draws from Husserl's transcendental and eidetic (*descriptive*) as well as Heidegger's hermeneutic (*interpretive*)

ideologies (Cohen, 1987; Cohen and Omery, 1994).

3.1.4 *Husserl's Descriptive Phenomenology*

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was a philosopher and mathematician who wanted to create a new (social) science, distinct from the natural sciences, that observed individuals in their natural context (Cohen, 1987). His project was to create a science that acknowledges and has its foundations in the '*lifeworld*', the world as experienced by humans, and that does full justice to those lived experiences (Dahlberg, et al, 2001; Dahlberg et al, 2011). Husserl believed that it is by returning to the life-world (*Lebenswelt*), to the 'things themselves' that one can best understand human experiences:

> *Thus, the objects of Phenomenology are "absolute data grasped in pure, immanent intuition", and its goal is to discover the essential structures of the acts (noesis) and the objective entities that correspond to them (noema) (*Husserl, 1985:635*).*

Husserl was influenced by Brentano who made a distinction between psychological phenomena and physical phenomena. Brentano and Husserl maintain that all mental phenomena, or acts of consciousness, are directed *towards* objects. For Husserl our consciousness '*noesis*' is always

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intentional and it aims at or refers to something objective '*noema'*. The principle of intentionality asserts that consciousness is always consciousness *about* something.

The fundamental aim of phenomenology then is to study phenomena, which are experienced in various acts of consciousness. Phenomenology searches for the *essence* in these acts of consciousness, and in order to find this, phenomenology strips away all that is non-essence. Husserl proposed to suspend the spatio-temporal world and focus on pure mental processes that he called the '*phenomenological reduction'*, which involves a process of '*bracketing'* or '*Epoche'* (Greek world for cessation). The process of '*bracketing'* is generally a process that suspends or neutralises beliefs and assumptions about the contingent features of phenomena.

Husserl affirms that transcendental subjectivity is the ultimate goal of the phenomenological method. The talk of the ego and its experiences presuppose the natural attitude, which phenomenology tries to overcome. Hence it is important that we should bracket the ego as well which Husserl termed the transcendental reduction.

3.1.5 *Heidegger and Hermeneutic Phenomenology*

The word hermeneutic is derived from the Greek word *hermenuin,* meaning 'to interpret' (Odman, 1988). Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology or '*hermeneutics*' is a scientific method whereby the researcher attempts to interpret the meaning of phenomena through the language of everyday experience (Holloway, 2005). By attempting to interpret the meaning of human experience, the hermeneutic-phenomenologist throws light on what it means to be a human Being situated in the 'life-world' (van Manen, 1990). Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was deeply familiar with both Brentano's and Husserl's accounts of intentionality, however he challenged Husserl's *'phenomenological reduction*' by arguing that one cannot distance oneself from the world and its objects and analyse the experiences of oneself and the 'Other' from an isolated 'I' or pure consciousness (Walsh, 1996). Heidegger (1927/1962) described his fundamental ontology as 'being-in-the-world', a situation where we make sense of experiences through our existence *already within* the world and where we share these experiences with others through speech and language. Therefore, for Heidegger, interpretation is an ongoing, evolving and interactive act because persons do not exist as separate entities and the world and individuals co-constitute meanings and understandings. Heidegger believed that there is no such thing as an interpreted 'fact' since

facts *speak through the lens of interpretation*, and these lenses vary depending on the viewers' own experiences. Heidegger's phenomenology is therefore interpretive and hermeneutic, and researchers who follow in Heidegger's tradition put emphasis on the interpretive approach to understanding phenomena, or the way that human beings impose their own meaning to experiences through speech and language (Holloway, 2005).

Another philosophical assumption underlying the interpretative phenomenological approach is that presuppositions or expert knowledge of the researcher are valuable guides with which to undertake a meaningful inquiry (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The researcher's forestructures of understanding are therefore an essential feature of the research and inform the research findings. Following Heidegger, Gadamer (1976) suggests that meaning evolves from a *'fusion of horizons'* between the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation, as well as the researcher and the participant. This process is a continuous, cyclical one, which allows for multiple possible co-created meanings to emerge and Gadamer termed this 'the hermeneutic circle' (*ibid.*).

3.1.6 *Rationale for Chosen Method*

As a 'being-in-the-world' as a mother and an existential counselling psychologist and psychotherapist, I am interested in conducting research that does not just describe new mothers' experiences, but attempts to understand and interpret them through existential perspectives. Initially I considered a Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) method because it provides an existential framework that I am interested in for analysing the data. However, I decided not to use SEA because its methodological principles follow Husserl's descriptive philosophy.

My own position is that phenomenological research is a researcher's attempt to describe the lived experience of the participants, which relies on the researcher's own subjective interpretation. First of all, the researcher's interest in a chosen research topic is born within the researcher's 'Being-in-the-world' and is embedded in the world of the researcher's language, social relationships, history and culture. I believe that the researcher needs to employ an open phenomenological attitude that enables them to use their own knowledge and experience in understanding the researched phenomenon. This could be done through reflexivity when the researcher explores their own embodied subjectivity, refrains from importing an external framework and sets aside judgments about the 'realness' of the

phenomenon. In other words, I chose to follow Heidegger's phenomenological tradition because I believe that I cannot separate or completely 'bracket' my 'being-in-the-world', which is inextricably linked to the 'being-in-the-world' of others. I cannot be disembodied, I cannot put aside who I am, my social, historical and cultural life circumstances. I believe that I can only be aware of them, and through personal reflexivity I can attempt to see them as particular instances of experiences shared by my participants. I believe that developing the ability to hold an open attitude towards the 'Other' and at the same time hold an awareness of my own embodied subjectivity through reflexivity, makes it possible to begin the process of separating out what belongs to me as the researcher, rather than to the researched. Gadamar (1976) described it as being open to the 'Other' while recognising personal biases, because knowledge in the human sciences always involves and is interpreted through self-knowledge.

In choosing a hermeneutic phenomenological method, I found myself attracted to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for its apparent methodological clarity. It seemed to lay down a precise template for how to proceed with coding data, while allowing space for personal input, though I also sensed that it might in some way feel restricting. With this in mind, I went back to the question of my research. The aim of this research was to

analyse whether the methodological framework of the Four Dimensions of Existence (van Deurzen, 1997) would be a useful map for observing and eliciting constructive understandings of the complex journey to motherhood. I therefore wanted to find a research method that allowed me to employ van Deurzen's theory of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'.

Finally, I opted to use hermeneutic phenomenology as described by Max van Manen (1990), who did see description and interpretation as a continuum, and who rooted his methodology in the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer. I found that van Manen's six methodological themes (as outlined under study design) provided me with an opportunity to reflexively approach, observe and interpret the phenomenon of becoming a mother. Van Mann's methodology offers the opportunity to follow the hermeneutic circle and balance the context of the research by considering the whole and its parts. I believe that it is essential to understand the lived experience of each individual mother, and at the same time to investigate if there is a common essence to the experience of the transition to motherhood. Van Manen's approach further encourages the creativity necessary to employ the existential theory of four worlds of existence and this, combined with an emphasis on lived experience, seemed to encapsulate the key aspects of the aims of my research.

3.1.7 *Rationale for choosing the framework of Four Dimensions of Existence*

Human beings' 'being-in-the-world' is multidimensional and is a dynamic web of complex interconnected experiences. To investigate and uncover an individual's lived experience or 'life-world' is a complex process within which many aspects of human life need to be taken into consideration. Van Deurzen (1997) highlighted that there are a number of tools we can use in the phenomenological investigation of phenomena. One of those is working with the four dimensions of the lifeworld within which the person functions, while paying attention to how the person deals with the inevitable existential tensions of each of those dimensions. This method of investigation can provide us with theoretical clarity and provides a 'birds-eye view' of human experience. In other words, this frame of investigation allows us to pay attention to the relationship between the whole and the parts, which can be done only in relation to the whole.

Van Deurzen argues that all known human experience can be mapped on to a world map that contains the (interlinking, fluid, overlapping) dimensions of: (1) the physical, natural, material domain; (2) the social, public, cultural domain; (3) the private, personal, psychological domain; and (4) the spiritual, interpretive, ideological domain. We all recognise our bodily

existence, our existence with others, our existence with ourselves, and our existence in relation to a system of meaning (van Deurzen, 1997, p.98). Describing those experiences can be an overwhelming and disorientating experience in itself. Therefore, addressing the investigation of the phenomenon of the transition to motherhood in a structured manner is one way of trying to cover every dimension of that complex journey. This existential framework can help explore the challenges, contradictions, conflicts or dilemmas experienced in multiple and manifold phenomena. It can offer a unique way of exploring the multiple challenges of motherhood around the four dimensions of being, which can empower mothers to examine themselves in relation to their physical bodies, emotional needs, social relationships and spiritual values.

Even though van Deurzen (2014) highlights that human existence is much more complex than is presented in this framework, contained self-reflection could lead new mothers to a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship with the world, could encourage new mothers to seek their own truth and make choices within their new identities. As van Deurzen (1997) pointed out, the nature of life is paradoxical and we can recognise those experiences as polarities and creative tensions.

3.2 *Method*

3.2.1 *Study Design*

This is a small, qualitative, idiographic study using purposive sampling to collect data from eight first-time mothers via semi-structured interviews.

In order to meet the philosophical and epistemological aims of this research van Manen's (1990) phenomenological-hermeneutic method was employed to analyse the data. This was combined with van Deurzen's (1997) framework of Four Dimensions of Existence which was be used as a framework to supervise and give structure to the research findings.

Van Manen (1990) argued that although a method can be addressed as a useful mechanism to undertake research, fixed signposts do not necessarily determine a method and do not support a flexible philosophy of phenomenological hermeneutics. However, he highlights that certain ways can be used to guide phenomenological research rather than being a set of fixed guidelines that need to be followed. For guidance and boundaries of this research journey, I followed the framework of the six methodological themes introduced by van Manen (1990).

1. *Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;*

Van Manen (1990) highlights that *'lived experience is the starting point and*

end point of phenomenological research' (p.36)*, when the phenomenological investigation begins with identifying what it is that deeply interests the researcher, questioning this phenomenon *'as a certain way of being in the world'*, creatively attempting to capture the essence of this phenomenon in a 'linguistic description that is holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive'. Also, van Manen (1990) is stressing that *'*the nature and number of possible human experiences are as varied and infinite as human life itself*'* (p.36).

Keeping in mind van Manen's recommendation or signposting, I began the journey of this research from questioning and reflecting on my interest toward the phenomenon of motherhood, as a woman, as a mother and as an existential psychologist. I attempted to think deeply and ask myself questions like 'What is it like to live as a mother?' 'Is there something essential to the experience of motherhood?' What is the essence, the nature, of motherhood, for an individual mother as well as collectively? I realized that I was interested in investigating the phenomenon of 'motherhood' within the existential position of 'being-in-the-world' (physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions).

2. *<u>Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;</u>*

Van Manen highlights that the world of lived experience is both the source

and the object of phenomenological research, and the researcher needs to search, collecting and gathering data in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature. Van Manen (1990:54) further points out that 'all the recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experience, taped interviewees about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already 'transformations' of those experiences.

Also, he emphasises the importance of the personal experiences of a researcher as a starting point that may proffer the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of the research journey.

Applying this to the current study, I was reflective of my own experiences of motherhood while considering and designing questions for the conversational interview as the method of gathering other mothers' experiences. I designed a set of semi-structured, open-ended questions to provide the participants an opportunity to reflect on, describe and talk openly about their experiences of motherhood. But at the same time, the questions were designed to guide the participants to address their experiences through all four dimensions of existence. This way I hoped to

gather mothers' lived experiences from all four dimensions of existence, in attempt to garner the fullest descriptions of the phenomenon. Other guidance of conversational interviews were used to prompt the participants to gather recollections and proceed with their stories, while making them feel heard, understood and supported (for instance body language, prompting questions, patience or silence).

3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon

Van Manen argues that the true phenomenological reflection on lived experience is a deep thoughtful process of grasping and reviling the obscured essential meaning of the phenomenon, reflectively asking ʹwhat is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience?ʹ (van Manen, 1990:32). In order to help our reflective grasping and make explicit the phenomenological meaning structure of lived experience, the phenomenon could be addressed and described in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes. Van Manen described several approaches towards uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of the phenomenon, and for this research *the detailed or line-by-line approach* was chosen that involves the detailed reading of each sentence cluster and asking ʹwhat does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?ʹ (van Manen, 1990:93).

The phenomenological reflecting on the interview transcripts or texts, and then the process of isolating the meaning units or themes were deep and thoughtful processes during which I was reading and re-reading the text trying to wear different hats each time, as a mother, as an existential psychologist and as a woman who is existing in a web of present, past and culture. I tried to hear and interpret each mother's individual experiences and later identity what were the experiences they shared, what they have in common and identify universal meaning units of the experiences described. Employing this structure of phenomenological reflection upon the lived-experiences described by the participants allowed and assisted me to observe and identity the implicit meanings or essences of the phenomenon of motherhood.

4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting

Van Manen's phenomenological approach is rooted in the writing, 'human science research is a form of writing' he asserts (van Manen, 1990:111). Our thoughts can be expressed through speaking and writing by using language. Gadamer (1976) highlighted how thinking and speaking, rationality and language share the same root '*logos'* that holds the meaning of conversation, inquiry, questioning. Also, van Manen (1990:33) highlights the way in which 'phenomenology is the application of 'logos' (language and

thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (as aspect of lived experience).

Further, van Manen argues that the methodology of phenomenological research requires a dialectical going back and forth among various levels of thinking and re-thinking, questioning and re-questioning, writing and re-writing to be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld.

The process of reflecting on the identified themes within the findings consisted of my vigorous questioning, thinking, writing and re-writing my thoughts, going back and forth between the part and the whole, zooming in and out of each theme, pulling close and away from my own knowledge and experience, close and away from the fundamental research question, hoping to get as close as I could to the meaning of the lived experiences described by the participants, in attempt to grasp the depth of the essence of the phenomenon researched. At the same time, I was aware that when I was interacting with the text I was in touch with the spaces between the words, my memory of the person who spoke those words and the inherent meanings that were visible only to me. As McCarthy (2015:59) said 'We can never "get at" stillness without inevitably creating waves. We can only attempt to turn waves into text, to interpret the un-interpretable and be satisfied with that'.

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation

Van Manen also reminds us how the journey required of qualitative research can be a demanding process that requires the researcher's constant and full attention, involvement and focus on the research question, on the notion of the phenomenon under investigation. He acknowledges the possibilities of getting distracted or side-tracked by pre-conceived opinions or speculations and falling back into abstracting theories. Van Manen encourages the researcher to be strong in his or her orientation and passion towards the phenomenon and the research question.

Keeping in mind the above signposting, I tried to stay mindful and passionate towards my interest and chosen direction of investigation of the phenomenon of motherhood. Even though at times I experienced the temptation to get sidetracked by existing theories and speculations, and wander aimlessly within the overwhelmingly vast experiences of the transition to motherhood, I tried to re-focus myself towards the question I was interested in and passionate to investigate. I tried to maintain my relationship, my interaction with the lived experiences described by the participants and engage myself as often as I could in thinking and reflecting on those experiences.

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

Van Manen encourages the researcher to simultaneously be mindful and considerate, not only of the significance of the parts that construct the investigation of the phenomenon, but also of the overall design of the study. Through my research journey, following the van Manen's guidance, I was frequently exercising 'stepping back' and looking at the phenomenon as a whole, whilst also closing in on the phenomenon by considering how each particular lived experience of each particular mother contributes a thread to the essence of the phenomenon (of transition to motherhood). This exercise supported me to stay focused on my journey when I felt I was losing my bearings and direction.

One of the ways to support me in this exercise of balancing between the 'parts' and the 'whole', in being able to focus, reflect and investigate each single experience as a significant part of the bigger picture, was utilising the 'Four Dimensions of Existence'. This existential theoretical framework held and navigated my boundaries in thinking, reflecting, organizing and presenting the lived experiences described by the participants. I used this 'map' in questioning, organizing, presenting and writing the investigated patterns emerging from the research. This map of the four dimensions of existence formed part of the questioning and direction of this research at the

interview stage and was also central to the design of this research journey.

In summary, the above six methodological themes provided me with a valuable structure or procedure to guide and support me during this challenging, and at times overwhelming, research journey. However, as van Manen highlighted, even though there is a certain order implied in the methodological presentation, this isn't implied in the methodological presentation between each step. Whilst zooming in and out between the whole and the details of this investigation, I was moving through the six methodological themes, working at various aspects intermittently and simultaneously, holding them in mind throughout the whole structure of the research design procedure.

3.2.2 *Participants and Recruitment Criteria*

Sampling is an important component of qualitative research that employs interviewing as a means to data collection. The evaluation of a benchmark for a participant's sampling is underpinned by the aims and questions of the research. The more defined and specific the inclusions and exclusions of the sample criteria, the more homogenous the sample, which enhances the validity of the study.

The answer to the question 'how many qualitative interviews is enough'

depends on both theoretical and practical considerations. The methodological and epistemological position of this research required a sample size that allowed an analysis of each individual participant, but at the same time provided the scope to develop cross-case overviews. Smith, Flowers & Larking (2009) give guidelines for students and researchers who employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to use a bracket of 3 to 16 participants for a single study, which is the upper end of the scale used for doctoral projects. The practical considerations drew on the guidelines of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, who encourage doctoral students to employ 8 to 10 participants for a doctoral dissertation, as the size and the time of a project completion are taken into account. Therefore, a small and homogenous group sampling of eight participants were recruited for this doctoral dissertation.

Inclusion criteria:

1. ***Mothers aged between 30 and 40***. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2010, 48% women had a first child when they were 30 or over. I also believe that a younger group of new mothers may have had a different set of experiences that are not within the scope of this study. According to my personal experience and the data from the literature, the loss of independence and control in the lives of new mothers over thirty are

amongst the strongest experiences recounted.

2. *Mothers with children between 6 months and 2 years old*. This was to give the new mother a chance to adapt to motherhood, whilst ensuring that the birth of her baby and the immediate post-natal period did not seem so long ago that they couldn't be recalled with clarity and a sense of embodied remembrance. Whilst Smith (1999) suggested that women's psychological preparation for mothering starts with pregnancy, for the purpose of this research I chose to investigate new mothers' experiences of the first two years of their mothering because I believe that these may be crucial years for new mothers trying to make sense of and adapt to their new identity as a mother.

3. *Mothers who had a planned pregnancy***.** I feel that unplanned pregnancy may raise different issues, and I do not have the capacity in this study to cover this data.

Further, even though each mother participating in this research went through her own journey to conception, for example two mothers went through an in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and one of the mothers was considering an adoption if she could not conceive herself, I made a decision not to include those differences in the inclusion criteria of the sample for this study. Very little is known about the direct impact of IVF on the experiences of the transition to

motherhood after the birth. Although some studies (e.g. Freeman et al., 1985; Newton et al., 1990; Thiering et al., 1993; Harlowe et al., 1996; Raoul-Duval et al., McMahon et al, 1997) have addressed the impact of IVF treatment on anxiety levels, depression and fetal attachment during pregnancy, it is not clear how different new mothers who conceive children through IVF adjusted to motherhood in comparison to community norms. Boivin et al. (1995) suggested that perhaps couples have adapted some coping strategies involving some denial of stress.

As the focus of this study was to explore the experiences of the transition to motherhood after the birth, the mothers participating in this research were not specifically questioned on their experiences of conception of their children. However, the interview questions were open-ended questions that allowed the participants to reflect on any experiences on their transition to motherhood   but the findings of this study did not show any significant differences in data between mothers who conceived through IVF or other ways.

4. Living with a partner. A single mother may have different issues to deal with and it may require different questions in a separate study.

5. Have not been clinically diagnosed (with PND or other mental health issues). This study aims to explore the experiences of women who have not

been clinically diagnosed before and/or after giving birth. Therefore, prior to interviews, within the recruitment process, I asked the participants if they were on any medication and had been clinically diagnosed by a mental health professional.

3.2.3 *Demographics*

The data shows that that the participants interviewed in this research came from somewhat homogeneous population, they all described themselves as White British or European, and they all lived in London at the time of becoming mothers. Most of the participants described having no support from close families, and even though only two participants had their families live in England, no differences in the themes were found between them and other mothers.

Moreover, no differences in theme analysis were found between mothers who conceived through IVF or other ways, and had female or male gender babies.

Table. 2 Demographic *information of the mothers participating in this research that was taken into consideration during the analysis process.*

Participant's Codding	Age	Child's age	Ethnic origin	Family Support	Occupation
P1. Masha	33	18 months	European	Not Available	City worker/ Full-time work
P2. Fiona	35	16 months	European	Not available	Lower/ Full-time mum
P3. Carina	31	11 months	British	Available	Nanny/ Part-time work
P4. Jess	31	16 months	British	Available	Photographer/ Part-time work
P5. Suzanne	37	7 months	European	Not available	Nanny/ Full-time mum
P6. Carol	40	8 months	European	Not available	Parenting Consultant/ Part-time work
P7. Maria	41	12 months	British	Not available	PA/ Full-time work
P8. Hilda	43	8 months	European	Not available	Property advisor/ Part-time work

3.2.4 *The Recruitment Process*

Several recruitment strategies were undertaken to identify potential participants for this doctoral dissertation project. For example, advertising on notice boards in key institutions such as antenatal classes, yoga classes for pregnant women, breastfeeding classes, baby development classes and baby centers such as 'West Mums' and 'London mum'. (See Appendix 1. Advertising Poster).

Most participants in this study were recruited through 'snowball sampling', some hearing about this study from other mums at the playground, some from friends who had seen an advertising poster and one of the mums had seen my advert on the 'Mumsnet' website.

All the participants initially contacted me via email expressing their interest

in the study, and to those who met the criteria, a 'Participant Information Sheet' was forwarded (see Appendix 2). Mothers were asked to contact me via telephone for further details. Through telephone conversations with each participant I discussed again whether they met the criteria identified for this study, explained in more details the aims and procedures of this study, discussed the issues of confidentiality and participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time. As a next step, I emailed each participant the

'Informed Consent Form' (see Appendix 3), which they were encouraged to read carefully, sign, and return electronically. For each participant who agreed to take part in this project, a date and time was arranged and participants were encouraged to contact me if they had any further questions regarding the interview procedure before the actual interview took place. Six mothers agreed to come to my home, and two other mothers asked me to come to their homes. I explained to the participants that the interview would take fifty to ninety minutes and offered to pay for two hours of childcare and cover the travel costs, but none of the participants required any payments.

3.2.5 *Data collection*

Since the project attempted to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and narratives in a detailed fashion, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant.

One of the methods for data collection for research based in a life-world approach is an interview and for this research I used a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. The disadvantage of using this technique is the time taken in collecting and analysing the information. Another disadvantage is that the quality of the information is largely

dependent on the rapport and trust established between the interviewer and interviewee. If there is an element of trust then the interviewee will be able to describe more openly their experience.

As a counselling existential psychologist and researcher, I tried to be aware of intersubjectivity between myself and the participant (Kasket, 2012). The intersubjective process between the researcher and the participant can influence the data collected as well as distort ethical issues such as informed consent. In focusing on our relationship as researcher and participant, I was aware of a reflexivity process that required my consideration of how the whole process of a research study is structured around issues of dominance, gender, sexuality, class, age, and race (Burman, 1990). Finlay (2002a) argued that reflexivity enables a process of self-awareness that can make power dynamics visible.

To balance the power dynamic between the participant and me, I disclosed that I am a mother myself and that my interest in this topic was triggered by my own complex experiences of motherhood. I was aware that disclosing my own experience is a complex issue that could allow the participant to feel understood and open, or influence the participant to feel obliged to bring complexity into their stories and not disappoint me. I highlighted to the

participants that each woman is unique and has her own experiences of transition to motherhood.

The research interview is characterized by openness, by a genuine willingness to listen, to see, and openly understand a phenomenon (Dahlberg et al., 2001). I tried to format the interview questions as openly as possible, but at the same time constructed them enough to be able to direct the interviewee's thoughts towards a certain area of interest. I tried to design a series of questions that first helped the participants to provide me with some general information about themselves, then I tried to prompt them to start reflecting and describing their experiences from the very beginning of their journey of the transition to motherhood. Furthermore, as part of the planned methodological procedure, I formed questions that might encourage the participants to address their experiences around the four dimensions of existence (e.g. Physical; Social; Personal and Spiritual dimensions). However, all questions were open-ended to allow the participant to go their own way while expressing their experiences. During the conversation, I used body language and short prompts to make sure the participant felt heard (

such as hmm, head nodding). (See Appendix 4, Example of Questions)

3.3 *Data Analysis*

The first step of the analysis Each interview was transcribed from the digital recording. I made a decision to transcribe the interviews personally, which prompted me to have a closer relationship with the data. The digital recordings were all transcribed no later than the day after they took place in order to preserve the immediacy of the interaction and the nuances of the dialogue, as well as the embodied memory of the tacit, non-verbal information that had been communicated. It was time-consuming and at times an exhaustive procedure, but it was a constructive process and an important part of my analysis of the data. The tape was played and re-played and meditated upon, and while I was transcribing the verbatim I made notes in my diary about the participant's tone of voice, body language, laughing and crying and my personal experience of the interview.

When transcribing the verbatim, I created an anonymised name for each participant and coded each participant with a number code P1; P2; (as Participant 1; Participant 2;). The coding was used to help me in organizing and recording the data during the analysis. I coded myself as V. To ensure

confidentiality of the data, throughout the transcripts or verbatim, I excluded or changed all the names, locations or any other identifying information (See Appendix 5, transcript of P1). As soon as each transcript was completed, I sent it to the participants to provide them with an opportunity to make further changes if needed. All the participants responded that they were happy with the transcript and did not require any further changes.

The second step of the analysis I chose the *'detailed or line-by-line approach'* proposed by van Manen (1990:93) to guide the first stage of the analytic procedure in uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of the lived experiences, and at the same time allocating those experiences to one of the four existential dimensions. Following van Manen's (1990) recommendations, I began with reading and re-reading each sentence and asking myself: What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveals about the lived experience of the participant? While reading the transcript I was replaying the tape allowing story, thoughts and feelings to filter through my mind. Dey (1993:83) compared the act of reading in qualitative data analysis with digging the soil as garden preparation – *'the soil is loosened and it is possible for the seeds of one's analysis to put down roots and grow'*.

I coded each sentence or sentence cluster with a number as S1; S2 (meaning Sentence 1; Sentence 2) and the end of each sentence I wrote my notes and

interpretations (in italic and brackets). I tried to be open-minded and think reflectively and creatively about what had been said, searching for implicit and explicit meaning(s) of the experience described in each sentence. I underlined key words or phrases that highlighted the meaning of the sentence that might help me in formulating themes or sub-themes. When I reflected and interpreted the possible meanings of each sentence, I considered on which existential dimension this experience may be located, and to help further analysis, I marked each sentence with the random color codes that symbolically represented each dimension Physical dimension - Physical; Personal dimension - Personal; Social dimension in Social; Spiritual dimension – Spiritual.

For example:

> P5 S55. "Before I was careless, I didn't plan many things. I took life as an adventure. Now, I have to think that I have a baby, look after her, be there for her, all her life. Also, I have to look after myself for her. What if anything happens to me? Who will be there for her? …it is a new responsibility". *(Awareness of mortality; responsibility for life & death (her and her baby)* Physical

> P1.S 89. "*Now* we are more into her, she comes first. Before it was different, but now he is not my first priority, at least not at this very

moment. He probably feels left out, and that we don't have time for us as a couple. <u>We are more parents than a couple</u>." *(Relationship with husband changed, he is not mother's priority)* Social

P1. S 23 "I would still <u>go back to work</u> because I like socializing, <u>being a full-time mum Is not for me</u>." *(the identity as a mother is not her full priority, she still values her other identities)* Personal

P2. S88 "So my meaning definitely changed since I became a mother, it is my responsibility for my child. I think motherhood put everything in to the context. I think the responsibility for another person, we can't grasp it until we are doing it." *(Her child is new meaning in life)* Spiritual

I found the process of allocating the experiences to specific existential dimensions very challenging because most experiences described could be situated across more than one dimension. As van Deurzen (1997:98) highlighted, *'we should never mistake the map for the territory'* since human existence is immensely complex. However, for the purposes of theoretical clarity and overview, lifeworld experiences could be distinguished between four theoretically proposed dimensions of existence (van Deurzen, 1997).

In spite of the challenging task, I was mindful that I had to make a decision and symbolically allocate each sentence or sentence cluster to the one of

four, most appropriate, in my view, dimension of existence, once more asking myself a question, 'what does this experience point to, at this particular point in the conversation?' I was aware that it was my personal interpretation and another researcher might probably made a different interpretation and allocation. Moreover, some sentences or clusters were allocated to more than one dimension, because I felt that the implicit meaning(s) of those experiences within different existential dimensions could contribute to the clarity of the interpretations and to the essence of the phenomenon.

For example:

> P7 S7. "We travelled a lot; we went out a lot and we drank a lot. It feels kind of indulgent now, when I look back on my life before I had her, I really did what I wanted for a very long time. I was 40 when I had the baby, so I had a lot of time to do my own thing, to do everything I wanted to do. There was always something going on**."**
> *(Life before motherhood remembered as self-centered, self-indulgent, being independence and in control of choosing how to spend time).*
> *Personal (Socially active life style) Social*

When all thematic sentences or clusters were isolated, coded, interpreted and allocated between the four existential dimensions, the verbatim was printed

and each separate thematic sentences or clusters were cut out. I separated the

pile of cut-outs into four groups according to each existential dimension.

The sentences that were allocated to more than one dimension, were copied

and pasted to as many dimensions as were represented (for example, P7 S7.

shown above was copied two times and two cut-outs were separated into two

piles, Personal and Social).

The transcript for each participant was analyzed and the process was

replicated for all eight transcripts.

The third step of analysis: This was to isolate and interpret the emerging

sub-themes within each existential dimension. Working through one pile

(existential dimension) at the time, I scattered the cut-outs over my working

table and began to read sentences, highlighting key words and my

interpretations again and again, trying to identify the clusters of similar

meanings. Working in a similar manner through each of the four existential

dimensions, I separated initial sub-themes that were emerging within each

existential dimension.

I created four separate word documents, for each existential dimension

(Physical dimension sub-themes; Social dimension sub-themes; Spiritual

dimension sub-themes) where all the sentences or sentence clusters

representing a dimension were copied and pasted, and all the sentences were

grouped according to the clusters or sub-themes. At this stage of the analysis I used the full sentences as described by the participant. At the end of each sub-theme, I wrote my interpretations of the possible meaning(s) of the sub-themes. As the result of this procedure, the transcript was divided into four parts, representing four dimensions of existence, each containing lived experiences clustered into sub-themes that encompassed interpreted meanings of the phenomenon within each dimension (see Appendix 6, a table with first stage sub-themes within four dimensions for the P1).

The transcript for each participant was analysed in the same way, and at the end of the step three of analysis, the transcript for each individual participant was divided into four documents, each holding sub-themes with corresponding participants' verbatim.

This was a very time consuming and challenging process, but it provided me with a structured, detailed view of each mother's experience. Methodologically, I found it very helpful working with the colour-coding and cut-outs, as this visual style of absorbing information provided me with more clear and detailed views of the mothers' experiences. By the time I transcribed and isolated thematic statements and grouped them into sub-themes for each mother, I developed a good knowledge of the data, and by reflecting on each sentence, meditating and interpreting each sub-theme, I

managed to build a very close relationship with the experiences described. At the same time, I began to experience and observe common themes across all the participants' narratives.

The fourth step of analysis. As van Manen (1990) argued, some identified themes may be culturally and historically determined or shaped, and not all of them will hold the essential meanings or be unique to the phenomenon we are investigating. To differentiate between incidental themes that may belong to an individual mother and essential themes that are unique to the phenomenon of transition to motherhood, I compared the data in an attempt to investigate if there were any universal themes that were common across all mothers participating in this research. I undertook similar procedures for step four as for the step three of the analysis. I combined cut-outs from all the participants according to the four existential dimensions. As a result, I had four piles of cut-outs separated into clusters or sub-themes, representing the experiences within each existential dimension of all eight participants. Once again, working on one dimension at the time, I read and re-read, compared and evaluated all the sub-themes across all mothers and combined or isolated them into further universal sub-themes that held similar meanings.

Even though the methodological procedure of analyzing the data was

somewhat structured, nonetheless, it was a very creative process. The stories of the eight mothers were always in my thoughts and I was meditating on the questions, 'what implicit and explicit meanings or essences of the experiences are being described by mothers?' (for example, the essence of unconditional love that all mothers described or the essence of their new identity as a mother). 'How do those experiences describe the essence of the journey from not being a mother to the world of motherhood?'

I began assembling the building blocks into the whole structure of the phenomenon by creating a table where I recorded all common (or universal) themes across all eight participants, within the four existential dimensions.

At this stage of analysis, I could no longer use the full sentences of the transcripts because of the vast amount of data. Focusing on the key phrases of the participants' descriptions, I shortened the sentences and chose the thematic statements that most represented the meanings of separated sub-themes. I still used the participants' own words as much as possible.

As the result of this procedure the five main categories were constructed, each containing several essential themes shared by most mothers. The experiences that were described only by individual mothers were put aside.

Comparing mothers' experiences was an exiting process full of surprises. Reading through and reflecting on the essential themes described by all or

most mothers, one theme emerged strongly as a possible meta-theme. I asked myself another question, 'What is the essential theme all eight mothers described as an underlying experience of the phenomenon of motherhood?' Further, following van Manen's recommendation, I considered the following questions, *'Does the phenomenon of motherhood without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?'* (van Manen 1990:107). The universal theme identified in this research is the awareness and acceptance of the responsibility for the 'Other' (the child), which I termed 'existential responsibility'.

3. Table: Methodological process of analysis.

Methodology

Listening to & transcribe taped interview

Re-listening to & reading transcribed interview

Line-by-line analysis (van Manen,1990), interpreting meaning & coding sentences

Sorting interpreted sentences according to four dimensions of existence (van Deurzen, 1997)

| Physical dimension | Social dimension | Personal dimension | Spiritual dimension |

Identification of sub-themes for each dimension

Process repeated for each of eight mothers

Identification of common sub-themes across all eight mothers, & re-aggregation into five main themes

Life before motherhood	Physical dimension	Social dimension	Personal dimension	Spiritual dimension
1. It was all about me 2. Decision to have a child 3. Expectations of motherhood	1. Birth & death 2. My time belongs to my child 3. Always tired 4. My body as a mother	1. Social responsibility 2. Relationship with partner 3. Reconnecting with my family 4. 'Old' & 'New' friends	1. From self-centred to self-giving 2. The vulnerability of responsibility 3. Finding my feet as a mother 4. Rebalancing identities 5. Transformative power of motherhood	1. Unconditional love as a spiritual experience 2. New meaning in life

Searching for theoretical concepts capable of capturing the mothers' experiences

Writing up the findings based upon the analytical process

Conclusions

3.4 *Reflexive Statement*

Since the researcher is the primary 'instrument' of data collection and analysis, reflexivity is deemed essential (Merriam, 1998; Russell & Kelly, 2002; Stake, 1995). The ultimate purpose of reflexivity is to increase the rigour of the research results, so that it is properly seen as enhancing rather than diminishing the quality of the research findings (MacLeod, 2003). Through reflection on my own thoughts and feelings I became more aware of what the entire research process allows me to see, as well as what may hold me back from doing so (Russell & Kelly, 2002). In other words, reflexivity can engender a better understanding of my own assumptions and behaviors that may impact the investigation, and as a result, a more careful consideration of the researched phenomenon. As a hermeneutic-phenomenological researcher, I am aware that the starting point in investigating lived experience is my own experience of the phenomenon. Further, I am aware that 'my own experience of the phenomenon *may or may not* be the possible experience of others, and that the experiences of others are possibly my own' (van Manen, 1990:). From the birth of this project I have adopted a reflexive stance towards all the stages of the research process (choosing my research topic, preparation of literature review, recruitment, data collection and analysis and discussion of results).

Maxwell (1996) pointed out that writing ideas down when they occur is actually the beginning of analysis. Writing notes to oneself permits researchers to discover things in their heads that they did not know were there (Elbow, 1995; Huff, 1999; Woods, 1999). In order to deepen my understanding of the research process, I kept a reflexive research journal throughout, in which I was noting my biases and assumptions, personal perceptions, experiences and unfolding understandings as they manifested in the process. I also attended personal therapy throughout and used my academic supervision as a space for non-passionate reflection on my research journey. This was essential since the question posed by this research is very close to my heart. It is based upon my personal experiences, values, passions and preoccupations, as a mother and as a psychologist. Also, the decisions for the design and data analyses are based on personal preferences; therefore, I was conscious that it is crucial to be aware of these concerns and how they influence the research.

Finlay (2006) highlighted that reflexivity is an essential indicator for evaluating the quality of the research process. Therefore, the active reflexive practice can benefit the researcher in uncovering knowledge about the phenomenon, and at the same time facilitate the desired transparency about how that knowledge has been learned. This transparency is important

throughout all levels of the research journey, not only addressing how the knowledge is accumulated by the researcher's ability to be mindful of 'bracketing' their own personal knowledge of the phenomenon, but also to be aware and address any ethical issues that may arise in power relations between the researcher and the participants during the research.

Reflexive practice also adds validity to the research, as it adds clarity to the research procedures and enables others to see how the knowledge was accumulated and findings recorded, which is essential if the research is to be trustworthy. This also potentially increases the publishing eligibility of my research.

3.5 *Risks to the Researcher*

I was aware of the potential risk in interviewing people at my home or attending their homes. I checked out each location before the interview to assess any potential risk. Also, I agreed with my husband that I would telephone him immediately before and after each interview, and if I did not contact him within the agreed time he had the details of the locations and could get help.

3.6 *Risks to Participants*

I was aware of the possible vulnerability of my participants and that the nature of the interview may be emotional for them. At the beginning of the interview I reminded each participant that they could stop the interview at any time. During the interviews I was mindful when questioning and discussing mothers' experiences. I was sure to give them enough space, made sure they felt heard, understood and supported if needed. At the end of the interviews I offered each participant a debriefing where we discussed the participants' experiences of the interview and the further procedures of the research, including data storage, confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. A 'Debriefing Sheet' (see Appendix 7) with a referral list of therapists, relevant books and organizations were given to each participant, in case participants wished to continue exploring their experiences or needed further help.

3.7 *Confidentiality*

Before the interviews took place, each participant received, reviewed and discussed with me a 'Participant Information Sheet' that explained the aims and procedures of the study, as well as a 'Consent Form' that participants also discussed with me and signed. Before each interview the limits of

confidentiality were fully explained.

The participants were informed that the interview material would be used as part of the doctoral research and may be published in various sources (in a journal article or part of a book). I explained to the participants that for the purpose of confidentiality I would anonymise the data (use pseudonyms and change place names) within the interview transcript, and would send it to them for their consent and for any further changes they wished to make. Participants were informed that all digital recordings would be protected by passwords and securely stored, and deleted after the transcripts were typed up. I reassured the participants that I would be transcribing the interview recordings by myself. The participants were made aware that they could withdraw their data from the study at any time.

4. *Findings*

4.1 *Introduction*

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of eight new mothers as they transitioned from a life before motherhood to 'being-in-the-world' as a mother. Analysing these texts through the hermeneutic-phenomenological method of analysis described in section 3.3, I have attempted to 'capture' certain themes that would do justice to the myriad layers of meaning found within the participants' narratives. Even though each mother had her unique story to tell, I have attempted to identify and interpret what emerged as common across all eight new mothers' stories.

Even though the identified themes were always overlapping and interconnected, fluid and emergent, I have chosen to categorise and interpret them within the comprehensive framework of Four Dimensions of Existence. Therefore, in keeping with the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition of the 'double hermeneutic', the findings could be seen as a one person's attempt at interpreting and making sense of new mothers lived experiences of the transition to motherhood.

During the analysis the following themes emerged: Theme 1. Life before motherhood; Theme 2. Physical Dimension: *Embodied Responsibility*;

Theme 3. Social Dimension: *Relational Responsibility;* Theme 4. Personal Dimension: *Personal Responsibility;* Theme 5. Spiritual Dimensions: *Motherhood as self-transcendence experience*

What follows is my description and interpretation of each five themes (and corresponding sub-themes) and this will be inductively supported throughout with quotations directly lifted from the eight participants' interview transcripts.

4.2 *Theme 1. Life before motherhood*

The journey of transition to motherhood begins when a women steps out of a life before motherhood into a life as a mother and a journey which never ends. To be able to observe this transition, I began by asking my participants to reflect on what they remembered about their lives before motherhood.

I found fascinating how all eight mothers chose to describe the life they remembered before becoming mothers by using key words: 'Independent', 'free', 'being in control' and 'active' – life was 'all about me'.

First of all, when describing their lives before motherhood, all the women in this research spoke about being actively engaged in fulfilling their personal needs and interests. Their reflection on life before motherhood focused on

being independent and free to choose how to spend their time. Women used words like, 'It was all about me', 'my traveling', 'my studies', 'my work', 'my friends', 'I was independent, in control and free'. Mothers reflected on their lives before motherhood as a life where choices and responsibilities were mainly about themselves. Under sub-theme 1.1 'It was all about me', I will address in more detail mothers' reflections on their choices in life before motherhood.

This research was specifically looking at the mothers who had planned pregnancies. Women in this research were describing enjoying their lives before being mother, but within the same breath, each woman declared that the desire to be a mother always was there and the planning to have a child was determined upon the right time and the right circumstances. One can argue that the decision or the choice to become a mother could be seen as the first step towards a woman's journey to motherhood. This will be discussed in Sub-theme 1.2 Decision to have a child: Did she jump or was she pushed? Women also reflected on their fantasies and expectations of what their lives as mothers would look like and this is encapsulated in Theme 1.3 Expectations of motherhood: I didn't expect this…

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                    │   Life before   │
                    │    motherhood   │
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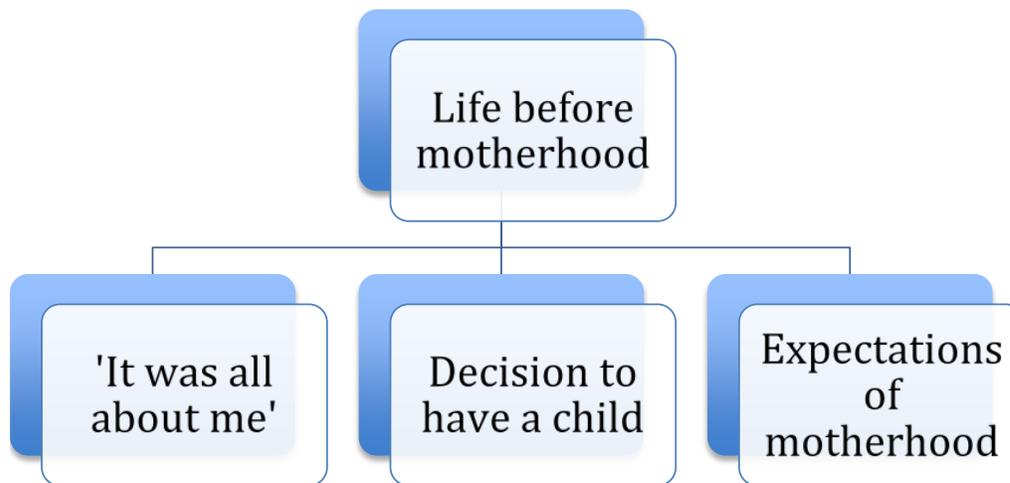
4.2.1 *Sub-theme 1.1* 'It was all about me'

Looking back on their lives before motherhood, all the women in this research described memories of a life full of activities they chose for themselves. They remembered the freedom to choose activities that were focused on their personal interests and needs. They remembered feeling more in control of their time, more independent (not dependent on 'others') in choosing how to spend their time. They described time as active, 'doing something' time:

> **P1 S8** *I was very active, attending every social event possible, traveling a lot, reading a lot, seeing friends a lot, gym, yoga, photography, exploring places…. These were often instant decisions, like waking up and deciding where we were going and what we are going to do.*

Masha (P1) described feeling spontaneous, in control of how to spend her

time, taking care of her personal needs and fulfilling her interests and hobbies. There is a real sense of freedom in her words, freedom from any responsibilities and freedom to focus on choices about herself and her own needs:

> **P1 S12** *For example, we could stay in bed until like 10am, why not? Now it's 6.30am and it doesn't matter that it's Saturday; tired, sick, lazy, no way, you have to get up and smile.*

Take also Maria's (P7) sentiments:

> **P7 S7** *We travelled a lot, we went out a lot and we drank a lot. It feels kind of indulgent now, when I look back on my life before I had her, I really did what I wanted for a very long time.*

Similar to Masha (P1), Maria (P7) chose to describe her life before motherhood as a life full of fun and exciting activities that she was choosing to do, doing 'what I wanted'. In the same breath, she mentions that it feels 'indulgent now' when comparing it to life as a mother:

> **P7 S55** *Before it was all about me, it was my job, doing what I wanted to do…* *(***S34)** *I was independent and in control.*

Maria (P7) highlights that before she felt independent and in control of her life, it feels to me that it is not how she feels now as a mother as she speaks about independence and control in the past tense.

Examples of these two mothers are mirroring the reflection of all eight

mothers' memories about their lives before motherhood. They all reflected on feeling independent and free, being in control of their choices on how to spend their time.

The definition of someone being independent is someone or something free from the influence or control of another. And I believe that mothers are describing being independent and free from the responsibility for their children and the consequences this responsibility generates. They are remembering a time when choices were about themselves and responsibilities were about themselves.

4.2.2 *Sub-theme 1.2 Decision to have a child*

One of the criteria in selecting participants for this research was that women had a planned pregnancy, in another words, women made a choice to become a mother. Another interesting similarity between all participants' stories was how they all expressed that they knew they always wanted to be mothers.

Even though women were describing their lives before motherhood as 'a good life', each of them said that they were ready for a change.

> **P1 S40** *And I think it happened just at the perfect time… I was ready to commit.*
>
> *(S41) … Thirty-three was a perfect time to stop and do something else. You know,*

not just traveling, party, cocktails after work, you know what I am talking about.

Masha (P1) talked about 'the right time', when she felt ready to change her life, ready for commitment, ready to have a child. According to her words she was choosing the right time for her to have a child, but did she consider what being a mother is about? Was her choice fully informed?

> **P2 S26** *I wanted my child this time in my life.*
>
> **P4 S10** *I always thought that I knew that I wanted to be a mum, and I thought I would find it quite easy.*
>
> **P5 S2** *We wanted this child very much. I did so many things to have this baby. I had lots of problems and lots of treatments. So I had a long journey to have this baby.*
>
> **P6 S2** *It was always a big thing for me to have a baby.*

I believe that the words of these women are indicating how having a baby is a part of these women's agenda in life. Some participants chose the words 'having a baby' instead of 'being a mother' and I could interpret that as those women had not considered in detail the complex role of a mother, and the choice to become a mother was not fully informed and therefore prepared for.

In Western Society, a child is often a part of a family structure within a heterosexual relationship, and women's decision to have a child also could be influenced by their partners' decisions.

For example, Maria (P7) illustrated her partner's role in her choice to have a child:

> **P7 S15** *We decided to have a baby, my partner really wanted to have a baby.*
>
> **P7 S3** *Our daughter is our first child, we were trying to get pregnant for a long time and she is an IVF baby.*

In her interview, Maria (P7) described the relationship with her partner as a long-term, happy relationship. At the same time, she spoke about how all her friends already had children and how much her partner wanted to have a baby too. Maria's example also demonstrates how women's choice to have children could be informed by the societal values of the family structure.

Drawing from the eight women's stories, having a child was on their life agenda, partially in a conscious way, partially in a mandatory way, as an integral part of a 'normal' female identity, and an important part of a marital or stable heterosexual relationship. Even though the women had chosen to have a child, they did not explicitly consider whether or not to have a child, but rather when, how many or in what social context to have them.

It is apparent that the women in this research were not entirely conscious, fully aware and prepared for what motherhood involved. They were not aware of the consequences of their choice to become a mother, and were not aware and ready for the responsibility of this choice.

4.2.3 *Sub-theme 1.3 Expectations of Motherhood*

In Western society, having a baby is represented by popular media as something that simply occurs while life continues as previously, and mothers still have the time and additional energy to see friends and carry on with career building and marital life as previously. All women in this research spoke about not being prepared for any dramatic changes and expecting that their life would carry on as it was before, but with a little person on board.

> **P1 S99** *.... I thought that I will be different and I will find time and energy for my friends and other stuff that I want to do.*
>
> **P7 S10** *I really struggled in the beginning because I think I thought that the baby will just slot into everything, and everything will just carry on like it was before, but just with this little person.*
>
> **P8 S20** *I thought I would be much more together, continuing my life, that she would fit around me and that is not the case.*

All mothers spoke about how they were not prepared for the big changes in their lives. They were expecting to continue their lives that were 'all about me' with a little person on board. Even though some mothers said that they were ready to commit and they needed a change, they had not considered and prepared for the level or responsibility and other challenges that motherhood demands. Most mothers described being shocked by the reality of motherhood:

P4 S12 *And it was not at all what I thought, even despite my sister living across the road from me, who has three kids, and I was quite involved in their lives and did lots of babysitting. So, I was very prepared, but I think you don't know until it is you 24 hours a day…. I did find it a bit shocking.*

Jess (P4) had some experience of practical skills that she gained in looking after her sisters' children, but she describes that she was shocked by the intensity of responsibility looking after her own child.

P2 S44 *I think that day-to-day stuff, the routine, feeding them, changing nappies, comforting them when they are upset, playing with them - None of these things were a surprise, but I honestly feel that nothing prepared me for that moment when you take your baby home and this is your life now, you are responsible for this little person until the day you die.*

Some of the participants had prior experience of working with children, or helping with child-care, but they emphasized how those experiences were different to the reality of being a mother. Women were saying that even though they were prepared and aware of some practical responsibilities in child-bearing, they were not prepared to be dependent to that extent upon this responsibility towards their children and were unsuspecting and unprepared to give up their independence, freedom and control in life.

The expectations of the eight women in this research did not match the reality of their motherhood experiences. In spite of the fact that participants

they were dreaming and longing to have children, actively choosing motherhood, it sounds like they only mildly questioned their ability to cope with mothering.

I believe that the results of Theme 1 demonstrate that the very beginning of the path to the transition to motherhood has begun from a place of unawareness, unpreparedness and therefore the shock of the reality, the consequences and responsibility that the irreversible choice of becoming a mother permitted.

4.3 *Theme 2 Physical Dimension: Embodied Responsibility*

Of all the dilemmas and tensions that we have to contend with, the tension between life and death is the most fundamental. With the birth of a child, a woman becomes a mother. Becoming a mother is one of the greatest experiences in life that reminds us of the reality of change and loss. Addressing the transition within a Physical World, women mainly spoke about possibilities and limitations of embodiment, awareness and anxiety of mortality, connectedness and responsibility for a child.

The sub-themes that will be explored are 2.1 Birth and Death: Facing morality; 2.2 Time and Space with 'the baby under my skin'; 2.3 Always

tired and 2.4 My body as a mother.
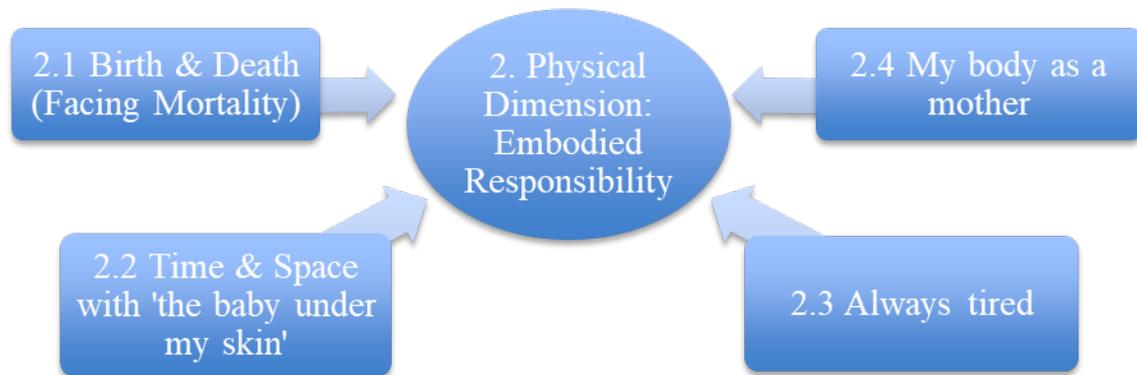
4.3.1 *Sub-Theme 2.1 Birth and Death: Facing Mortality*

The experience of childbirth ties women to the fundamental cycle of life: birth, death, and re-birth. To become a mother a woman gives birth to a new life, her child. Through the experience of facing a new life, a woman, now a mother is facing a death too. Life and death is bound biologically and psychologically, and by greeting one a mother is greeting the other too. Death is a primordial source of anxiety, and mothers in this research have described high levels of anxiety when faced with the fragility of their children, the possibility of loss and their own responsibility for their children's survival. Mothers in this research described experiencing an overwhelming responsibility, a terrifying one, especially during early motherhood.

P1 S50 *Before she was six months. When she was a very tiny, tiny baby, I was panicking. I didn't know what to do.*

P1 S51 *...that very first moment, I didn't know if she was breathing and I was panicking.*

Masha (P1) described feelings of anxiety and helplessness when facing her child's fragile nature, the reality of illness or the possibility of the death of the child to whom she gave life:

P1 S10 *Everything changed because now you are responsible for someone, you have to look after someone who is very precious to you. You feel totally responsible for what you are doing so that your decisions do not affect your child badly.*

Thinking of parental responsibility, the following statement gives a profound insight.

P2 S86 *I do worry that I have burdened another human being with mortality. I feel that I brought a child to this world for my pleasure and he has to accept that he was born and will have to die. I believe it is better to be born than not to be born. If you created life you always have to be there for them. That initial choice was not theirs so we need to support them in life. So I guess that is what parenting is all about.*

Fiona (P2) questions her overwhelming feeling of responsibility through the realisation that by becoming a mother she made a decision for her child to be born and now she is to take responsibility for that decision, her child's life.

Mothers also reflected that through giving birth to a child, they were prompted to face their own mortality. As mothers begin to acknowledge the responsibility for their children, they are forced to acknowledge their own fragility and mortality and consider questions such as 'who will mother my child, if anything will happen to me?'

> **P5 S55** *Before I was careless, I didn't plan many things. I took life as an adventure. Now, I have to think that I have a baby, look after her, be there for her, all her life. Also, I have to look after myself for her. What if anything happens to me? Who will be there for her? ...it is a new responsibility.*

Suzanne (P5) described re-evaluating the quality of her life through the possibility of death. She needs to care about her life now to be able to care for her child. It is like her life and death doesn't belong to her anymore, it is for her child.

Motherhood could prompt the awakening of a more mindful being, when a mother is confronted with her authorship of her own life, the choices and responsibilities in her life, now, as a mother. Through this awareness, a woman becomes more self-aware, aware of her possibilities and limitations, faces her freedom and nothingness, as well as her anxiety.

4.3.2 *Sub-Theme 2.2 Time and Space with 'the baby under my skin'*

Feeling responsible for your child's survival and well-being changed mothers' life-styles and their relationship with time and space.

Women described how before motherhood, time was prioritised and spent on their own needs and interests. They have described feeling more in control over their choices about how to spend time, plan or be spontaneous with their time. Time was measured through working time and leisure time, busy time and free time. Women described a lot of 'me time'. Time could have a more abstract texture, where a woman could float in-between past and future.

Being mothers, women described time through countless repetitive actions, through the developing routines and habits, and ruptured routines, and through good moments and bad moments. Instead of hours and minutes, work time, rest time, me time, etcetera, the days and nights were broken into sleep time, feeding time, bathing time and house work time, but there is no rest time or 'me time' anymore:

> **P1 S8** Before *we were very active .... These were often instant decisions, like waking up and deciding where we were going and what we are going to   do.*

(P1.S 9) Yesss… sometimes, we did plan, but there was also a lot of just spontaneous stuff. We were very active before, we never stayed at home.

P1 S11 *Now, everything changed that affects your lifestyle. Like your life doesn't belong to yourself anymore.*

Marsha (P1) feels that 'life doesn't belong to you anymore, she doesn't measure and control time through her own needs and routine, but her child's needs. As a mother, she became more aware of every minute and every hour, time lost flexibility and become more planned. Time became more 'here and now', but at the same time mothers always have to look ahead:

P4 S8 *As soon as my son was born, I was completely shocked by it all. My life was very different before, everything is much more planned now. (*S14*) I worked out that when you have more of a structure in your life, your child calms down. Yes, it was definitely a shock. (*S22*) I didn't have time to do anything else. I didn't know what was going on in the world except for your little world with your baby. And I think that you are all wound up in your tiredness and everything. I think I found it quite hard.*

Jess (P4) expresses how surprisingly shocking it was for her to change her lifestyle, and how different it is from before. Her time is organised into a routine to accommodate her child's needs. There is no time for anything else, and space feels as 'a little world with your baby. It portrays the feeling of having been cut off from the big world, from her previous life, from

everything she was familiar with and in control of.

Another example of how a mother was describing the change in her life style and her relationship with time:

> **P8 S5** *It is very different. I like things to be ordered, but I have never stuck to a routine before. And now, with my daughter we have been blessed, from six weeks on she has been sticking to her routine. But every day is the same because every day you feed at the same time, you sleep at the same time, you do the same things. That is fantastic for a child but it is not so good for me because there is no spontaneity, I am doing it because of her.*

Hilda (P8) is explaining how 'blessed' she is that she has a routine in caring for her child's needs, but at the same time she is expressing how this is not good for her, because it is not about her. The responsibility for her child changed her priority and value of time.

> **P8 S7** *Actually, I must admit, I don't find any time for me.*
>
> **P8 S11** *I liked to go to gym, I liked to get a facial, but I don't have a chance to do any of those things anymore.*

Women are reporting that there is never enough time for oneself, as a mother. Mothers are prioritising and value their time differently.

> **P1 S16** *I can't waste my time on anything else because I want to spend my time with my daughter. (***S18***) It is like I take it from her. It is not like wasted, but I need to spend it with my child. (***S17***) So I don't miss those precious hours.*

Marsha (P1) is prioritising and valuing time as a precious time, with her

child. She describes how everything loses its value and feels like a waste of time, priorities have changes and values have adapted.

4.3.3 Sub-*Theme 2.3 'Always Tired'*

On the one hand mothers are describing the change in their priorities and values over their time with a sense of deep meaningful dedication that they are talking about with pride and significance.

On the other hand, mothers intensely expressed how tired they were. They reflected that they were expecting to be busy looking after their babies, but they were not prepared for the level of change to their lifestyle and the lack of 'me time' in a mother role, therefore the level of tiredness came as a shocking surprise. Most mothers reflected that the level of tiredness is one of the main challenges in motherhood.

> **P1 S67** *I am struggling, always feeling tired, the fatigue. (***S68)** *I always feel tearful and cry easily. Before, you would never see me cry. (***S69)** *I have a strong and positive mind, even though I am still strong and positive, but this tiredness, hmmm, sometimes I feel that I can't function anymore. (***S70)** *The biggest challenge for me, every evening, is that I am tired. I can't function at work and I am grumpy. It eats my energy, and it effects how I am as a mum and at work. So, the biggest challenge is to find the energy.*

Marsha (P1) speaks about how physical exhaustion affects her life from all

different perspectives, her psychological wellbeing, her performance at work and her role as a mother.

Mothering a child is not full-time work that is measured by eight hours per day, it is a full-life, mind and body state, with no evenings, weekends or holidays. Mothering means to be responsive (responsible) for her child's needs in an on-going way. If we are tired, the advice would be, have a rest or have a good night sleep. But sleep or rest is a luxury in a full-life, on-going mothering job.

Every mother in this research talked about sleep deprivation:

> **P4 S11** *He didn't sleep through the night until 11 months old, so I was quite sleep deprived for months. (***S22***) …. I think that you are all wound up in your tiredness and everything. I found it quite hard. (***S21***) I felt like I was going out of my mind and I felt like I wanted to be who I was before. But I am on   the other side of that world and it is a bit like, 'I don't know who I am anymore' - maybe because I was so tired.*

Similar to Marsha (P1), Jess (P4) was describing how her tiredness was affecting her physical and psychological wellbeing, how she was struggling to adjust to this new lifestyle as a mother, which felt like the other side of the world in comparison to the life she knew before.

Mothers are mothering their children and suspending their own needs. Listening to the words of the mothers in this research, I don't feel that they

are taking for granted their needs, they are fully aware of them, as they are fully aware of their responsibility for their children.

> **P7 S16** *When my body was trying to heal, I needed my sleep. I was tired, and of course a new born baby was up. The biggest thing to me was to be so exhausted and having to carry on. (*__S23__*) … no sleep was my biggest challenge. Just being tired and still having this baby to look after, on my own, we don't have family around, it was very tough.*

Maria (P7) was reflecting on how the responsibility for her child was more important than the responsibility to her own needs, and how difficult it was for her to mother her child on her own, without any help.

4.3.4 *Sub-Theme 2.4 My body as a mother*

It could be said that the most apparent area of change associated with childbirth are in the physical (natural) world. Pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding are all physical experiences. However, I was surprised how the women in this research gave very little significance to describing how they felt differently in their bodies as mothers. These findings are not intended to suggest that new mothers do not experience significant changes in their bodies. There is a lot of attention that has been given to post-natal embodied experiences by a variety of researchers (see Kristeva, 1982; 1986; Oakley, 1979; 1980; Crossley, 1996; Butler, 1997; Stadlen, 2004; Nicolson, et al.,

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2010; Neiterman, 2012; Roth, et al., (2012); McCarthy, 2015).

One the one hand, women were expressing how little they paid attention to their appearance since they became mothers. But on the other hand, several women expressed that they felt lucky to be back to the body shape they had before becoming mothers.

> **P2 S82** *I am very lucky that I didn't put on any baby weight and I had not problems fitting into my old clothes. (***S84)** *I don't ever feel like I have days when I don't look after myself. I still put in the same effort if ever I go anywhere. So not much has changed for me.*

Fiona (P2) describes that she feels lucky that her body did not change shape and she still looks as she did before. Most women during their interview mentioned that they feel happy to be back to the same body size as they were before giving birth.

> **P3 S49** *I was back to my normal size straight after I had my daughter. I was absolutely fine; you would not even know that I had a baby apart from the bump has gone. I felt amazing, I was breastfeeding.*

Examples of Fiona's (P2) and Carina's (P3) words demonstrate how women experienced the pressure of social values to rush back to the look of pre-maternal body, perhaps with an underlying feeling of wanting to stay in control at least of their physical appearance, and being perceived as being in control. It sounds that they are saying that physically they have not changed,

I am still the 'old me'. Something still belongs to me even though every other bit of me belongs to my child.

Some mothers expressed how proud they are in their bodies, to be able to have children.

> **P2 S82** *I feel very proud of what my body has done. I think it is amazing that a woman can do those things. Physically I feel very proud that I had a baby.*

To become a mother, a woman gives a birth to a child through a great physical accomplishment, and through this ability (or, indeed, inability to conceive or carry a child to term or give birth without obstetric intervention) a woman is reminded of her body's possibilities or limitations.

> **P5 S13** *Yes. I feel very pleased with myself…I can be a mother…I can do it…I have my child, and now I feel complete. It feels like an achievement.*

Through the physical achievement of a child's birth, a woman becomes a mother. Suzanne (P5) reflects on how her six-year struggle to become a mother brought her face to face with her embodied self-limitations, and how, equally, it was her body's giving birth to a child that allowed her to revel in her accomplishment as a woman.

Through the passage of the Physical world, through her body, a woman first gets a sense of a connection with her child. With the birth of a child, the mother is also existentially born. With a responsibility for the birth of a child, a mother accepts the responsibility for the child's life. It is almost as if

this responsibility is given to a mother, but at the same time it is a *chosen* responsibility.

All the women in this study made a choice to have a child and to become mothers. Furthermore, these women made a choice to accept motherhood, made a conscious choice to take care of their children, to be responsible for their children. It is an overwhelming responsibility, a responsibility they thought they had anticipated, but were not aware of and not prepared for the reality of it.

As Emmy Van Deurzen (1997) reminds us,

> *'When a baby is born it is almost exclusively in the physical realm: even its relationship with its mother is primarily about sheer survival and the satisfaction of bodily needs'.* (van Deurzen, 1997:104)

So, the first wave of responsibility a mother is experiencing is physical, the biological responsibility for her child's survival and well-being. Her time, her body, herself, all will be transformed through the sense of this responsibility for the other person's life, her child

4.4 *Theme 3 Social Dimensions: Relational Responsibility*

The sub-themes found were: 3.1 Performing motherhood; 3.2 Relationship with a partner: We are more parents then a couple. 3.3 Relating to your mother as a mother; 3.4 Reconnecting with my family: going back to your roots and 3.5 'Old and 'new' friends: separation and belonging.

4.4.1 *Sub-Theme 3.1 Performing motherhood*

Mothers described feeling, not only responsibility for their children's needs, but also responsibility to others, to society, about how they *should* be mothering their children. This awareness could be termed *Relational*

Responsibility, the responsibility and the expectations that women experience being thrust upon them from the outside world.

Women are entering the role of mother with a premeditated (shared, socio-cultural) understanding of what being a mother means, and what is expected from them in their mothering by the society they are living in. Before becoming mothers, women observed and evaluated other mothers on their mothering performance, according to the societal values and beliefs, developing their own expectations about what mothers s*hould* be doing; therefore, when they became mothers they held an awareness of what is expected from them, and how they may be seen and judged by others.

> **P4 S40** *You become very aware of judgments you have made in the past about other parents. Things like baby screaming in a public place and you suddenly become very aware that you are that parent who is doing their best and you look around and people are like, 'oh, it is very annoying'. And you have to learn to get over it.*

Jess (P4) reflects on her awareness of how she was judging other parents before she was a mother herself. She demonstrates her belief that people may find children's crying annoying and therefore they are judgmental about that child's parents. Now she is that parent she feels judged by others. She is aware of how she may be evaluated as a mother by others. Now when she is

that parent, she has already changed and she sees the work of a mother as 'doing her best' and is learning to respond to the look of others in a different manner.

Women demonstrated how they developed their view of a 'good mother' and a 'bad mother'; 'a good mother' is in control of her child, therefore she is coping well. On the other hand, a 'bad mother' is not in control of her child's needs and emotions, therefore, she is not coping well, she is a failure.

> **P7 S39** *I would be thinking that people are looking at me and judging, which I am sure now they were not. But I felt powerless and helpless, I was used to being in control of everything and then I wasn't. I thought that they assumed that I didn't know how to look after my baby. That they thought that I was not a very good mum and I was questioning myself if I was a good mum or not. Every time she cried, I felt like a failure. I felt that I was not good enough and that's why she was crying. I felt that she shouldn't have to cry because I didn't know what to do, other mums seem know what to do.* **(S38)** *I felt very panicky if she cried in public, I felt that people judged me.*

Maria (P7) describes how as a new mother she felt vulnerable and out of control in her role as a mother, when she was trying to learn to connect and understand her child's needs, she felt that she was seen and judged as not a 'good mother', a mother who is not coping and not in control. In Western society, women learned to value being organized and in control of their

actions, they learned to be valued by their performance and sufficiency. Maria (P7) described how she felt powerless and helpless when her child was crying and she could not control him, she felt out of control and not performing her responsibilities well. She felt a failure.

> **P2 S35** *Yes, you know everything you read in the press is all about how you must be breastfeeding, how you must be making them developmentally better, you must be taking them to this class or that class.* (**S37***) In the early days everyone was talking about how to get him to sleep at this time, eat at this time, all the time.*

Fiona (P2) described how she perceived the pressure of social responsibility on her performance as a mother. Her reference to how to be a 'good mother' was the prescribed values and norms of a society on what is best for the child and how a 'good mother' must mother her child. Those 'social expectations' are navigating and setting up the standards by which women measure their mothering, mostly during early motherhood when women are most vulnerable in searching for their own personal meaning of what kind of mother she wants to be.

> **P2 S34** *I know that everything in society is geared towards women feeling bad. I just can't believe how judgmental everybody is about other people's children. It was another massive surprise for me. (***S96***)* **I** *think women are afraid to admit when they struggle and admit it is hard and they are afraid of being judged, afraid of the labels, like she is depressed or not coping well.*

Every woman in this research described evaluating her performance, at least in early motherhood, through other people, they wanted to be seen as 'good mothers'.

One of the strongest examples in this research of how new mothers were evaluating their performance through the societal values is in describing their experiences regarding breastfeeding. Each woman participated in this research described how they felt judged mostly on their ability to breastfeed. The primal task of a mother is to nourish her child for her child's survival. However, in a Western culture it becomes a socially constructed 'act'. By this I mean that there is much in the literature which indicates how positive judgments in relation to infant feeding methods may increase the mother's self-confidence, whereas negative judgments produce reduced confidence and maternal wellbeing (Grosz, 1994; Shaw, 2004; Hoddinott et al., 2012; Taylor & Wallace, 2012; Thomson & Dykes, 2011; Thomson, et al., 2014; McCarthy, 2015; Thompson et al., 2014).

I decided to address this topic within the social responsibility theme because every mother in this research described breastfeeding as a strong expectation of society on her mothering and being judged by others as a mother.

For example, Fiona (P2) spoke about her feeling of being judged and made to feel as a 'bad mother' when she couldn't meet the expectations of society

to breastfeed her baby:

> **P2 S32** *Breastfeeding did not go well and I felt hugely guilty because everywhere you go people assume you are breast feeding and don't even consider, in middle class of course, that you didn't.* *(***S39***)* **At** *the beginning, I was enormously ashamed every time I took formula out of my bag, feeding my baby from the bottle and all my friends were breast feeding.*

> **P7 S19** *Everyone was just telling me to breast feed - the midwife, the doctor, it was like there was no other option. I felt like the worst mother in the world because I was considering formula. (***S26***) I think it is too much pressure on mothers to breast feed. (***S31***) You feel on your own if you don't breast feed. I signed up for an NCT course, but I cancelled it because I felt that they will be breastfeeding. I didn't want to be in a room with lots of mums who were breastfeeding and I would be getting a bottle out, I just didn't want to deal with that.*

> **P6 S97** *People were very judgmental of the fact that I was not breastfeeding. (***S100***) Oh, very difficult. Because I felt guilty as I was, and I didn't need to be told that. Because it made me feel even worse, because I was thinking that maybe I am a bad mother.*

> **P8 S80** *There are nutcases over there about breast feeding, and I got tutted a lot by 'others' in coffee shops when I took out a bottle. People would think 'Oh my God, you are not breast feeding? (***S82***) I always felt that I had to apologies and explain to people constantly why I was not breast feeding   my child.*

Seven out of eight mothers interviewed in this research experienced problems with breastfeeding. However, they felt lonely in their experience, felt judged by others and felt guilty. Their perceived failure made them feel they were 'bad mothers'. Mothers are very vocal in describing how they felt they were not performing in line with social responsibilities in their mothering and therefore felt they were 'bad mothers'.

All mothers in this research described how they felt pressure and expectation from others about how they should be mothering their children, and were sensitive to how they were seen and perceived by others as mothers. Mothers felt judged by others if they were not fulfilling the expectations they believed were prescribed to the role of a mother. However, some mothers have recognised and admitted that the expectations they were experiencing partially came from within themselves:

> **P2 S43** *I think that all the pressure that was on me was internalised, it has not been from my husband or my family, it is all my perception of what they might think.*

> **P4 S42** *I realised that people make their judgements, but it is more about what you are worried about yourself. So, I am trying not to be so self-conscious about things…… Those people judging will move on and think of something else. It is more you who gets worried about it all.*

> **P7 S32** *Yes, I think people do judge, probable not as much as you judge yourself.*

But I know that before having my daughter I would have judged. I would   never

judge anyone now. I felt like a failure. I felt like a bad mum.

Those mothers demonstrate how a sense of social responsibility molded their own moral expectations of themselves as mothers, and their own judgments on their mothering, the socially constructed meaning of what it means to be a 'good mother' or a 'bad mother'.

Through the social responsibility theme we can observe how women's position in society changes and being a mother puts a lot of pressure on a woman to demonstrate to others that she is a 'good mother' and can look after her child. Women demonstrated how they felt that a mother role is socially contracted and always observed and judged by others. Before childbirth, a woman was responsible only for her own actions and her presentation and acceptability to others, and now she is responsible for both her own actions and her child's actions too, and they both have to be performed and accepted by the society they are living in.

Overall, it could be argued that maternal consciousness is grounded in social relationships and their way of mothering. The specific form of women's feelings of intense responsibility for their children flow partly from cultural assumptions about children and their needs and how they should be mothering. For example, the belief that children are emotionally fragile

implies that their psychological security is contingent on the constant availability of their mothers. Thus when things go wrong, mothers are blamed, or blame themselves, for not caring enough. Cultural beliefs that women are 'ultimately responsible' for their children and their needs, can shape women's roles as mothers, and their transition to motherhood.

4.4.2 *Sub-Theme 3.2 Relationship with a partner: We are more parents than a couple.*

From the participants' stories, we could observe how socio-cultural messages about motherhood has led them to accept or made to believe that the responsibility for their children must be their first priority in life. This consciousness of full responsibility appeared to also reflect their relationship with partners. Women described how their relationships with their partners took a back seat, became 'not a priority'. Every mother in this research described how the relationship with their partners changed, they were 'more parents than a couple'.

> **P1 S89** *Now we are more into her, she comes first......Before it was different, but now he is not my first priority, at least not at this very moment. He probably feels left out, and that we don't have time for us as a couple. We are more parents than a couple. (***S93)** *It is not great. It's upsetting me, but as I said at the moment, she*

is my priority.

Masha P1 described how her child became her first priority and her time belonged to her child instead of her husband. She described how they are relating to each other more as parents then as a couple, a couple as it used to be before. She admits that the dynamic of their relationship is upsetting her, but her mothering responsibility is her priority. She feels the loss of their connection as a couple that they used to have.

> **P5 S1** *I have been married for 10 years. . . (**S36**) The relationship with my husband changed. We don't have time for each other like we did before (**S37**) I feel like our lives are going parallel, he is going his way and I am going my way and the baby is in the middle. We talk mostly about the baby and live our lives only like parents.*

Suzanne (P5) is another example of how the mothers experience changed in the dynamic of their relationship with partners, from a twosome to a threesome. She reflects that they used to have time and attention for each other, but now they are parents their priorities have changed. She also reflects on the loss of their connection to each other as a couple.

I feel that Carol's (P6) reflection on the changes to her relationship with her partner demonstrates well the process of the new dynamic between parents.

> **P6 S114** *Parenthood can definitely take over from the relationship, at the beginning . . . (**S115***) You need to find your feet as parents and find that both of*

you are new people. The child demands all your attention and both of your priorities, and it is so easy to fall into it, and very easy to forget why you are together, how to make each other happy and you just constantly concentrate on the negative things because you are tired, you are both looking at things differently. Definitely that was the toughest thing for me.

Carol (P6) is describing herself and her husband as 'new people', people with different priorities and values, people who look at things differently, relating to each other differently. Her sentiments indicate a transitional process where a couple are learning to be parents and relate to each other in a new way. Women are relating to their husbands as mothers to fathers of their children, and vice versa. It is a new connection, new relationship with new priorities and new values, and parents are learning to connect with each other as parents. This process contains a loss of a previous connection or relationship when a couple connected to each other as two people who were there primarily for each other. And now, as parents, they are a dynamic of three and they are both there for the child as well as for each other.

Even though, every woman in this research described the loss of the previous connection with their partners as a couple, they all highlighted how much they value their partners as fathers.

P2 S53 *We have moments when the two of us are just standing over his cot and watching him sleeping and it is just amazing.*

P5 S41 *He is a very helpful husband. He is very protective over our baby . . .*

(S43) It is better now, we got used to the baby and are more relaxed . . .

(S38) It is kind of changing now. We went out once recently because I could leave my baby with a friend for a few hours.

P7 S42 *My partner was absolutely amazing; I knew he would be a good dad, but I didn't realise that he would be as amazing as he was. I didn't realise how much I would need him and his support, I still do.*

Women are describing seeing the connection between their partners with their children as amazing. Every woman in this research described the transition from feeling the loss of a previous relationship as a couple to an opportunity of establishing a new relationship as parents.

4.4.3 *Sub-Theme 3.3 Relating to your mother as a mother*

All women participated in this research described how being a mother changed their priorities and how their everyday lives are situated around their children. This new role and new position in the world not only influenced their relationship with their partners, but with extended families too.

First of all, woman addressed their relationship with their own mothers. Every woman had her own story to tell, they all had their unique relationship

with mothers and different expectations towards their mothers, but every woman spoke about re-visiting and re-evaluating the relationship with their mothers, now that they had become mothers themselves.

> **P1 S84** *First of all with my mum, I think it is important. Now I understand her and why she was worried at many points of my life. Now I know that I want to know exactly everything about my daughter, if she has eaten, if she is happy. Now I am sharing mum's worries for me and sympathizing a bit more. Now I am spending more time with my mum and I want to improve our relationship. (***S85***) I am listening to her more. Now I am sometimes agreeing just to please her, just to show that I appreciate her. And I think it is great because it opens your eyes to a different perspective. So I think our relationship is much better.*

Masha's (P1) story about her new connection with her mother is a story about using her own experiences of motherhood to enhance her understanding of her mother's own experiences. She could relate to her mother from the point of view of another mother, they share similar feelings and can understand each other more.

> **P2 S22** *I don't have that close relationship with my mum, but since I had my son, I miss her in a very fundamental way. Because I know I can trust her 100% and she is not going to judge you for struggle to cope . . . (***S24***) I definitely have more respect for my mother and patience with her.*

Fiona (P2) reflects that even though the relationship with her mother was not

a close one, when she became a mother herself, she could relate to her mother differently. She feels appreciation towards her mother because now she can share her experiences. Moreover, she is not only re-connecting with her mother-to-mother, but also child-to-mother, as a child who needs her mother's love, understanding and support.

Not every participant expressed positive change in the relationship with their mothers. Carol (P6) described her relationship with her mother as always unhealthy and complicated. Becoming a mother herself prompted her to become more conscious about the relationship with her own mother, and she compared her identity as a mother with the way her mother was mothering her.

> **P6 S68** *My relationship with my mother is almost unhealthy, it always has been . . I was always determined, all my adult life, that I would never be like her. Yes, I think our relationship has changed, maybe not in a bad way, but I am more aware…*

Women described a new awareness, positive or negative, of a re-connection with their own mothers and an awareness of how they themselves were mothered. Some women appreciated the hard job their mothers had done and some would not want to be like their own mothers. Through this re-connection with their own childhood and how they were mothered, women are constructing their own mothering style.

4.4.4 *Sub-Theme 3.4 Re-connecting with my family: Going back to your roots*

During the interviews, all eight women spoke about their families, how they were recognising and valuing the importance of family support, irrespective of whether family support is available to them or not. Women described how they all became closer to their families, more involved and feeling they belonged. They described how, now that they are mothers, they are re-connecting and re-constructing their relationship with their families as a parent. They explained that they are seen and accepted by their families in a different way, as mothers and parents.

> **P4 S28** *I think it made the difference with all my family. I think I became more about family. Before I was more about my friends, and suddenly you have a child and you become closer to your family . . . (S30) One of my brothers has kids and I see him much more now, and his wife. They all want to come and see my baby, nice. I think it brings family together . . . (S25) With my sister we have much more in common now because she has kids already.*

Jess (P4) describes how, before motherhood, she prioritized spending her time with friends she had more in common with, and now, being a mother, she feels closer to her family. Her values changed and her connection with her family was re-constructed. She describes how from being siblings who had their own different lives and interests, she and her brother re-connected

through being parents who once again belonged to the same family unit.

> **P6 S78** *I became much closer to my brothers. They all had children already, and they now look at me differently, they treat me differently. They are looking at   me now as a mother of their first nephew because they all have girls. They all adore him and they are very happy for me, so it is just very different.*

Both mothers are mentioning how they value that their children are being loved by their families. The women described making more effort to be part of their families because they value their children growing up within a bigger family unit. For example, Carina (P3) speaks about how important it is for her that her daughter has a relationship with her grandmother:

> **P3 S43** *When I was younger, we didn't have a good relationship with my mother. I think, I only make an effort now because I want Sofia to have a grandmother.*

A similar example is from Fiona (P2) who talks of how the relationship with her sister changed. Even though her sister is not a parent and they not connecting as parents, their relationship has improved because they are closer as a family now.

> **P2 S65** *I have a sister but she doesn't have kids. I don't think she appreciates or understands how hard it is . . . (***S66***) I would say the relationship with my sister became better, definitely. We had a very rocky relationship at times, but she makes a special effort for my son and she really wants to be involved. She always comes for his birthday; she is enormously helpful. All this makes our relationship*

better . . . (S67) I think I have become closer to my family than before.

Six women out of the eight interviewed for this research, had no family around them and they all reflected on how difficult it is for them, and how they were missing the support and the connections with their families.

> **P7 S40** *My own mother died when I was 21, so I think I missed having some sort of mother figure around. I think having some sort of support is important. (S41) Of course I have friends and they are great, but for someone to just take over sometimes and help out is incredible. I felt that I didn't have family support, it is hard when you don't have any family support . . . (S78) One relationship that has really changed, I became much closer to my partner's parents. I am really grateful for their support with the baby, we have definitely grown closer.*

> **P2 S14** *I don't have family here and I really believe that we are not meant to raise our children on our own.*

I believe that during the transition to motherhood women reflect upon their shifting understanding of what a family unit is and what it means to them, especially in the context of their children's upbringing.

> **P1 S111** *The meaning of my life is my daughter, but also it is my family. Not just my extended family, not just my mum, my grandmothers, and my godmothers. They are happier. Before, it was all the same, now they can look at the progress of my child. Like what she will be doing next summer. It is life awakened for everyone. Everyone became more alive. It gave energy to everyone, more*

happiness in the air.

Women described becoming closer to their families not just on a practical level, but also on a spiritual level. The feelings of belonging, connection and sharing of love towards their children with their families were prompting women to re-construct their relationships with their families. They were spending more time with their families than before, they felt more connected with their family members since becoming mothers, and they made more effort towards their families as they valued their effort and support.

4.4.5 *Sub-Theme 3.5 'Old' and 'New' friends: Separation and Belonging*

Motherhood demands time, involvement and the postponement of a mother's own needs and desires. Having a child transforms the mother's everyday life significantly, her time belongs to her child's needs for whom she feels responsible. Being a mother changes a woman's priorities, re-constructs her relationship to time and space, and her proximity to others within that space. Therefore, mothers reflected on how their relationship changed, not only with their immediate and extended families, but with their friends and colleagues.

P4 S7 *Yes, I definitely feel different now. My life was very much more around my*

social life, my friends, my work, going out with my husband, being much more

spontaneous

Jess (P4) also reflected on her time before motherhood as more spontaneous and available for socialising with friends. Similar to Masha (P1) she remembers her life before motherhood as very different than it is now as a mother.

In addressing their lives as mothers, women were describing significant changes in their social lives and relationships with the friends they used to socialise with. Every woman spoke about changes to their priorities, adopting new motherly responsibilities, new concepts of time and space which influenced their connection with friends.

> **P1 S98** *To be honest now I understand my friends who had kids before me. How they just could disappear for months. Because time just absorbs you, there are no weekends, no time. Before I wondered why it was so difficult to contact or meet with friends. (***S100***) I think now I could see who my true friends are, because even some friends who don't have children still come and see us. Only that I would not join them in activities that I used to before, going to exhibitions, going to the parties.*

First of all, Masha (P1) described how she recognised her own disconnection with friends who had children before her and 'despaired' about their social life. Secondly, she highlights that her new social situation filtered and

indicated friendships that were constructed beyond just social interests.

The examples above showed how Masha's (P1) and Jess's (P4) description of their social life before motherhood were quite similar. Also, both mothers expressed similarity in describing the changes with their friendships:

P4 S25 *I think our relationship changed with people who are already parents… we have so much in common now…*

P4 S9 *Seeing my friends is not easy anymore . . .* **(S45)** *Two of my very best friends who do not have kids are trying to do everything they can to help me. They come over. So with them I don't feel more or less close. With other friends, they will make less effort to come to see us and I will see them less. And they probably would not understand us anyway. Also, I have probably become less close to my colleagues at work . . . (*S46**)** *I guess some of my friends would not call me if they want to do something fun, I guess it is a bit sad.*

Comparable to Masha (P1), Jess (P4) reflects that being a mother changed the dynamic between the friends who already had children; they have more in common now. I believe she is saying that they share experiences and therefore understand each other more. On the other hand, friends who do not children don't share her time-space and her priorities and they are not as close as before.

I included one more example because I feel that Carol's (P6) sentiments summarise the context of re-constructing the social situations of new

mothers and their relationships with friends.

> **P6 S81** *The relationship with my friends definitely changed. So with my single friends…. they distance themselves from me because they don't get it. They don't understand that I don't have the same flexibility. (S82) It was very hard for me, yes hard…But, I suppose I just got over it because for me my son is more important. (S108) And my friends in Ireland all have children. I was the only one who didn't have kids and who wanted to be a mum so badly. And they reminded me of it. So now I am quite happy to be vulnerable with them because they get me now and I get them and I like the reassurance I get from them. (S85) But I have made a lot of friends since I've had my son. And I think that I have a good relationship with all of them.*

Carol (P6) speaks about how she lost her connection with her single friends, but feels a sense of belonging and is supported by her friends who have children. Similar to P1 and P2, and all other participants in this research, Carol (P6) describes how her new role as a mother replaced her position with others, and re-constructed her relationships with her friends. She became closer with people who she has more in common with, more similarities in values and interests, and she distanced herself from people with whom she did not share those interests any longer. Instead, she describes making new friends with other mothers with whom she shares experiences and interests.

In addressing the changes within their friendships, most mothers began to

describe the process of disconnecting with old friends and then developing new connections and building new friendships.

> **P1 S103** *I have met new friends and a new road has opened to me. All of them are local mums who attended groups with their children. We would go for walks, coffee, go to playgrounds, so it was our socializing. . . (**S104***) That's how I found my style as a mum. . . (**S105***) . . . because we were speaking about the same topics. They understand and accept you; they love your baby. So it was great. I felt more powerful because now I knew where I was and what I was doing. So, I never felt alone, that is a good thing. You know, it was a great support to have these groups. . . (**S108***) It helped me to stay in a state of balance . . .*

Masha (P1) described her new social life with friends who had the same priorities and interests at the time, with whom she felt connected, understood and supported. She highlighted how great and important those friendships were for her and how it helped her on a practical level but also on psychological level in her transition to motherhood.

> **P4 S23** *I had one particular friend who lives nearby and I would just go there and we would just sit there and go, 'coo', and then feel much better, afterwards . . . (**S24***) Yes, I kind of think that I am the only one and I am doing everything badly. It feels better when you see other people who may be dealing, not exactly with the same problem, but it does sort of materialise that their life is not marvelous either, or how I imagined it from the outside. I think that really helped.*

Jess (P4) also described how meeting with other mothers helped her to feel a

sense of belonging and normalised her new experiences as a mother.

> **P5 S47** *I met a very good friend when I was pregnant and since I had my baby we are going everywhere together. I can say that I did find new friends. It is like my child showed me who my real friends are. Before I had a baby, I could do lots of things for my friends, but now I need more support, mostly when I am sad.*

> **P5 S50** *I can see my new mummy friend is doing the same, and some of my other friends with babies. But now we can all go out together and help each other with children. We chat about this and that. I find it very helpful. It comforts me and confirms that I am doing the right thing.*

Maria (P5) describes similar experiences to other mothers in this research. They all described this new community of mothers that they belong to now and how they support each other through their transition to motherhood. Most women in this research reported that not all those friendships were long-term, but at that time they were an essential support network for them - an opportunity to compare themselves to other mothers and learn from each other on how to be a mother and to normalize overwhelming and anxiety provoking experiences.

All mothers in this research described changes to their social life-style and changes to their friendships. From spending most of their free time in outdoor activities socializing with friends, they went to spending most of their time at home with their children and families, cut off from the social

world they used to belong to. However, they soon found a new world, a world of mothers who were in a similar situation to them and who shared their experiences. Their social circumstances had changed and so their circle of friends had changed accordingly.

Overall, looking at the changes to the social worlds of new mothers, I observed how women experience the loss of a world they used to belong to, finally settling into a new world where they belong now as mothers, as parents. Those worlds are significantly different. Before motherhood they were responsible mainly for themselves and their choices about how to spend their time. In this new world as mothers, they experienced sudden and extreme responsibility for the 'other' (their children) and their priorities were re-focused on their children's needs. In the 'before motherhood' world, women felt belonging and connectedness with people with whom they shared common interests, but when those interests deviated, women felt they no longer belonged to that world any more. As mothers, women discovered a new world with a new membership, and they built new connections with people who once again shared their interests, values and priorities. Women described how they built new friendships with local mothers and how this new belonging and sense of connectedness helped them in their transition to motherhood.

4.5 *Theme 4 Personal Dimension: Personal Responsibility*

The Personal dimension is concerned with issues of responsibility, choice, freedom and personal integrity. The 'self' is the product of the choices and connections with the 'world' we have made and will make. Existentially, a sense of self is the dynamic center of gravity of a person's network of physical, social, personal and spiritual worlds and these networks are continuously re-ordered and re-balanced throughout life. The self shifts and changes a little bit each day and adjusts to new situations (van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). Everything we do, every choice we make, is an act of self-expression and self-definition.

Observing the experiences of mothers in this research from the existential theoretical perspective of the personal world (dimension) allowed me to see how the new 'role' of mother influenced women's 'being-in-the-world', and their existence.

The Sub-themes that emerged within this theme are as follows: Sub-theme 4.1 From self-centered to self-giving; Sub-theme 4.2 The vulnerability of responsibility; Sub-theme 4.3 find my feet as a mother'; Sub-theme 4.4 Re-balancing identities and Sub-theme 4.5 The transformative power of motherhood.

Although the women in this study described how they 'always wanted' to be mothers and had come to claim a strong commitment to motherhood by the time they gave birth, the majority of these women were unaware and unprepared for the changes this new identity as a mother generates. Through the connectedness and responsibility for a child, motherhood offers a new identity for a woman that requires a process of re-defining the self. Once identified as a spouse, a daughter, a friend and/or a worker, the new role of a mother can bring about complex feelings regarding personal identity.

4.2 The Vulnerability of Responsibility

4.1 From 'self-centered' to 'self-giving'

4.3 Find my feet as a mother

4.5 The transformative power of motherhood.

4. Personal Dimension: Personal Responsibility

4.4 Re-balancing identities
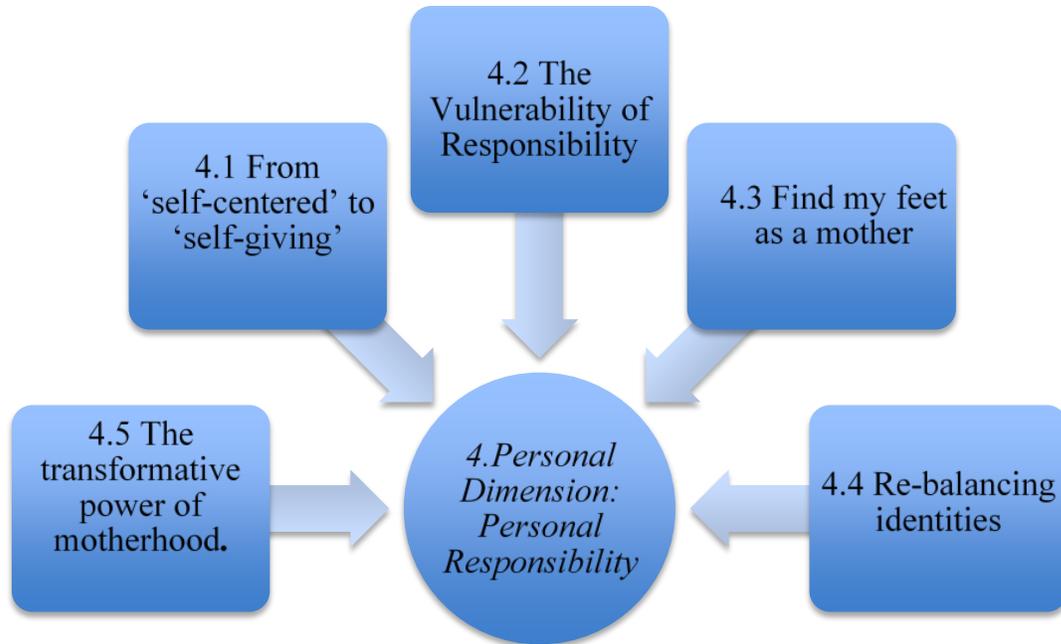
4.5.1 *Sub-Theme 4.1   From 'self-centered' to 'self-giving'.*

Women in this research described how developing an identity as a mother influenced their relationship with their selves and transformed their values, priorities and life choices. They described a transition from a position in their 'lifeworld' as 'number one' for oneself (self-centered) to a position where they are choosing and accepting their openness and responsiveness to the 'Other', their child; and to the 'lifeworld' where value and meaning are expanded to the 'other' and there is an ability and willingness to put the 'Other' before oneself.

For example, Carina (P2) expressed a clear definition between her choices and priorities before becoming a mother, a life that was all about her, to a

life as a mother when her priorities and choices are focused on her child's needs:

> **P3 S8** *I liked my independence, liked my own time. I liked going to gym. I liked my holidays, going skiing. (**S9***) I liked shopping, spending money. I do not do that now, because having a baby changes your priorities, like spending money. I now make sure my baby has everything.*

Carina, as most women interviewed in this research, described how the life she knew, the life that was self-regulated, self-defined and self-contained was changed by motherhood, but that this was fundamentally a change in her priorities and was experienced as a conscious choice.

> **P3 S33** *We lost our identity of being. (**S63***) I am a mum now. (S64) …. now you are just thinking about your baby's upbringing, safety and what is best for her. She's become number one. (**S66***) I don't think about myself anymore… I'd rather give everything to my daughter.*

Another example of how a mother became selfless is Masha's (P1) words,

> **P1 S13** *Before I was selfish. Well, not selfish but let's say I was like any other woman: I looked after myself. Now I have to forget about it. (**S37***) Yes, I am a mum. (**S89***). My child is my priority now, she comes first.*

Masha (P1) describes herself before motherhood as selfish, in other words self-focused, 'like any other women' before becoming a mother. She also describes a loss of 'being-in-the-world' where she was a priority for herself.

Her identity as a mother changed her priorities, her child comes first, he is the priority. Early motherhood demands a woman to put on hold almost every aspect of her life, and this could feel like a loss, a loss of a relationship she had with herself, an identity she knew all her life. However, mothers in this research described their sacrifices as their choices, with a sense of loss and at the same time with sense of pride.

Jess (P4) is another example how a mother's role has influenced her choices in life, her priorities and personal needs.

> **P4 S56** *My life is now pretty much around my son and everything I think and do and plan for is around him…. the way I think and what motivates me and the things I want are all associated with what would be good for my son rather than me. (***S68***) So you always have to be…not the priority. It sounds very sad. I chose to have a child and now I have what I wanted. I know it sounds sad, like what about me, but it is what I wanted.*

Jess (P4) describes her life as being 'All about her child', her priorities and motivations are preoccupied by her motherly responsibility for her child's well-being. Jess reflects on her loss because her life is not about her anymore, but she reflects that it is her choice. Indeed, Jess and the other women in this research did choose (or planned) to have children, they chose to become mothers, but as mothers they are choosing how to mother their

children and accepting an awareness of their responsibility for their choices.

Suzanne (P5) described in a similar manner that all her choices are about what is good for her child and not for herself.

> **P5 S60** Yes, my baby is my priority and everything we do is evaluating if it is good for her. So it is not about me anymore, and the meaning of my life is my baby. (**S6**) I have to compromise…. All I care about is what is good for her.

All women reflected on changes to their values, priorities and choices from self-centered, 'all about myself' to self-giving, 'it is all about my child'. Women in this study, describe those changes and their choices with a sense of loss and sacrifice, as well as pride at the same time, for creating meaning out of motherhood.

For example, P2 is explaining that the shift in her priorities towards her child's needs come naturally to her,

> **P2 S48** *I think nature is amazing because I haven't had a lot of difficulty putting him first.*

> **P8 S108** *It is very interesting. From day one she was inside me; I did everything for her. Maybe it is a maternal instinct, I don't know if that exists. It suddenly clicked, and overnight I have someone else to look after too.*

When I read through these passages, I could observe how mothers were describing something meaningful to them. An incredible, meaningful transition from a focus on oneself to a significant 'other', a shift that

changed one's relationship with oneself and prompted a re-evaluation of one's meaning in life. I believe it is a crucial component in a women's transition to motherhood within a Personal World, the re-focus of life from 'I' to 'other'. Some mothers are describing themselves before motherhood as, Masha *(P1 S13) before I was selfish or* Maria *(P7 S51) I am much less selfish now*. Within those words, I believe I can sense a tension between two concepts, feelings of loss and gain, experienced at the same time.

4.5.2 *Sub-Theme 4.2 The Vulnerability of Responsibility.*

According to the Oxford dictionary, the definition of responsibility is the state of having a duty towards someone, a control over someone or something. These duties involve authority, control, power, leadership and management. At the same time, there is responsibility and moral obligation to behave correctly towards the one you are accountable to. This also generates self-blame, feelings of fault and guilt.

Early motherhood is the beginning of a process towards agency that takes seriously the presence, dependency and needs of the other, the baby. Early motherhood and caring for the infant involved moral ambiguity related to the questions of responsibility and vulnerability. Responsibility involves moral ambiguities over how to understand and fulfill the baby's needs and

wellbeing. New mothers are suddenly confronted with these choices every single day. The findings of this study indicated that mothers accepted the responsibility for the 'other' their children, and motherhood brought transformation in their value system and ethic of care.

Every mother in this research reflected upon the overwhelming experience of the responsibility for their children, for the 'other', which was another unexpected surprise motherhood held for them.

Fiona (P2) in her interview spoke about the weight of responsibility for her child as the main overwhelming change in her transition to motherhood.

> **P2 S47**. *nothing compared to that moment when you realised that you are responsible for this person, and everything else comes second. (***S44***) ...you are responsible for this little person until the day you die. (***S80***) We make decisions about everything, about what is best for him. All these decisions need to be perfect and I do find it hard sometimes to understand that I can get it wrong and he will be ok. That's the part I find the most difficult, I need to forgive myself, but I find it hard...*

Fiona is describing her deep awareness of responsibility for her decisions, her choices regarding her child's wellbeing and her child's future. This decision on how to mother, what is wrong and right for your child, what it means to be 'a good mother' or 'a bad mother', all those decisions and choices need to be re-evaluated every minute by mothers:

P2 S81 *At work, if you are doing a bad job there are consequences, but they are not serious, and it is easier to accept it. I do get very annoyed if I do something psychologically damaging and I realise that I shout just one time too many and make him aggressive because he has learned that from me. I don't want to mess my child up.*

Fiona's (P2) words sounds like a description of a very heavy burden of accepted responsibility that causes her a high level of anxiety. This responsibility is very meaningful to her. She describes feeling fully responsible for her child's being-in-the-world, present and future; she is an ultimate author holding the full power in her actions that can influence her child's existence, 'her project'. It is not a job that she can quit, the choices have to be made and the responsibility has to be faced and accepted.

Masha (P1) described how the feeling of responsibility for her child is a permanent state, she always has her child in mind, and experiences responsibility for her child's life, present and future, even when she is not with her child:

P1 S10 *now you are responsible for someone, you have to look after someone who is very precious to you. You feel totally responsible for what you are doing so that your decisions do not affect your child badly. (***S95***) …I am still always in charge of her needs, even when I am at work. (***S117)*** Motherhood is a great thing that comes with lots of responsibilities and sacrifice.*

Masha (P1) also reflects how motherhood brings responsibility and sacrifice,

which I could interpret she perceives as sacrifice of freedom and independence. As a mother she is in charge, she is responsible, she is an authority or an author over her child's 'being'. This position comes with moral obligations, being accountable for your decisions, holding the blame for your actions and at times feeling guilty as the result of it.

All mothers in this research described that they are accountable to decide what is best for their children, the mother has to evaluate and choose between 'good' and 'bad', she has to face her values, her beliefs, her fears, her own position in the world, her own existential values.

> **P2 S9** *… actually guilt is a huge part of being a mother… and that has been a massive surprise for me. (***S12***) …. I feel that I am not a perfect mum. I feel massively disappointed in myself …*

Mothers are evaluating and questioning their mothering, they have to choose how to mother. It is not an easy position and it can originate feelings of anxiety and guilt, loneliness and groundlessness, loss of control and freedom, and loss of self-confidence:

> **P2 S9** *… guilt is a huge part of being a mother. You feel guilty when you are distracted and not playing with them, when I take a shower and he is just waiting for me, I feel guilty when I am angry with him and when I am frustrated.*

Guilt is the dark shadow of responsibility, an echo of a sense of 'wrong-doing', a sense of 'badness'. The strengthened awareness and acceptance of

responsibility and accountability for their children strengthens mothers' feelings of guilt. Mothers can no longer fall into the comfort of avoiding responsibility for their choices. They are the ones who decided the roles and the boundaries, they are the ones evaluating their own choices and they are the ones who hold themselves responsible for their decisions.

Moreover, mothers in this research indicated that this motherly responsibility for their children is accepted as a permanent state. Even when women are away from their children, they are still responsible for their children's well-being:

> **P1 S95** *... it is not easy to be a full-time mum and work full-time. I am still a full-time mum. I mean I am still always in charge of her needs, even when I am at work.*

> **P6 S49** *So I am very conscious of his needs. When I am coming out of the door, I have to think that he will be fine...*

Mothers are reflecting on how they always feel responsible and conscious of their children's needs, which can be an exhausting duty that places mothers in a vulnerable position where they feel anxiety, guilt and at times isolation. This awareness of responsibility for your choices requires mothers to have an awareness of their values, their relationships with oneself and with others. This awareness of responsibility encourages a more authentic way of living.

4.5.3 *Sub-Theme 4.3 Find my feet as a mother*

Once a mother has accepted the responsibility for her child, she is confronted with the dilemma 'how should I mother?', 'what type of mother I want to be?', 'What values and beliefs are important to me?' and 'what would I teach to my child?'. Therefore, a new identity as a mother requires a woman to re-evaluate and re-construct her sense of self through an active process of becoming more authentic to herself. Actively or passively, a mother acts as 'a teacher of life' for her child, therefore, she is faced with a decision about what type of teacher she would be and what she would teach to her child.

Even though there are many books and professional advice available on childcare, each mother gradually realised that there is no specific manual for how to mother their own child, and they have to figure it out for themselves:

> **P2 S36** *I think I decided quite early that I will be choosing my own paths with parenting. I didn't believe in reading lots of books. I felt that all the books my friends were reading were so restrictive, saying what a baby should or should not do. I thought, I don't have to be like that, I don't have to have pressure on me to make him be or do things.*

This job is yours for the rest of your life and you are the one who will decide how this job will be done, on a daily basis. Also, there are much greater consequences from every step you make and every decision you take, and

you are the one who will be blamed for it by yourself and others. Every mother in this research described the journey from feeling lost and anxious to finding her own ways to mother with self-confidence in this new role:

> **P1 S76** *At the beginning I was lost. I wasn't sure what was going on at all…. But now I have developed a good understanding of what she wants from me and what I want from me as a mum. (***S78***) I develop my own mothering-style. (***S73)*** *I don't like it when anyone advises me how to be a mum, because I believe that every mother has a feeling if something is going wrong, with their child's health or development.*

Masha (P1) is describing how she did not have the knowledge of looking after her baby, feeling panicky and lost. But after some time, she felt as 'a natural mum', she learned to understand her baby's needs. But it is not just her baby's need but her own needs as a mother that was an important component in building confidence as a mother. Masha (P1) is talking about developing her own mothering style, where she has to decide what type of mother she wants to be and fulfill her own values in mothering. She learned to trust herself and her judgments regarding her mothering and rely less on expectations of 'others' on her mothering.

> **P2 S43** *I think that all the pressure that was on me was internalised . . . it was all my perception of what they might think. Public expectations are not a problem for me anymore, I feel more confident as a parent, I know my son better than*

anybody.

Similar to Masha (P1), Fiona (P2) described finding her own path in mothering and build her confidence as a mother. It took some time for Fiona (P2) to re-assess and re-build her values in her role as a mother - 'I know my child best*'*, she said.

> **P4 S12** *I would say it took me about five months at least to think…'what is happening (***S50***) You re-evaluate who you are, what you are capable of. I think I remember that there are different stages, almost every two months, when you reassess who you are and what you are doing.*

Jess (P4) is describing the journey of mothering when you become aware of your values, your existential limitations and possibilities. On this journey, a woman re-evaluates 'who you are', her relationship with herself is re-constructed, her personal world is re-shaped.

Every woman in this research described a journey of personal re-evaluation that was unavoidable in making decisions on how to mother their children. It became clear that women in this research had barely contemplated the way in which it would disrupt their existential being and throw their familiar lives into chaos.

> **P7 S11** *Of course she came along and turned our lives upside down. I think at the beginning I really struggled with that because I couldn't accept the changes… (***S13***) I would say probably the first six months; it was a very tough time.*

(S32) …. I felt like a failure. I felt like a bad mum. (S29) As a first-time mother you try to find the best for your baby… (S39) I didn't know the baby as well as I do now, so I was checking if she was hungry or needed changing and it would take some time. But I felt powerless and helpless, I was used to being in control of everything and then I wasn't. …I was questioning myself if I was a good mum or not. Every time she cried, I felt like a failure. Now it seems crazy because babies just cry, that is the way they communicate. I felt that I was not good enough and that's why she was crying. I felt that she shouldn't have to cry because I didn't know what to do, other mums seem know what to do.

(S43) I read many books, books that tell you how to make your baby sleep and how to do this and the other. There was so much conflicting advice, so I just gave up, I didn't have the time and energy to read them. But we muddled through, she is such a happy little girl.

(S57) I am ok now, because I love her so much. I feel like I found my feet as a mother now. (S58) I feel very content and calmer than I have ever been. I feel like my needs have changed and I don't feel that I am lacking absolutely anything. I just feel like my life has got a very good balance now, I feel so happy being her mum…. We found a balance. (S12) Now it is wonderful. She really enriches my life and I have learnt to be more patient and much kinder, but that took time.

The story of Maria (P7), how she struggled through the first six months of motherhood and how she found her *'feet as a mother'* is another demonstration of the amazing abilities and skills mothers require and manage to develop over the tough and intensive journey of searching for

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their own unique way of being a mother. Similar to other mothers in this research, being inexperienced and anxious in her new role, Maria (P7) tried to read books and follow the rules and expectations that were imbedded in her by society regarding what a mother *should* be doing. She described feelings of loss of control over her life, feelings of inadequacy and of being judged. And only by re-evaluating and accepting the changes to her new being-in-the-world, allowing herself to be more authentic, rebuild her relationship with herself and discover what type of mother she wants to be could she 'find my feet as a mother'.

Every participant in this research described the journey from feeling lost, anxious and incompetent as mothers to finding their own unique mothering style. They all recounted approximately six months for an adaptation period before realising how to '*deal with it all'*, how to combine their own needs, values and beliefs with expectations of society and cultural norms of how to mother. I believe it is a process of focusing on and expanding the personal and spiritual worlds and re-evaluating and re-constructing your own stand within these worlds.

4.5.4 *Sub-Theme 4.4 Re-balancing identities*

On every dimension, women are confronted with an overwhelming amount

of changes, from physical readjustments, new social connections and life-style to the development and integration of a new identity as a mother. Some mothers described the experience of losing their sense of identity. After an adaptation period, when women began to feel more confident within their new role as a mother and began to question how their new role was fitting with myriad other roles and identities women had in their lives.

> **P1 S4** *I am working full-time. (S22) If I had a choice, I would probably go part-time. (S23) I would still go back to work because I like socialising, being a full-time mum is not for me. (S25) I want to develop myself, and when I am going to work, I am an adult again. (S26) …. I am going for an adult coffee, I have adult chats, read the news. I dress up differently than when I am with a child, so it gives me a change to be myself and to understand where I now need to go to progress. (S27) … so I can be myself like I was before having children. (S28) It is development for myself, when I am at work; I am fitting in with a social life and other people.*

Participant Masha (P1) returned to work when her child was eight months old. It sounds like she described work as the world to which she can retreat to focus on herself again, to use skills and identities that are familiar to her. She uses words such as 'develop myself', 'be myself again', 'all decisions about myself'. Masha (P1) reflects that her identity as a mother is not enough for her fulfillment and she is trying find a way to combine her old

life-style with the new mother identity by going back to work, 'back to her social life and other people'. Masha refers to going back to work as being an 'adult again', as moving away from her mother identity, her motherly world, her motherly responsibility. From the total immersion in her baby's world she returns to the world of work, politics and other big world issues, 'adult' issues.

> **P3 S6** *I worked full-time as a nanny. I looked after two little girls… I worked with them for 6 years. I loved my job. (***S14***) - I am working part-time now, collecting two boys from school just around the corner. Sofia absolutely loves going into their house and being with other children. So it's nice to know that in the afternoon I will go and do something else.*

What is interesting to me in Carina's (P3) description is that she chooses to go to work and look after other children. She is not running away from childcare to be in an 'adult world', but in her world it is a routine when she can do 'something else' apart from being 'just a mum'. She worked as a nanny before becoming a mother, and is going back to the same job perhaps represents to her combining her new life with the life she lived before, combining her new identity with her old identities.

> **P4 S61** *I am back to work and I think I like that balance. It is very hard at the beginning to figure it out what your priorities are and what you need, because you can't do everything, there is not really enough time. (***S62***) I know that in my*

*work I am trying to meet people and be a professional and forget family life almost…. It is very hard to do both things, but kind of makes my life more interesting. (**S58***) I really enjoy my days of working when he is in nursery, and just having a day to myself. I think that is for me very important. Before, I thought that I would be happy to be a full-time mum, I realise now that it is actually so important to have those days, where you are working or doing whatever you are doing. Just to switch off and talk to other people rather than mums. And not be running after somebody. (**S59***) And I think it makes you a better mum on those days when you are with him. Because if you spend endless time with him, you would just be a bit frazzled.*

In Jess's (P4) story we can hear that she is also escaping to the world where she can apply her other skills ('be a professional'), meet with people who are not mums (or not talking mum's talk), 'switch off' from motherly responsibilities and experience other identities. Jess (P4) describes how hard it is to evaluate your priorities and be able to combine a mother's identity with other identities Similarly to Masha (P1) she expected to be a happy full-time mother, but realized that it is not for her. She further says that attending her other identities helps her to be 'a better mum'. Perhaps a happier and more satisfied person who doesn't feel that she sacrificed her life completely.

P6 S52 *When I went back to work, I felt very satisfied and much happier. Even Barry said that he really noticed big differences in me when I went to work. And*

part of me still swings back, like some days I feel that I can't do this and I feel like 'ok, I am just going to stay at home and mind my baby', and then I feel like I definitely need those three days away at work. I need those 3 days on my own, to use my brain, for my sanity, and do something else. (S53) I have been working for so many years, using my brain and being engrossed in things in my office; I miss challenges in my life. It is not enough for me to be at home and being just a mother. I needed to get to the place where it doesn't feel so bad to feel this way, because I felt I should be the mum who stays at home all the time. (S107) Now I am totally different at work. I am far more empathetic. I am far more understanding and interestingly, I find that other mums, far more, take my advice more seriously because I am a mother. (S119). Yes, it gives me identity. A little bit what I was before, but in a good way. It gives me back what my brain is just thinking in a different way and I feel that my brain is challenged in a different way. I feel I completed something, that it is not just mummy. That I have another outlet, and that I can do something else and not just be a mummy. It is a self-confidence actually. (S122) I think that lots of women, career women who were highly independent, they fear the losing of control. So, I am very sympathetic of other mums because I understand that they don't necessarily know.

The story of Carol (P6) is in line with other mothers who expressed themselves wanting to be more than 'just being a mum', but she highlights that attending to her other identities provides her with self-confidence, feelings of independence and control that perhaps mothers had before motherhood.

P7 S2 *I worked as a PA and loved my job. (S5) Work was an incredibly big part of my life. (S55) Before it was all about me, it was my job. (S62) Whereas at work, I can go and have a cup of coffee with my colleagues, focus on something else, almost relax a bit. I am really looking forward to that and I am looking forward to using my brain again. (S59) It is both. Financially I have to, but also, I really like working. I have always worked; I like the structure of it and the expectations. I need some structure in my life and the routine, work is very good for that. (S8) Work was a big part of it, so it would be interesting to go back to work as a mum. I am ready to   have that balance now. (S63) Yes, I do miss my 'other' identities - as a colleague, as a friend. I am really glad I took a long maternity leave, I have this good quality time, I got to know my baby and myself, adjust to my new life. So, I am glad I had that time, but I am ready to go back to work. I think she is ready for something else as well. I think it will be tough, but it will be good for both of us. I think if we were just to stay a home, the two of us, I can see how I will become overprotective. I don't want to be overprotective, I want her to be independent in life. I do feel guilty, but at the same time looking forward to it.*

Maria (P7) tells us very a similar story to other women, where she is expressing the wish to go back to work where she is missing her previous life, her adult life, other routines and tasks 'using her brain' as many other participants described. Maria also reflects how difficult it is for her to 'balance' her 'new life and new her' with what she was before, but how much she is looking forward to it. She speaks about feeling independent as

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she used to. Furthermore, most mothers mentioned the financial need to work and the ability to contribute to the family budget. I believe financial independence is also an important component in modern women's self-confidence.

> **P8 S98** *I am very independent, my husband earns a very good salary, but he still wants me to contribute. I don't want to feel that he is looking after me. I already do enough in terms of cooking, cleaning and looking after him. I don't need to justify anymore, but it is for my independence, I think. I think it is important for me and for him, if I didn't need to work, I still would work. (**S99***) However, I would not work five days a week, no matter what. Now that I have had her, I really only want to work three days per week. (**S100***) So it is important to me to work, I just feel that I need to. I think it is part of me, and I like to be self-employed. I like have meetings, dress for it and all the rest.*

Here Hilda (P8) speaks about her financial independence that provides her with self-identity and that is important to her. However, similar to most other mothers she only wants to work part-time and spend the rest of the time with her child.

Most participants in this research described that they want to have this combination of part-time work and part-time mothering, that could provide them 'both worlds'. None of the mothers said that they would like to just go back to full-time work because they are value their time with their children.

Two out of eight participants in this research described that they are completely satisfied with being full-time mothers and not ready to go back to work (the other world). But they are considering going back to work at some point because it may be better for them and their children.

> **P2 S10** *I have made the decision to be at home with him and I am happy with that. I don't miss work. I don't feel that I am becoming stupid because I am at home with my child. (S70) I really fulfilled being at home and being a mum . . . but, I think for most people both worlds to have are best. (S71) I want to work again when my children are at school. (S74) I think it is important because at the moment I am just a mum. (S75) When I met people for the first time…I didn't want them to think that I am just a mum…I would tell people, 'I used to be a lawyer'.(S77) I do think that it is important at some point for me to be doing something else, I want my son to see that a woman is many things. I feel that my justification for being at home will be gone when he is at school.*

Fiona (P2) is saying that she made a decision to be a full-time mother and she feels fulfilled by this role at present. However, she considers it a temporary situation and when she is ready, she would like to have other roles in her life. Curiously, she mentions that she doesn't feel stupid by being 'just a mum', but because of how some people perceive a mother's role and she was ashamed of it at the beginning, telling people about her other roles, her achievements in life. However, Fiona (P2) has one day a week where she leaves her child with childminder to have time for herself.

P2 S6 *I don't think I can give him the best of me five days a week and I actually feel very guilty about that. I can choose to work, we were just lucky that way, but I have felt guilty that I can't cope with him full-time, five days a week. (S7) I am paying somebody to look after my son so I can do something for myself, even though on some level, I understand that makes me a better mother in that I have time to myself.*

Fiona (P2) in her interview described that she was not satisfied with her previous job and was glad to leave when she decided to have a child.

P2 S7 *1 think my situation is unusual because, I have been trained as a lawyer, but I never had a career, I had jobs, so I am at the stage now, I know I want to work again when my children are at school, but I don't want to go back to law. I don't really know what I want to do. (S74) I think it is important because at the moment I am just a mum. (S78) I think my career was nonexistent and I didn't like what I was doing, so I wasn't defined by my career. So now when I am a mum, I feel that it is the right thing for me, I don't mind missing out on anything. Being a mum is my career now and I am my own boss now. I feel in control now more than before.*

What is evident here is that even though Fiona (P2) is still trying to get some time away from mothering and reclaim some time for herself, she gives a good example of a different kind of independence, independence in making decisions and being in control of her life. She describes being fulfilled by her role as a mother at this present time, but at the same time she had the

need to say that she is 'unique' in this position and would like to go back to work in the future.

Suzanne (P5) is another mother in this research who expressed that she sees her role as a mother as the most important one and is happy to be a full-time mother for the time being. P5 is the only participant out of eight who said that she is happy in her role as a mother on a full-time basis and does not need time for herself at present.

> **P5 S66** *I want to stay with my child for at least two years and then I have to go back to work. If I went back to work now, I would miss her too much. She does something new every day, she does so many things for the first time and it happens only once. (S67) If I could afford it financially, I would just be a stay at home mum.*

Seven out of eight of the interviewed women said that 'being a full-time mum is not for me'. Mothers described that going to work part-time, or being away for a day or two from the responsibility of a mother's role, provides women with an opportunity to re-focus their attention back to themselves ('being the old me'). They described that having the balance between their role as a mother and other role makes them a 'better person', 'a happier and better mum'. This suggests that women are trying to find a space when they are getting back that feeling of being 'independent and in control' that they missed at the beginning of motherhood, back to the social world and

everything that that word had provided (validation, recognition, affirmation). The stories of women reflecting on changes in their personal worlds, began with the loss of an identity they had developed through an entire life, an identity they felt familiar with and in control of. Becoming mothers, women had to make choices about how they would mother their children, what values and beliefs they would choose to hold and want to pass on to their children. From holding responsibility mainly for themselves, their actions and their lives, motherhood granted them an overpowering responsibility for their children's lives, development and well-being. This responsibility demanded women to re-evaluate their values, priorities and meaning in life, and changed their relationship with themselves. As a result of their choice to become mothers they changed from being self-focused to self-giving, making more authentic choices and taking responsibilities for those choices. It prompted them to be open-minded but assertive, in control but spontaneous, living in the moment but looking in to the future. Women described how motherhood demanded that they become more mindful, authentic, patient and sensitive, present and responsive to their children.

The development and shaping of a mother identity is therefore an on-going journey that evolves on a daily basis. Every mother expressed how a mother identity becomes one of the most important roles of their lives. Nonetheless,

every woman spoke about the importance for them of expressing other identities, identities they had not dismissed but just put on hold. Motherhood demanded women almost to step out of the world they lived in, and step in into a world with a completely different time zone, boundaries, language, values and priorities. Women described how going back to work allowed them to go back to the familiar world of adults, back to society. However, every woman in this research said that they value and wanted both worlds, a combination of part-time space for themselves where they can develop their other identities, and part-time motherhood. Women described how challenging this balance is, full of anxiety and guilt as she attempts Being-in-the-world as a wonder woman who can do it all. Holding the paradox and ambiguity of juggling the identity of a modern woman and a traditional mother.

4.5.5 *Sub-Theme 4.5 The transformative power of motherhood*

For every woman in this research, becoming a mother has led to a sense of profound personal change. All women expressed feeling themselves changed by the experience of motherhood, changed in both external and internal ways – in practical details of everyday life and in the ways they experience themselves in the world. The practical changes to life-style and the use of

time are the most obvious and most commonly reflected changes, but mothers in this research were extensively reflecting on personal changes, personal growth and development, new view of the world, their new relationship with humanity and the universe.

Women felt that motherhood changed the ways they related to themselves, helped them learn about one's self, stimulated better awareness of one's values and a transformation in one's personal qualities, such as becoming more patient, less self-centered, and more mature and confident. For example, Masha (P1) describes how motherhood changed her:

> **P1 S36** *As a mother I feel much, much better person, much more content. This is something I should have done earlier. (S38) Still, there is nothing you could have that is better. (S47) Yes, she gives me a kind of settled down feeling, like you have done something, not just work. (S116) Yes! It is much harder, but I never thought that I would be so attached. That unconditional love exists. Now I can see how this unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedication.*
>
> **P1 S117** *I think overall, I am much happier. Even though I am saying, 'Ooo it is so tough'. I think that it is the best thing that ever happened to me, despite of all the difficulties.*

Masha (P1) describes how her life has become much harder in a practical way, but at the same time there is nothing that she could have that is better. She describes the joy that her child brought to her and significant others.

Masha (P1) speaks about how motherhood brought a new meaning, understanding and acceptance in life for 'her struggles', because her child 'makes it easier in some sense'. Masha (P1) described motherhood as an accomplishment, an achievement in life that is much more meaningful then her career achievements. Being a mother provided her with a settled down feeling and she is more content and much happier as a person.

Masha (P1) described how surprised she was and overwhelmed by the feeling of unconditional love towards her child. How this feeling of love and attachment to her child changed her values and priorities in life. I believe she described the experience of self-transformation, transformation of being more caring, loving women and human.

> **P2 S47** *I probably always thought that if I don't have children I will be ok. I will still have a nice life, I love my husband, I have lots of friends, I can still have a busy happy life without children. But now I know how life is changing amazingly, you just can't prepare anybody for it. (S79) I think just seeing my son happy. It is such a joy because he brings life to basics, and I rediscovered the joy of simple things in life. Just seeing a person grow, I feel that I have achieved something. (S85) I definitely feel that my life has more meaning now.*

Fiona (P2) reflects how she was feeling regarding her life and herself before being a mother, how she thought that her life was good enough. However, she reflects how becoming a mother took her to a completely different level

of relating to life and herself. 'life changed amazingly' she said. Fiona (2) describes how motherhood provided her with access to a joy of the simple things in life and to new meaning in her existence. She also describes motherhood as an achievement and the most important thing she has in her life.

> **P5 S7** *For about three years I was depressed, a woman who really wanted to have a child   but couldn't. (**S13**) Yes. I feel very pleased with myself…I can be a mother…I can do it…I have my child, and now I feel complete. It feels like an achievement.*

Suzanne (P5) describes how important it was for her to be a mother and how this identity completed her. She also speaks about motherhood as an achievement.

> **P6 S36** *I am actually in a much better place in that I don't think about little things. I learned to live differently, relax and not make such a big deal out of it. (**S59**) So, yes, I think I am very different now, very different life – amazing, but very different. I would not change it now for the world. (**S64**) I am happier for living like it is now rather than being as controlled a person as I was. So I think I am a better person now. (**S86**) Yes, I definitely changed as a person. Definitely for the better. I think I am definitely more relaxed; I feel much more complete.*

Carol (P6) is another woman who describes herself as feeling more complete since she became a mother. She mentioned several times that she feels she is a better person now, more relaxed, accepting and happier.

Maria (P7) is another example of how women in this research describe how

becoming a mother led to a sense of profound personal change.

> **P7 S12** *My daughter is really enriching my life and I have learnt to be more patient and much kinder, but that took time. (***S35***) She turned our worlds upside down, but now I can't imagine not having her there. (***S51***) I am calmer now than I was, I am much less selfish and much less judgmental, I think. I really think about her before I think about me, and that is huge for me. (***S58***) I feel very content and calmer than I have ever been. I feel like my needs have changed and I don't feel that I am lacking absolutely anything. I just feel like my life has got a very good balance now, I feel so happy being her mum.*

> **P8 S19** *Some people are born, I believe, who feel that their life would not be complete without a baby, they feel like a right arm would be cut off. I never actually felt like that, I never felt that I would not be complete without a baby, or a man for that matter. But now that I have it, it is just different, I can't imagine my life without her now. It is a complete transition and I didn't expect it.*

As we have seen, becoming a mother for these women was not only a matter of giving birth to a child; it was also experienced in terms of a moral transformation of self.

Moreover, women throughout of this research were reflecting that you can't imagine or describe to anyone how it would feel like to be a mother, with all those losses, sacrifices, overpowering sense of responsibility, the overpowering love and joy that your child brings into to your life, and the pride and empowerment you feel as a mother.

Women described the new relationship between self and other that came with motherhood as a process of becoming 'less self-centered', but one that was neither self-sacrificing nor self-denying. They re-defined themselves through connectedness with their children, but in a way that limited the engulfment of self in the relationship. Women talked about the connectedness and relationship they felt with their children. I could argue that motherhood was experienced as an 'essence-making' process. Indeed, it appeared that it was having children that allowed women to claim or realise this phenomenological sense of self in ways that re-affirmed certain cultural ideals of womanhood.

Listening to the women in this study speak of the bonds they felt with their children, seeing how these women came to define themselves through their relationship with 'other', how mothers characterized themselves by an ethic of care, responsibility and intimacy, indeed prompted me to conclude that the transition to motherhood is a journey of amazing self-transformation where women had to become more authentic, re-evaluate their personal world and re-define their way of 'being-in-the-world'.

In listening to these women speak, at first it seemed to me that they held traditional conceptions of motherhood that emphasized self-sacrifice and self-denial. Gradually, however, I came to understand that these women

were using the language of traditional motherhood ideology to symbolize the process of self-change they experienced in adapting to lives that were more concretely difficult, but at the same time deeply meaningful. To these women, I argue, this did not mean sacrificing the self. Rather it meant the *death* of an earlier sense of self and the emergence of new self through a process of re-evaluating values, beliefs and meaning in life, as part of re-defining their 'being-in-the-world' position.

4.6 *Theme 5. Spiritual World: Motherhood as self-transcendence experience*

On the spiritual dimension, meaning in life is found through the discovery of a sense of purpose. All mothers in this research were emotionally describing their new found sense of connectedness, their unconditional love towards their children, and new found sense of purpose and meaning in their deep commitment and ultimate responsibility for their children's lives. The sub-themes identified on The Spiritual Dimensions are Sub-theme 5.1 Experiencing Unconditional Love; Sub-theme 5.2 New Meaning in Life.

4.6.1 *Sub-theme 5.1   Experiencing unconditional love*

If we consider feelings as a guide to the relevance something has to someone, and an indication of the meaning that holds for that person, then we can understand what women describe as overwhelming unconditional love towards their children. Women's emotional responses signal the self-relevance of children to their lives. In calling their feelings 'love', women are focusing attention on their connectedness or attachment with the objects of their love, their children.

Women in this study felt surprised and often overwhelmed by their emotional responses to their children. They recognised and described the correlation between their feelings of love, connection and attachment towards their children and their feelings of responsibility and dedication to their children.

> **P1 S116** *I never thought that I would be so attached. That unconditional love exists. Now I can see how this unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedication.*

Masha (P1) described feelings of unconditional love towards her child as a new or unfamiliar experience of relating to the other (her child), and how this love generated a strong feeling of connectedness and commitment to her child (the other).

P1 S44 *Also, seeing how she is developing, how she starts crawling, and chatting.*

Masha's (P1) words captured the two most frequently talked-about rewards of motherhood: experience of magical, deep connection (unconditional love) with their children and the experience of seeing and facilitating their children's development. Jess (P4) put it like this:

> **P4 S15** *I enjoy watching him grow. In the first few months it is so intense, every day feels like a lifetime, and you can't imagine him to grow into anything. And all of a sudden, all these skills and his little personality come out, and he is so much fun. I think I just like seeing him develop. (S16). And you are so important to them and you kind of can help him along the way. It is very special. (S72) Yes, definitely, motherhood is much harder than I expected. But it is worth it because you have someone in your life that you love more than you could ever have imagined. And they love you back in a completely innocent and beautiful way.*

Jess (P4) describes her feelings of love towards her child as she never experienced or even imagined before. She finds this love innocent and beautiful, a love that makes her feel so special and the most important person to her child. This love is full of magical power, but at the same time full of moral responsibilities, anxiety about making the right choices, every minute of your life.

I believe that Carol's (P6) words have clearly captured her experience of the rewards of motherhood: the special bond, the pleasure of watching her child

develop and emotions that were the coin of exchange in interaction with her child:

> **P6 S105** *Feeling of unconditional love was a total shock, like kind of 'Oh my God'. He would look at me with his eyes, and you think OMG this baby, as far as he is concerned, I am his world. (**S65***) I love that he is interested in everything, I love the education side, so I love it when we are going to look at the boats and look at the helicopter, and I love constantly chatting to him and that is huge, it's my biggest enjoyment. To see him learning and to see him growing. (**S66***) I love reading on Facebook about other mothers' insights, and loved what one of the mothers said, 'I don't get sad, but I do when the day ends because it is one day less with my baby'. So that is exactly how I feel. When I put him to bed, I think that another day is over, and I am not going to see him for the next 12 hours.*

"I am his world', said Carol, what can be more empowering and at the same time demanding as the feeling that you are someone's whole world? The pleasure of the opportunity to help the child to learn to walk and talk, understand and enjoy life is the privilege of parenting. Most mothers described this job as the most difficult, anxiety provoking, but the most meaningful and valuable job they have ever done.

> **P2 S79** *I think just seeing my son happy. It is such a joy because he brings life to basics, and I rediscovered the joy of simple things in life. Just seeing a person grow, I feel that I have achieved something. I do feel it is amazing watching him learning simple stuff. (**S46***) I am a bit surprised by how much you can love your*

*child. (**S90**) To be able to give willingly whatever they need, knowing that you are not getting much back at the beginning, but when they first smile at you or cuddle you – it is absolutely magical and I don't think a woman before she becomes a mum can understand that, it is such a strong feeling of love.*

Fiona (P2) considers that magical motherly love is a feeling that can't be compared, experienced or understood unless a woman becomes a mother. Therefore, it is a feeling that is only born and developed within the relationship between a mother and a child, it is the magical part of motherhood.

Few other mothers/participants compared their love for children with whom they worked as nannies with the motherly love towards their children.

P5 S63 *People talk about unconditional love towards your children, but you don't know that until you become a mum. Even if you work with children and love them, it is a very different love.*

Suzanne (P5) and Carina (P2) both expressed that motherly love can't be experienced until a woman becomes a mother.

Mothers described themselves as having been surprised by their feelings and overwhelmed by their emotions when they become mothers – as totally absorbed by their children; as though they had fallen in love. Women expressed their connectedness with their children and I believe that descriptions of these feelings were central to their accounts of motherhood.

The also reflected that the best things about having children were the pleasure or rewards they got from watching their children learn and grow and the special connectedness of relationship they felt with their children. Many of the women felt there was a special bond between self and other in the mother-child relationship, one not to be found in other relationships in that they never loved so deeply before and with such a profound sense of unconditional and profound devotion and loyalty.

4.6.2 *Sub-theme 5.2 New meaning in life*

Every mother in this research described a re-organisation of her values and priorities, and how becoming a mother changed their meaning and purpose of life. Women reflected that motherhood broadened and deepened their meaning and purpose of life.

> **P2 S85***I definitely feel that my life has more meaning now. I don't mean that people who have no children have no meaning. But for myself I just don't know what is more important.*

Fiona (P2) described her life as more meaningful as a mother because she sees this role as the most important. She experiences her meaning as participating in the life cycle through fostering her child's development. She articulated the connection between the meaning in life and value of a self

and responsibilities and meaning of motherhood.

> **P2 S87** *When you bring someone into this world, it makes you think that it is definitely what you are meant to do. (S88) .... So my meaning definitely changed since I became a mother, it is my responsibility for my child. I think motherhood put everything in to context. I think the responsibility for another person, we can't grasp it until we are doing it.*

Fiona (P2) described gaining a transcendental meaning in life through motherhood that placed her in an empowering position of giving life and nurturance to another human being, engaging the purpose of her life with care of another, her child.

> **P1 S48** *She brought a different meaning to our lives, that for sure. Even though life become much harder, but she makes it easier in some sense, if you see what I mean. (S11) The meaning of my life is my daughter, but also it is my family, my parents and grandparents. They are happier. It is life awakened for everyone. Everyone becomes more alive. It gave energy to everyone.*

Masha (P1), alongside other mothers in this research, was described how motherhood challenged her life in every dimension of existence, but expanded and illuminated her spiritual world with special energy and transcendental meaning, which made life easier and happier. Moreover, Masha also reflects on how the connection with her child encouraged the re-evaluation and re-construction of connections with her family and expanded

her view on meaning and purpose in her life.

Carina (P3) is another woman in this study for whom becoming a mother shifted her experience of self in relation to others.

> **P3 S64** *Meaning of my life totally changed because now you are just thinking about your baby's upbringing, safety and what is best for her. She's become number one. (***S66***) I don't think about me anymore. I rather give everything to my daughter, my husband and my friends than spend on me. I think it makes me happy to be giving and see others happy.*

She described changes to her spiritual values and the meaning of life through transcending self-centeredness to include 'others', her family. She finds happiness and inspiration through an active participation in other people happiness, her child's and her family's.

Maria (P7) is another example of how being a mother creates a new ability to connect to the 'other', a new form of relational spirituality that shifts the meaning of life from oneself to the 'other', the child.

> **P7 S53** *Yes the meaning of my life has changed, she comes first. She is so important to us; we love her so much. (***S55***) Before it was all about me, it was my job, doing what I wanted to do, and now it is all about her. Giving her a secure base, giving her good examples and being there for her.*

All women in this research described a mother-child relationship as 'unlike

any other'. Several mothers described it as being beyond words and impossible to understand unless you have experienced it yourself. It could therefore be argued that a mother-child relationship could be seen as one beyond the relational world and described as 'a spiritual awakening,' which is one of the best rewards of motherhood. This special connection with the 'other' transformed mothers' phenomenological experience of being from isolated self in the world into a feeling of permanent belonging, spiritual connection to her child.

As a result of the relationship with their children, some mothers become more spiritually-minded and renewed their attention to faith:

> **P8 S87** *But being catholic, I definitely became a bit more religious since having my daughter. I think I was always a spiritual person, but I notice that I have become more religious since my daughter. (***S88***) Yes, I very much want to bring my daughter up with morals and religion. It is not important to my husband, but he knows that it is important to me. And I didn't know that until I had my daughter. I am thankful that I have her, I am not praying for anything, I am just saying 'thank you'. I pray to God every day to say 'thank you'.*

Hilda's (P8) words indicate she experiences motherhood as a miraculous 'act of God'. This faith let her re-evaluate her own spiritual values, values she wishes to introduce to her child.

This deepened spiritual awareness triggered a more general philosophical

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awareness and questioning about existential issues of life and the universe in general. Mothers became more aware of the political situation in the world, safety issues and the vulnerability of human life:

> **P7 S54** *I see how I am more worried about what is going on in the world, it is the world that she will be growing up in. I am more conscious about thing like that, everything has changed.*

Overall, for the eight mothers who participated in this research the experience of motherhood could be viewed as a transitional process during which a mother turns away from self-centeredness to the 'other', her child. Every woman in this research strongly declared that their child's needs and well-being came before hers, her child is 'number one' in her life and the meaning of mothers' lives are their children. That is not to say that that all other activities and relationships have become meaningless, but that their children had displaced all other priorities and had become their number one priority central to their meaning in life. Women were fully aware and did not take for granted the difficulties and challenges that motherhood brought into their lives, but they all described how motherhood brought, what can be interpreted as a profound shift towards self-growth as they become more compassionate and empathetic people. This growth spread into their spiritual development, changed and deepened their sense of meaning and purpose in

their lives. Therefore, I believe the transition to motherhood could be viewed

as a spiritual transition.

5. *Discussion*

Last year I died. My life without you ended. Our life together - only

nine months! – ended too: abruptly and forever, when you gave birth

to me. Being born into motherhood is the sharpest pain I've ever

known. I'm a newborn mother: your age exactly, one year old today.

(...) Because of you I will return to Earth, transformed: no longer a

virgin, but a mother, married to a child.

Phyllis Chesler (1979)

5.1 *Introduction*

The birth of a child, a new existence, is also the birth of a mother who is thrust into motherhood. Whether she accepts or rejects motherhood will depend on whether she either accepts or rejects her child. The phenomenon of motherhood has been observed and described by many philosophers, poets and writers of all genres, as well as a multitude of researchers and other professionals. Despite this attention, just as we can't capture the objectivity of human existence, we can't define the essence of motherhood as it is not static. Motherhood evolves across generations and cultures as well as through the unique individual journey of each mother. However, I

believe that addressing the phenomenon of motherhood as an existential journey allows us to shine a meaningful light upon, and aid the understanding of, the fundamental lived experience of motherhood.

The aim of this research was therefore to observe new mothers' lived experiences using the framework of the 'Four Dimensions of Existence' (Van Deurzen, 1984) as a map to navigate and explore the nuances of their experiences on each dimension. This framework was therefore used as a heuristic, not only to provide structure, but also to guide the questioning and methodologically interrogate the findings, as well as tease out and identify the myriad changes and ruptures inherent in this deeply complex and arguably existential transformation that women experience as they begin to explore 'being-in-the-world' as mothers. Additionally, van Manen's phenomenological approach provided an opportunity to pay closer attention to the language mothers used to describe their unique journeys and to uncover multiple meanings in these.

The findings of this research were contextualised and interpreted from an existential perspective, drawing on insights from existential theorists and philosophers such as Medard Boss, Irvin Yalom, Bo Jacobsen, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmy van Deurzen. Even though many of these existential philosophers were not written specifically about

motherhood, I attempted to show the relevance of their philosophical terms to the changes that women are experiences on their journey to 'being-in-the-world' as mothers.

In order to fully capture the journey from woman to mother, it was necessary to begin the research interviews by inviting the participants to reflect on how they remembered their life before motherhood (*Theme 1. Life Before motherhood*). All eight participants described experiencing a loss of their previous life-style, which included a semblance of being in control of their own time and being free to make their own choices about themselves and their lives. This finding was in alignment with those of many other researchers in the field (see Becker and Hofmeister, 2001; McCullough et al., 2005; Andersen et al., 2011; Prinds et al., 2013). Vick & Hafting (2012) and Hartley (2005) for example, demonstrated that the journey of becoming a mother introduces fundamental changes into women's ways of 'being-in-the-world', where women are required to 're-order' their way of 'being' in all its existential dimensions. This concurs with the finding that the changes required of motherhood expand across all four dimensions of the lifeworld: On the physical dimension ('*Umwelt*'), when mothers are coming face to face with life and death (*Theme 2*); On The social dimension ('*Mitwelt*') when mothers are experiencing isolation from their previous relationships and re-

connection with their new social world (*Theme 3*); On the personal dimension ('*Eigenwelt'*) when mothers challenged by freedom of choice, authenticity and a personal sense of integrity (*Theme 4*); And on the spiritual dimension ('*Uberwelt'*) when mothers are re-constructing their values and meaning of life (*Theme 5*).

The overarching theme that emerged from the women's narratives, as evidenced across all four dimensions, was the immediate and overwhelming experience of *responsibility* for their babies: physical responsibility, social responsibility, personal responsibility and spiritual responsibility. Mothers unanimously reported becoming acutely aware of, and instantly accepting of this, what could be described as *existential responsibility*, for their children. All of the findings therefore share this common theme, which runs through all four lifeworlds.

5.2 Theme 1 *Life before motherhood*

5.2.1 *Sub-theme 1.1 'It was all about me'*

The transition to motherhood could be conceptualised as a transitional journey from life before motherhood to life as a mother. In order to understand this phenomenon, it was necessary to begin by asking the participants how they remembered their lives before becoming mothers.

Across all eight transcripts emerged common themes relating to life before motherhood, each participant reporting they felt a sense of *independence, freedom* and *control.* Life before motherhood was summed up by the sentiment that 'it was all about me', a sentiment also reflected in Prinds et al.'s (2013) study which states the finding *"before you have a baby, it is all about you".* (p.5)

Central to the experience of life being 'all about me' was a sense of autonomy over how and with whom the participants should carve up their time. That they had a choice about whether or not to take care of their own needs and wants was an intrinsic part of their lived existence. Choice was, in every sense, a given. Inherent in these choices was a sense of individual responsibility – whether choices were right or wrong, good or bad, informed or ignorant, they were only ever choices that impacted on them. In this way, life before becoming a mother was 'all about me' and any sense of

responsibility was 'all about me'. That is not to say that the women were suggesting they were ever responsibility *free*, of course they had partners, family, friends and colleagues who had to be taken into account when making their choices, but they all alluded to a sense of autonomy over their lives, an illusion of choice and control prior to becoming mothers that was now lost.

Existentially, it could be argued that before motherhood, the women who participated in this research experienced themselves as at the heart of their own life project. By investing in their own education, career, social engagements, friendships, personal achievements, hobbies and interests, physical health and body image, they take responsibility for their 'me' project by making conscious choices about what they want for themselves.

Transition to motherhood could therefore be thought of as an experience of being displaced, in an unanticipated way, from a sense of identification with their 'me' project which creates what they perceive of as a loss: loss of a life-style, loss of choice, loss of individual responsibility, loss of autonomy.

This is echoed in Barclays et al.'s (1997) findings which indicate that new mothers experience and describe 'loss' in a variety of areas of life: Loss of time that was previously available for self, partner and friends and, as a consequence, loss of freedom and independence. The fundamental 'loss'

appeared to be loss of control over one's own life. Those findings are in line with the feelings of loss echoed in the reflections of the mothers in this research on their life before motherhood.

This begs the question: Are mothers therefore saying that they don't feel independent, or free, or in control in their roles as mothers? What kind of control, independence and freedom have mothers lost? Are mothers not free to choose any longer? I believe what the data shows is that it is the quality of choice that has changed for mothers. In some existential sense they really don't feel independent, free or in control since they have accepted existential responsibility for the life of another human being. The sheer weight of this responsibility, as Stadlen (2004) describes, is overwhelming to the extent that the mother is no longer the executor of her own life since her child *always* comes first. Any notions of overriding this responsibility for her child are always burdened by complex and heavy (personal and social) consequences which far outweigh those before motherhood. Boundaries, rules and meanings around choice were revealed to have irreversibly shifted for the mothers in this study.

The women in this research described life before motherhood as full of activity, projects that they were fulfilling (in nursery, at school, at work and in their personal lives). Their lives were structured and guided, graded and

reworded, on a daily basis. They buzzed from one activity to the next, played the parts that were required of them, performed their roles and displayed the attitudes that they thought others expected of them. In Heidegger's terms they followed the 'they' ('*das Man*') (Heidegger, 1927a). The women in this research were familiar with their everydayness, interconnected with their world of 'others' through personal and collective meanings, soothed into a sense of familiarity and belongingness, and therefore sheltered or protected from the existential givens of temporality, emptiness, and isolation. As Hartley (2005) has described, before motherhood women were 'securely' embedded within their lifeworld.

As Irvin Yalom (1980) highlights, the structure-providing social artifacts, the rules, grand designs, things we must 'do', soothe us away from freedom and responsibilities for our choices and the anxiety of awareness of the existential facts of our lives. But at the same time, it soothes us from our possibilities and our authenticity. Jacobsen (2007) stressed that to be responsible is to accept the consequences of your own actions. To be aware and accept the responsibility for your choices is to be aware and accept the consequences for those choices. Sometimes, such a decision can bear resemblance to a leap into the unknown.

Heidegger (1962) believed that there are two fundamental modes of existing

in the world: a state of *'forgetfulness'* of being and a state of *mindfulness* of being. He states that when we immerse ourselves in the everyday diversions of life, lose ourselves in the 'they', we live in a state of *'forgetfulness'* of being or in an *'inauthentic'* everyday mode of existence. Moreover, Heidegger (1962) argues that to move from a state of 'forgetfulness of being' into 'mindfulness of being' we need to experience some certain unalterable, irremediable conditions, or as Jaspers (1994: 203) calls it *'limit'* situations. In *'normal'* situations, Jaspers asserts, one can make a comparison to other known situations and one can step in and out of it, whereas a *'limit'* situation is irrevocable; we can't change it, we can only visualize it more clearly.

Stepping into the world of motherhood women enter a 'limit' situation, an unfamiliar, unknown world. Women were dislodged from the place of *'at-homeness'* (Heidegger, 1962) of a previous, familiar, structure-providing social world, a world that provided them with structured time, time to work and time to relax, time for 'others' and 'me' time. All these artifacts provided women with feelings of being in control, of making choices within limits. In this world there was less anxiety, more room for mistakes and fewer responsibilities.

It could be argued then that the journey to motherhood begins with a sense

of '*defamiliarisation*', when women's relationship with the familiar world is profoundly shaken, when new mothers suddenly lose their sense of 'know-how' in the world, when everyday guidelines are suddenly stripped away, when the world that had previously comforted them from the anxiety of existential givens dissolves. Heidegger (1962) uses the term 'uncanny' (*Unheimlich*) to denote this experience of having lost contact with one's existential situation and feels not 'being-at-home-in-the-world'. Before motherhood, when life was 'all was about me', when women were invested solely in their 'me' project, when women mainly made choices about themselves, they were responsible only for those choices. By choosing to become mothers, women took responsibility to have children, to be responsive and responsible to their children and for their children.

5.2.2 Sub-theme 1.2 Decision to have a child

For women in this research, the commitment to mothering began with the choice or decision to become a mother. Jacobsen (2007:108) describes a choice or decision as a phenomenon that 'occurs when someone faces a situation with more than one possibility, considers the options and ends up by saying yes to one of them, thus not choosing something else'. Jacobsen (2007:108) goes on to note that

(...) choice presupposes freedom. Freedom means to be able to do what one wants or believes to be right. Freedom entails autonomy. Choice entails responsibility. When you say yes to one thing and not to something else, this has consequences for others and for yourself

The women in this research had actively made a choice to have children (as stipulated in the recruitment criteria) and described a process whereby they said 'yes' to motherhood. Considering women's choice of motherhood, it became apparent that all eight mothers spoke about how they always wanted to have children, there was always a desire to become mothers; the choice was always there. The decisions and choices they made were about when and under which circumstances to have their children and with whom to have them. They also described being independent, free and in control of their choices in life, and they all made a conscious choice to become mothers. Choices entail responsibility, awareness and acceptance and almost an obligation or commitment towards the consequences for those choices (Jacobsen 2007). All eight women described that they desired and made important life decisions to become mothers, but at the same time, they described how many aspects of motherhood came to them as a surprise or even a shock. They reflected how they were unaware and unprepared for the changes in their lives that motherhood generated. Most mothers said that

they did not expect their lives would change much, they expected to have the same structured life as before and 'me' in the center of that structure. They were not prepared for the level of responsibility the mothering role would bring, and the outcomes of that responsibility. They chose motherhood but were not aware and therefore not prepared for the latent responsibility inherent in that choice. Therefore, it could be said that the transition to motherhood began from a place where mothers had to face the unexpected responsibility for their uninformed choices to become mothers. This unexpected responsibility that emerged from what they believed was a 'choice' exposes that choice as perhaps having been made from an 'uninformed' place, a place of unknowing?

Sevon's research (2009) indicates that, even though modern women's life transition has become more and more an individual, free or autonomous 'choice', the choice of motherhood is regulated, for example, by the structural and cultural factors related to gender, and a 'reasonable' (female) life course (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: Gordon 1990: Holland, et al., 2005; Miller, 2005). Letherby (1994) further discusses the desire for motherhood as a multidimensional phenomenon towards the biological and relational/social experience of motherhood. Sevon (2009) similarly emphasises that the desire for mothering emerges from memories and

cultural narratives, unconscious and conscious identifications that motherhood represents. Echoing this, Meyers (2001) argues that women's decisions on child-rearing and motherhood are seldom as autonomous as they appear to be. In the present social climate, choosing and timing motherhood becomes a contradictory and ambivalent issue for many women who are torn between following the (socially, culturally, politically and historically informed) narratives and norms of a female adult (ie motherhood) and exercising the right to remain free, autonomous, economically relevant agents of their own lives (Sevon, 2009). Likewise, Sevon (2009) indicates that the choice to become a mother is a multi-layered process and not a clear-cut one, involving desires and relationality more than autonomy, uncertainty and, thus, ambivalence. In other words, ambivalence arose because women tried to follow the narratives and norms of an adult influenced by the current contradictory cultural and social values while at the same time, experiencing their lives as embodied, relational and emotional female subjects.

Battersby (1998:6) claims that one salient feature, if one approaches motherhood from the viewpoint of women's identity, is the birth-giving possibility of the female body. This means that every woman (from childhood onwards) is somehow conscious of her body's potential to give

birth, and thus every woman needs to take some kind of stance over this potential. However, it can equally be argued that the freedom to choose motherhood and the fact of autonomous decision-making increases the feeling of being responsible for one's own choices, having to manage without help. Different life decisions are to be seen needing conscious life planning, which in turn becomes a virtue, and further, the unexpected 'failures' become attributed to a fault of the individual's own irresponsible behaviour (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Gordon et al., 2005).

5.2.3 Sub-*theme 1. 3 Expectation of motherhood*

The findings of this study demonstrate that women were surprised, unprepared, and even shocked by many aspects of motherhood. All women described how unaware they were about the reality of life as a mother, they did not expect the level of change in their lives, they were unaware of the consequences of their choices to be mothers. These findings are in line with a number of other researchers. For example, Arnold-Baker (2014) in her study of the transition to motherhood, uncovered the theme 'life is different'. Also, Prinds (2014) in her study describes how some mothers expressed their relation to society as unfulfilled in the sense that there is a difference between their expectations prior to becoming a mother and the actual

experience. Stadlen (2004) points out how some new mothers sometimes look back on their preparation classes and feel betrayed. In their grounded theory study, Barclays et al. (1997) captured the impact of the post-hospitalization experience in two words: 'Realizing' and 'Drained'. After women were home, they first realized how much they had to give and learn and how different it was to care for an infant from what they had expected it to be. They soon reported feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted. Despite all preparatory efforts, women in a number of studies reported feeling overwhelmed and unprepared (Barclays et al., 1997; Barlow & Cairns, 1997; Smith-Pierce, 1994). Barclays et al. (1997), in the category of 'Realisation' describes that the reality of early motherhood was different from expectations. Most women felt 'unready' for the reality of motherhood. A number of women questioned whether you can really prepare for birth and parenting. Also, Darvil et.al. (2008) described how women in their study were surprised by the experiences of motherhood, they were so incompatible with their expectation for motherhood. Barclays et.al. (2008), in their study, described the impact of the child on mothers' lives as a 'shock'. Women felt 'unready' and 'unprepared' for the magnitude of the change that they experienced on becoming a mother.

Considering the above findings, it could be argued then that, even though all

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the women in this research chose and/or decided to become mothers, they were not aware, accepting of and consciously committed to the consequences and responsibilities involved in making that *existential* choice – the important life decision to become mothers. We could assert from this that the beginning of the motherhood journey is therefore paved with existential crises, wherein women are shaken out of their 'being-in-the-world' and confronted with the naked reality of existential givens across all four dimensions of existence.

The literature supports this assertion with the transition to motherhood being described as a *life crisis* (Prinds et. al, 2013) where women undergo physical, social, psychological and spiritual changes in life (Tammentie, 2003; Vick & Hafting, 2012; Prinds, 2014; Athan & Miller, 2013; Arnold-Baker, 2014). Stern (2004) states that women in the perinatal period are in a life crisis that dis-organises and re-organises much of their psychological life. Brudal (2000) also sees the period of becoming a mother as an existential crisis. It is a period wherein a new identity is about to be formed and wherein inner conflicts and anxieties encompass important issues of purpose, responsibility, independence, freedom and commitment. Jaspers (2005) understands this as a *psychological* crisis - we undergo 'a shock to the soul' wherein we lose direction, loose orientation and are profoundly shaken.

A crisis can be understood therefore as a sudden disruption to normal life activity and the perceived continuous flow of life; A crisis involves a painful and distressing break with the past, leading to the unfurling of new modes of existence on a level that is different from that of the past. Jaspers (1994) goes on to explain that every crisis contains three dimensions: loss, adversity and what we may call an *'opening-of-existence'* which is suggestive of a positive shock, a silver lining behind a dark cloud. Other existential theorists similarly view crisis as an opening of possibilities, an opening to the depths of existence. The transition to motherhood, if seen in this way, could, through pain and possibilities, offer women a personal turning point, the opportunity of a new life. It could allow women to transition from the 'forgetfulness' mode of living into a 'mindfulness' mode of living, or 'authentic' way of living (Heidegger, 1962). Transition to motherhood, when viewed through this lens can almost certainly be understood as both a psychological and an existential crisis.

5.3 *Theme 2. Physical Dimension: Embodied Responsibility*

5.3.1 *Sub-themes 2.1 Birth and Death: Facing Mortality*

Darvil (2008) points out that, even though women are experiencing both an awareness of and responsibility for the 'new life' inside them from a very early stage in pregnancy, the birth of a child symbolizes more concretely the beginning of motherhood Hartley (2005). Stadlen (2004:34) makes the point that, once a baby is born, a woman's life is completely changed. She refers to Nigella Lawson's words who said,

> (…) *the strange thing about being pregnant and being a mother is that, although we know the one leads to the other, they are not part of the same psychological thing.*

In line with my findings, the participants were unprepared and shocked by the reality of having a baby. This is illustrated by Lawson who describes one of the mothers remarking 'I knew I was pregnant, but why didn't anyone tell me I was going to have a baby? (Stadlen, 2004:34).

Once born, the baby is no longer embodied in the womb but becomes separate, an autonomous individual present in space and time, who is both entirely dependent on the mother while retaining the status of *otherness*. In

this moment of realization, you could say, a woman becomes a mother, a mother who is embracing her choice of motherhood and the existential responsibility for another Being. This could be conceptualised as a Sartre's paradigm shift in which she is embracing her new *life project*. In this moment of awareness of the responsibility for another comes an awareness of human fragility and mortality which ushers in an unanticipated and acute anxiety of death. As Prinds et al. (2013) also discovered, it is through the experience of giving birth that a mother confronts an awareness of bodily limitations and possibilities, of her own and her infant's mortality and of a biological responsibility for sustaining life. Death, when faced with this responsibility, becomes a primordial source of anxiety, and mothers in this research described high levels of anxiety when faced with the fragility of their children and the possibility of loss. This is echoed in Vik & Haftin's (2012) research who also found that mothers experience their babies as completely dependent on them for survival and experience heightened anxiety related to the baby's life and wellbeing.

Although in my findings the mothers did not explicitly speak about their fear of their children's death, they all discussed their anxiety around the fragility of their children 'I was not sure if she was breathing' (Masha P1). This corresponds with Hartley's (2005) study where she demonstrates that

initially women responded to their fear of 'disappearing' with constant alertness and expectations of danger. This caused women to be overwhelmed by anxiety and necessitated a *re-attunement* (Boss, 1979) to a particular mode of 'being-in-the-world' that, although disabling at times, ensured the baby's wellbeing. Hartley (2005:247) sums this up when she says 'New mothers are shocked by their helplessness in the face of the utter vulnerability of babies and the reality of possible illness of death'.

A number of mothers in this research expressed suddenly coming face-to-face with their own mortality and worrying about maintaining their own health for the sake of their child. This new awareness of, and attunement to, the embodied limitations of Being, shakes these mothers out of an 'inauthentic' way of 'being-in-the-world' in a way that demands engagement with their existential givens. This is reflected in previous findings (Bergum, 1986; Leonard, 1993; Smith-Pierce, 1994; Hartley, 2005). Price (1988) describes how responsibility for the baby's physical survival comes to be placed on and accepted by the mother. Consequently, by the time their babies are born, many mothers become acutely aware of how fragile life is, how vulnerable the child is, and how responsible they are for keeping their children safe and preventing their death. They are also responsible for keeping themselves alive so as to be able to protect their child: 'If anything

happens to me, I would no longer be able to care for my baby'. In effect, mothers are experiencing the complete unpredictability of death, an awareness of an existential 'given', in contrast to a 'before-motherhood' ontic state wherein we often behave as if death were not a part of our lives. Heidegger uses the term 'uncanny' ('not at home') to refer to the state in which one loses one's sense of familiarity in the world. Awareness of their children's 'thrownness' into this existence mirrors their own 'thrownness' and awareness of their own existential givens. Yalom (1980) describes these moments in life as *'defamiliarisation'* when one is torn from one's moorings of 'at-homeness'. This experience of death anxiety triggers a new awareness of their responsibility for their children's life and their own lives and provides mothers with the pathway to a 'mindfulness' (Heidegger, 1962) mode of life, an 'authentic' way of Being.

Prinds et al. (2013) discussed in her study how, in the light of *Umwelt*, mothers' confrontation with their bodily limitations and possibilities may facilitate new perceptions of 'being-in-the-world' (Binswanger 1963). She highlights that,

> *Through the lens of existential psychology, during childbirth mothers are confronted with awareness of mortality. On one hand when confronted with death life may become reinvigorated, which may*

facilitate the ability to live fully, and on the other hand when confronted with a new life, mortality may appear more present. (p.8)

Further, Yalom (1980:30) echoed Jaspers when he described how the awareness of death prompts us to live in the state of 'mindfulness of being' or 'ontological mode' (from Greek *ontos,* meaning "existence")*, 'One remains mindful of being (…) of one's responsibility for one's own being'.* In summary, these findings are pointing out that motherhood symbolises a 'limited situation' (Jaspers, 1994) or 'urgent experience' (Heidegger, 1962), when mothers become existentially aware of their responsibility for the life and death of their children and their own, and through that experience mothers enter a 'Mindfulness' or 'ontological' mode of being (Heidegger,1962). A mother is suddenly tugged from her everyday state of existence, 'forgetfulness' or 'inauthenticity', to a state of 'mindfulness of being'. According to Heidegger (1962) living in the mode of 'mindfulness of being' is living in 'authentic' mode. To exist in this 'authentic' mode means to be continually aware of 'Being', aware of possibilities and limitations, aware of a freedom to choose. On becoming a mother, a woman becomes mindful of her 'authorship' of her own life.

5.3.2 *Sub-theme 2. 2 Time and Space with 'my child under my skin'*

In this new mode of 'being-in-the-world' as mothers, new mothers are not only experiencing a heightened awareness of, and existential anxiety over, their children's embodied fragility, mothers are also experiencing a different awareness of time ('clock' time versus 'existential' time) and space. According to Yalom (1980) this experience of '*defamiliarisation*' involves a variety of entities that provide structure and stability (rules, values, guidelines), and also *time* structure. Before motherhood, women lived by socially constructed rules and guidelines. These structures provide us with an experience of boundaries and control over time and the ability to plan and be spontaneous with our time.

The early motherhood experience of 'clock' time changes from that of familiar rules and guidelines (breakfast, lunch, dinner and night time), working time and free time, to the all consuming 'baby needs' time. All mothers in this research expressed that their time belonged to their children, that they were stripped of the familiarity and comfort of everyday time boundaries.   Instead, mothers had to learn to let go of the known structure of time and learn 'Being' in the time mode that allows them to follow their children's needs. We could argue that mothers chose to switch from 'Doing-

in-time-space' to 'being-in-time-space'. Some mothers attempt to manage the existential anxiety that comes with this switch in mode by continuing to keep to a strict time schedule that determines baby feeding and sleep time.

In order to be able to be there for their babies, mothers describe that they had to be always alert, aware of time, phenomenologically 'present' in a 'here-and-now' mode of time-space. At the same time, they had to learn to plan ahead in minutes, hours, days, years. Mothers had to be able to spontaneously respond to her child's needs and learn to be organized and 'ready to go'. Living in constant awareness of the presence of another Being and alertness to your responsibility for that Being's survival, mothers' perceptions are that they are living with their children on their minds every moment of day and night. Being a mother, therefore, has no time boundary; it is no nine-to-five project with free time to rest. It is a 24/7 project with no ability to switch off. As Stadlen (2004:41) describes in her book,

> '*Suddenly the new mother learns that she cannot even hurry to the toilet without first thinking about the safety and well-being of her baby'.*

Mothers in this research reflected that the responsibility they felt for their children cannot be compared to any other responsibility they experienced before motherhood. Concurring with the findings of this research, Stadlen

(2004) speaks about how the responsibilities women hold before motherhood have the ability to be shared, passed on or even ignored. By comparison, the weight of a mother's responsibility is such that no-one can completely take her place. The mother isn't just 'looking after' her child. She is responsible for him or her even in her absence. Every mother described that nothing could be compared to the experience of the responsibility they felt for their child, which during early motherhood was focused more on their children's physical well-being, their safety, their survival. Mothers are therefore prioritizing 'baby needs' time over 'my needs' time.

Arnold-Baker (2014) in her phenomenological study of motherhood identified a theme called 'Living in the Present' where she describes new mothers' experiences of following the rhythm of their babies, when they had to adapt to new sense of 'temporality'. The results of this study echoed Arnold-Baker's findings that 'mothers (. . .) primarily experienced their lives in the present, the immediate past and immediate future and were focused, in the main, on existing for their babies' *(p.176)*. She reflected on this finding, referring to Heidegger's (1962) term *resolute*, meaning to act according to conscience and one's potential. One cannot choose to be resolute and by being resolute 'Dasein' is acting in a way that makes sense of life as a whole

and in the face of the possibility of death. The mothers in her study were therefore 'resolute in that their whole beings were directed towards the care of their babies' (Arnold-Baker, 2014).

They were trying to respond in the best way possible for their babies and they were well aware of the mortality of the situation both in terms of their own death and that of their babies.

Furthermore, through this peak awareness of life and death, mothers enter into a new relationship with 'existential' time. They become aware of the temporality of existence, their own as well as their children's. It could be argued that the mother's role delineates a defined line between a woman's past and her future. In the past, she was responsible only for her own existence; she lives behind her life project –'herself'. On becoming a mother, a woman accepts a new life project –'her child', and this 'new project' becomes part of her for the rest of her life.

This more existential relationship to time was also explored by Hartley (2005) who found that women described how baby's needs absorbed all mothers' time, and how the priorities that previously were important to women were displaced by the needs of their children. Similarly to the mothers in my research, Hartley (2005) described how mothers in her research expressed the experience of their time belonging to their babies.

This transformed 'being-in-time-and-space' is another example of how motherhood places a women in a state of 'defamiliarisation', when the previous layers and routines of everyday life that were socially constructed and time-boundaried, infused with personal and collective meaning are deconstructed and have to be reconstructed, this time through her own volition, her own choices, her own responsibilities, her own call of *conscience.* As Heidegger (1962) argues, conscience summons 'Dasein's Self' from its *lostness* in the "they". One must keep in mind that when we designate the conscience as a 'call', this call is an appeal to the they-self in its Self; as such an appeal, it summons the 'Self' to its potentiality-for-being-its-self, and thus calls 'Dasein' forth to its possibilities. But we shall not obtain an ontologically adequate interpretation of the conscience until it can be made plain not only who is called by the call but also who does the calling, how the one to whom the appeal is made is related to the one who calls, and how this 'relationship' must be taken ontologically as a way in which these are interconnected in their Being.

In describing the ways in which motherhood changes women's lives, we must consider what it is that 'replaces' that which has been lost. My research, as well as countless other studies, have revealed that women surrender much that is familiar, enjoyable and reassuring when they become

mothers, with the aim (whether deliberate or not) of being able to devote as much time as possible to mothering – in other words their own time (which has been lost) is replaced by 'baby-time'.

5.3.3 Sub-theme 2.3 'Always Tired'

Living in this mode of continuous 'call of consciousness', responsibility and choice and continual physical and psychological availability to another is an exhausting experience and mothers in this research described feeling '*always tired*'. Stadlen (2002:110) similarly pointed out that 'the tiredness of a new mother is in a league of its own'. Most researchers reflected on mothers' physical and emotional 'exhaustion' during early motherhood. For example, Barclays et al. (1997) used the word 'drained' in describing the physical, mental and emotional demands associated with the new role of a mother. Hartley (2005) provides her view on how mothers may feel 'drained' by the experience of this Being mode of living rather than a prior 'doing' mode, arguing that this Being mode may be cherished by some new mothers but experienced as frustrating and isolating by others.

Stadlen (2004) describes how mothers often say that after the birth, the degree of tiredness comes as a rude shock. Most mothers in this research

declared that the most challenging part of early motherhood was the state of 'exhaustion' while they were learning to understand and respond to their children's needs. To ensure their children's survival and well-being, mothers were choosing to take on the responsibility of providing 'good' mothering for their children, and as Stadlen (2011:98) pointed out mothers make choices over and over again to look after their children even at a cost to themselves in terms of fatigue, loss of sleep and declining personal interest in their own needs:

> *Mothers might care for their babies at the cost of their own physical wellbeing. They themselves complain that they are not exercising choices…but of course they do have choices. They are exercising free will.*

One of the consequences of being aware of and accepting the ultimate responsibility for their children's survival means that mothers are always mindful of their choices, twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week, what Stadlen (2004) calls *'keeping in mind'* their children's needs. It could be argued that this mindfulness of choice and responsibility, this new way of 'being-in-the-world' is one of the factors that leaves mothers so exhausted. This 'mindfulness mode', in spite of exhaustion and ambivalence, can also offer the mother the opportunity to live authentically. For instance, the

personal qualities that the mother then becomes aware of in herself include the capacity for selflessness, perseverance and constant commitment in the face of overwhelming exhaustion.

5.3.4 *Sub-theme 2.4 My Body as a mother*

Mothers in this research describe how proud they are of what they had achieved; they are proud of their female bodies, bodies that allowed them to become mothers. And at the same time, they are expressing how lucky and proud they are that their bodies went back to the shape they had before motherhood, how important for them to still look like a girl. This is in line with McCarthy's (2015) findings on mothers' experiences of getting their bodies 'back', and how there is a desire (or requirement) to 'race back' to a prior, known, (socially) acceptable body free from any signs of having carried or given birth to a baby. The female body in this way becomes a kind of 'currency' that is used for acceptance and integration 'back' into society in the postnatal period.

Also, mothers described how they are presenting their bodies through a different dress code, depending on the role they play in society. Mothers who went back to work described how, in work mode, they dress like 'the old me', taking more care over how to present themselves, and how, when in

'mother mode', they take much less care over what they look like.

Clothing is therefore symbolic of the separateness of being a mother and being a woman-for-herself. When being a mother, women dress differently to demonstrate they are not sexually available in society, but being 'for herself' means being a woman with a sexual identity. By wearing different clothes more appropriate for the role, women explicitly demonstrate the separation between her 'self-as-mother' and her other identities which exist solely 'for her'. This corresponds with Bailey (2001) who also found that some women identified themselves more as 'someone's mum' with their bodies existing for an 'Other' and a concomitant loss of desire to 'dress up' or look sexy. On becoming a mother, women attain two modes of existence, which they can step in and out of according to the demands of their roles. As mothers they embody a mindful, authentic mode of existence wherein they are authors of their own life project: their child's survival. Stepping back into society's roles, back into following 'das Mann', women bring with them a different level of awareness and responsibility. For mothers, living in a truly inauthentic mode, blindly following 'das Mann' is no longer possible. Motherhood wakes women up to life's potential, to their own potential. As McCarthy (2015) highlighted, the transition to motherhood is a period that involves many internal and external changes to the self, implying

a complex relationship between body and mind that creates more demands for women to manage their motherhood role.

5.4 *Theme 3. Social Dimensions: Relational Responsibility*

> *Human beings are always in relationships – we live in them and through them. We are nurtured by them and produce through them; everything that a human being gives and receives, from birth until death, evolves through relationships.* (Jacobsen, 2007:5).

5.4.1 *Sub-Theme 3.1 Performing Motherhood*

Reflecting on and describing the transition to motherhood as the experience of an awareness of death anxiety, freedom and choice, and other existential givens, would be impossible without first reflecting on the life-world totality of being human, or, as Heidegger (1962) terms it, 'being-in-the-world'. Stadlen (2011:14) highlights that describing 'being a mother' is describing 'being in a relationship'. In giving birth to a child, another human being, a mother gives birth to a relationship which lasts forever. As Lintott,

(2010:67) describes,

> *'this is not just any relationship – the mother and child are one being*
>
> *and two at the same time'*.

When this relationship enters the mothers' social or relational world, it is squeezed into the dynamic of all her existing relationships. For example, the shape of her relationships with a partner, family, friends and colleagues are inevitably altered and re-constructed. Therefore, her 'being-in-the-world' will be re-constructed and her position within her life-world will be recreated (Stadlen, 2004:14).

Hartley (2005) described the relationship between mother and child as being different to any other relationships in a woman's relational world. The child is central to a mother's existence, and as such they are not co-existent (Boss, 1979). They are not equal participants in a relationship because the baby totally relies on the mother and a woman carries the baby, literally and ontologically, as part of her 'being-in-the-world'. Hartley (2005) points out that a mother's utter absorption in every mode of the child's Being, prompts her to turn her own Being towards the child and restricts her openness to other Beings, including her partner, family, colleagues and friends.

On the one hand, the findings of my study support this argument, but on the other, as Hartley (2005) also describes, all the mothers spoke about how

motherhood enriched some of their existing relationships and opened up the potential for new relationships. Therefore, I could argue that these relationships are not restrained, but re-shaped according to a woman's new existence as a mother.

Prinds et al. (2013) described how the period of transition is the facilitation of a gradual psychological opening to profound social change. They align their findings with Davis-Floyd's (2003), who argued that the transition to motherhood must be conceptualised as a manifestation of the core values of any society. These findings are also in line with Arnold-Baker (2014) who highlighted how relationships with significant others are changed as a result of being a mother. She argues that mothers, by opening themselves up toward their children, are opening up towards other social relationships, for example becoming more understanding of husbands and their own mothers. However, the results of this study highlighted not only an existential openness towards the 'Other', but also a fundamental re-evaluation, reconstruction and transformation of existing relationships.

During the transition to motherhood, the re-construction of the Social world encourages active questioning of belonging, when relationships are transformed and values and priorities are re-evaluated. This is in line with my findings and also those of Arnold-Baker (2014) and Prinds et al. (2013),

who described how, from an existential perspective, the relationship to a child is also ultimately a confrontation with the fear of losing that child and therefore a confrontation with aloneness and failure (van Deurzen, 2005). It is also a confrontation with human fragility. In this way, becoming a mother renders a woman at once both powerful and vulnerable.

The concept of a 'good mother' is socially constructed. As Butterfield (2010:67) expresses 'the "ideal mother" is revealed to be a social construction, and one that varies historically and culturally'. Further, she argues that the ideal of a 'good mother' asserts that a 'natural mother' is a woman who sacrifices all other identities, and whose maternal love should be literally selfless. Brown and Small (1997) point out that mothers' self-sacrificing attitude signifies something more fundamental than the increased physical workload and associated time constraints of caring for a baby: It is culturally derived. For example, Marshall (1991), in her review of pregnancy and childcare guides, concluded that women need to be present and available for their children at all times, providing stimulating, devoted mothering. As an outcome, there is a belief that if she fails in this task, then the morals of the next generation are at stake (Marshall, 1991).

Mothers in my research spoke about how, on a daily basis, they are affected by their perceived failure to provide the nurturing and care that they had

committed to giving their children (see Barnston, 2011; Price, 1988). These mothers' sense of failure was exacerbated by their sense of what society expected of them as mothers, and how those expectations were internalized and used as a form of self-judgment for their inability to fulfill the requirements of being an 'ideal mother'. Price (1988:128) argues that

> *Society, having handed over the entire responsibility of mothering to women, can afford to have unreasonable expectations of what good mothering is. Hence messages are that mothers should be constantly available, always put their baby's needs first, have no needs of their own and should aim towards a form of perfect relation with the baby abound.*

Further, Price (1988) describes how this model may cause new mothers to feel judged, shamed and fearful of sharing their experiences, thereby isolating themselves from the very support they need from other women who are going through a similar adjustment to this new way of life.

Every mother in this research described this phenomenon mostly when reflecting on their experiences of feeding their babies (see also Hartley, 2005). For example, in this research, for two mothers out of eight, breastfeeding was not problematic and they found it to be a pleasure, but for the other six mothers it was a frustrating and ultimately disappointing

experience. They all described feeling insecure, not being in control and mostly feeling judged by others on their mothering. All mothers spoke about how they questioned their own abilities and performances as mothers. They described breastfeeding as being the main task by which they were judged by others. Even mothers who did successfully breastfeed their children were advised by others on what they were doing wrong. Mothers stated that not being able to, or having to give up, breastfeeding their babies was the most heightened experience of failure as a mother. Breastfeeding is connected to a mother's sense of embodiment, but mothers in this research did not interpret this as a failure of their bodies, but rather as a means by which society could judge them and deem them failures at motherhood.

In the early transition to motherhood, women's affirmation of themselves as mothers was influenced by the way in which women felt that society observed and judged them. Women described how they felt judged, not only about their own behaviour, but about the behaviour of their babies. As a result, they felt personally responsible for how their babies behaved in public. As Butterfield (2010:70) points out, mothers believe that they will be judged on the basis of their children, so the pressure of responsibility is intense:

'After all, if the children don't "turn out well", then she, as a mother,

will be seen as a failure'.

As discussed earlier, mothers stepped into motherhood with an implicit awareness of the cultural associations regarding mothers' morality as linked to their ability to take responsibility for their children. Further, implicit in women's investment in parenthood is the belief that children's daily emotional and physical well-being is ultimately dependent on their mothers' caring behaviour (Backett, 1982; Wearing, 1984; McMahon, 1998). The belief that women are 'ultimately responsible' for their young children endures (Wearing, 1984); they are seen to be responsible for the preservation, growth, and social acceptability of their children (Ruddick, 1984a). Since the mothering role is culturally associated with responsibility, morality and caring, for a woman to risk being seen as irresponsible towards her children would be to risk far more than an inadequate role performance, it would be to portray a view of herself as a 'bad mother'. However, the women in this research recognised a discrepancy between the low public value placed on motherhood, as opposed to the high personal value (and moral worth) afforded to the role by mothers themselves (Wearing, 1984). For woman to be remiss in feeling responsible for her child would implicate her whole moral character. These 'normative, stereotypical expectations of motherhood' (Sevon, 2009) and the ways in which they inform women's

perceptions of their duty to fulfill these expectations, clearly influenced women developing their own way of 'being-in-the-world-as-mothers', as evidenced in this research.

Butterfield (2010:74) describes the 'ambiguity' of the human condition, where we are never completely alone as individuals and we are also never completely lost in the social – the reality is in the tension of experiencing both at the same time. She demonstrates that to be a mother is to be socially positioned in a specific way, within a specific social context in the world. This social context positions a woman within a web of expectations of how, a 'good mother' (or 'ideal mother') *should* behave:

> *and there may be real advantages and disadvantages – socially, emotionally, materially, and physically – associated with the extent to which one follows or veers from the stereotypical script*
>
> (Butterfield, 2010:69).

Therefore, to be a mother is to live within the boundaries that are determined in real ways, but a mother is still free to choose what being a mother will mean to her, how she will respond to the social script and how she will live this new identity as a mother within larger social and cultural contexts (Butterfield, 2010).

5.4.2 *Sub-Theme 3.2 Relationship with a partner: 'We are more parents than a couple'*

Reflecting on their relationship with partners, my findings concurred with other researchers who found that mothers experienced the changes to their intimate relationships as a shock. Most women began with a description of how close and tender their relationships were before having children, and how they expected that having a child would enrich their partnership. To their surprise, mothers described feeling *more* separate following the birth of their child, as though they are walking down separate roads, living separate lives. This finding in line with Stadlen's (2004) description of the way in which, after a baby's birth, couples quickly discover their minimal preparation. A two-person relationship is radically different from being one of three people, and new parents don't often adequately consider this change.

Sevon (2009), in her psychological and social research on Maternal Responsibility, highlights how the transition to motherhood doesn't only happen between mother and child, but rather is a complicated process of division of care which is under negotiation and prone to personal and moral conflicts. This is particularly with regard to the couple relationship, where parental identities are formed through relational negotiations, conflicts and

adaptations in everyday life with the birth of a baby. Numerous researchers report similar observations, pointing out the ambivalence of the process of finding a balance between contradictory cultural narratives and constructing new identities as mothers and partners (Adkins, 2003; Gordon et al., 2005; McNay, 1999; Sevon, 2009).

The overwhelming weight of responsibility for their children shifted new mothers' priorities and values. All eight participants reported that their time and space belonged to their children, their children's needs being their first priority. It is not, therefore, just mothers' own needs, but father's needs that are shelved, at least during early motherhood, *'He is not my priority anymore'* described mothers in this research.   Hartley (2005:276) also describes in her study that it is as though the baby has displaced the partner in space and time, edging him out. It is time and space for the baby first. Stadlen (2004:214) describes how:

> *It is confusing, because a mother is usually trying to create enough attention space for their newborn, the father can feel rudely and inexplicably rejected. Suddenly the baby can seem to be occupying 'his' special place. Instead of both parents trying to identify the father's new and unique place in the triangle, both may perceive the father as competing for affection with his baby.*

Mothers in this research did not report that their ambivalence towards their partner was merely a matter of different workloads. Rather, it was mothers' feelings of 'ultimate responsibility' for their children that influenced their re-shaping their priorities, values and needs in relation to their partners, and this was central to the challenges in relationships with them. Mothers described that it was as though their partners had not shared the same moral transformation of self that was demanded of them through their connectedness to their children. Some mothers considered fathers to be less responsible, less conscious of their children's needs. These results are in line with Cowan and Cowan (1988), who described the different change of pace for mothers and fathers. They argue that, although both parents will undergo significant shifts in self-concept, attitudes, and behaviour, mothers will change faster and further than fathers. In other words, women described the conflict between their difficulties sharing parenting tasks due to their 'ultimate responsibility' towards their children, and on the other hand desiring their partners' help and support. These findings also echo those of other researchers who described the ambivalence between the ideal of shared parenting and the reality of having to manage by themselves (McMahon, 1995; Thagaard, 1997; Sevon, 2009).

Stadlen (2004) points out how mothers' and fathers' daily lives can seem

very remote. Every woman in this research described that they felt so distant from their partners, that they were '*living in different worlds'*. Indeed, fathers' daily routines may not have changed much, and perhaps triggered by the feelings of parental responsibility and being the only income in the family, some fathers work even longer hours, becoming more absent and tired when returning home. By contrast, for the mother at home, everything has changed in her daily life. New mothers suddenly find themselves in a new world where their existence is not about them anymore. They are spending all day and night prioritizing their responsibility for their baby's needs, learning new skills as mothers and how to respond to their vulnerable babies whose survival is dependent on their constant choices. This responsibility to make choices on another's behalf confronts the mother with anxiety, guilt and other existential givens, as she learns to live in a different, less structured time-space reality that is displaced from the external 'familiar' world. So when their partners come home from the world they shared together before having children, mothers and fathers are experiencing *home* in a different way; they may feel distant and disconnected in place of the 'increased closeness' that they expected when planning to become parents.

The findings of this study highlighted that women feel unappreciated,

misunderstood, unsupported and distanced from their partners. As mothers they found it difficult to make sense of and describe their experiences of this novel world to their partners and even to themselves. It could be argued that this new 'being-in-the-world' as a mother can't be described, but only experienced, and mothers do not have any energy left to even attempt to describe it to their partners. They want to be understood, supported, even rescued, perhaps rewarded, but instead they may feel judged and criticized by their partners who have also been thrown out of their 'comfort zone'. As Stadlen (2004) highlights, women are astonished at how furious they can feel towards their partners.

The findings also point to the division of life changes and level of responsibility accepted by mothers and fathers for the day-to-day management of children's lives. This may also be a major contributor to the experienced loss of intimacy in marriage after children. As we discussed earlier, mothers reported high levels of fatigue and difficulty seeing themselves as sexually available in the mother role and this has enormous consequences for intimacy in marriage after children (Stadlen, 2004; Maushart, 2000; Ehrensaft, 1994).

Moreover, the mothers in this research came from a world where 'equal opportunity' was not so much demanded as simply *assumed*, a world where

their choices and expectations of parenthood were shared with their partners. The results of this study clearly show that it was not only women's expectations of motherhood that turned out to be misconceptions, but also their relationship with their partners. Mothers and fathers both stepped into parenthood from a *shared* modern world, with shared 'equal' interests and possibilities, and found themselves in a more 'traditional' world of parenthood, where their roles became specialized and polarised. Maushart (2000) spoke about the divergence of interests and activities of parents, the widening gap between 'his' world and 'hers', as she called it. According to Cowan & Cowan (1995:217) 'the transition to parenthood is more difficult now than it used to be'. They stressed that

> *the problem is not so much the magnitude or even the multitude of changes that parenthood brings to a marriage; it is the direction of those changes, as in the division of household tasks and child-care, social support outside the marriage, and working life* (Cowan and Cowan, 1995:112).

This indicates that both partners were unaware and unprepared for their relationship changing from 'couple' to 'family', from the dynamic of two people to three in a relationship. Mothers reported experiencing this change as another huge loss within the transition to motherhood.

Further, Mothers in this research described that, with time, both parents became more certain in their roles; they learned their roles as parents and became more relaxed with each other and with the baby. As babies grow stronger, mothers and fathers learn how to be parents, how to find more physical and psychological time and space to re-evaluate and re-build their relationships with each other and how to assimilate their new values and priorities into their roles as parents. Both parents have to re-fashion their 'being-in-the-world', and each follows their own idiosyncratic journey to parenthood. Mothers reported that it took time for them to re-connect and be able to talk about their problems and needs. As Stadlen (2004) points out, it's important for parents to be able to discuss their needs and feelings in order to help them re-connect and re-construct their relationships. Although a mother's anxiety might prevent her from wanting to leave her child with its father, his support and assistance with child-care and other chores in fact helps the mother and facilitates her seeing the family as a 'joint venture'.

All the women in this research stressed how much they value their partners as fathers, not just for the support that mothers so desperately need, but for their children's connection and belonging to their fathers. Women described feeling a special connection to their partners as fathers of their children. It is a different connection, perhaps on a more spiritual level, as well as a

relational level. Becoming mothers triggered women's awareness of their 'existential isolation', and their need for belonging. Prind et. al. (2013) addresses this within the dimension of *Mitwelt* and demonstrates how new relationships encourage active questioning of belonging. Fathers are the only 'other' who biologically created the child and all the women in this research recognized that fathers were the first point of reference when it came to belonging and support for their children and this was highly valued by them. Mothers described being aware of the opportunity to build their own family units, wherein they are all bound by a structure of combined values, rules and boundaries and to which they all belong.

5.4.3 *Sub-theme 3.3 Relating to your mother as a mother*

Reflecting on relationships within family networks, all the participants in this research noted changes in their relationships with their mothers. Similarly, many studies researching the transition to motherhood found that all new mothers re-defined their relationships with their mothers, since now they are not only daughters, but mothers as well (Darvil et al.; Hartley, 2005); Fischer, 1981); Tammentie, 2003). For example, Tammentie (2003) describes the importance of parental support, and how new parents' attitudes towards their own parents change as they compare themselves and their

partners to their own parents.

Stadlen (2004:234) describes a 'mother and daughter' relationship as usually the oldest relationship mothers will know. Despite each mother having her own unique story, all eight mothers described re-evaluating their relationships with their mothers and how this affected their own mothering values. Some mothers described feeling more connected, empathetic, appreciative and involved with their mothers. Others described suddenly becoming more aware and reflective upon mistakes or challenges they perceived in their mother's mothering of them. Women described how, through their own experiences, and an awareness of the challenges of mothering, they became more understanding, respectful and accepting towards their mothers. This finding is in line with Arnold-Baker (2014) who, in her research on the transition to motherhood, described how new mothers became more understanding of their own mothers and their mothering, and how this may prompt them to see their own childhood experiences from a different perspective. Stadlen (2004) also described how mothers had the opportunity of seeing their mothers, not as failed models of perfection, or as a failed 'perfect mother', but as an individual with their own life-stories affected by their culture and history and by their own existential givens. As Stadlen (2004:245) states

'this enabled them to re-evaluate their childhoods, and sometimes to resolve to parent their own children differently'.

It could be argued that, even though every mother will learn her own unique way to mother her child, every mother will have the experience of evaluating their mother's mothering and learning from it, accepting desirable and rejecting undesirable mothering.

The results of this research indicate that women reach for their own mothers, for their support and/or a new opportunity for understanding, as well as repairing, their relationships with them. This process can support new mothers in finding their authentic mode of relating to their children in terms of their own and their children's needs (Parker, 2005).

Moreover, the findings of this study also indicate that new mothers are not only re-constructing relationships with their mothers, but the whole family network is redressed with the arrival of a new baby. Stadlen (2004) speaks about how everyone within the extended family gains a new identity: As grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and siblings, and new values, perspectives and responsibilities are materialized within the wider family network. Mothers in this research described experiencing altered connections and often a closer sense of belonging to different family

members. They also described how important and valuable it is for them to observe how their family members accept and love their babies.

Every woman in this research described how becoming a mother changed their perspective on the meaning of 'family' and they felt more connected and rooted within their family systems. This finding concurs with those of other researchers who found that mothers often expressed feeling an increase in the importance of family, a renewed feeling of closeness with their own families, and a new-found empathy for all parents (Barclays et al., 1996: Cudmore, 1997; Smith-Pierce,1994).

5.4.4 Sub-theme 3.4 'Old' and 'New' friends: Separation and Belonging

All the women interviewed in this research described leading very active social lives before motherhood. They spoke of spending much of their time on social activities with their friends, colleagues and partners. When becoming mothers, they lost that social life, they lost their previous, known 'social identity'. The findings of this research support Smith-Pierce's (1994) study which highlighted how women drift away from childless friends when

they become mothers. Each mother in this research described a loss of connection with previous social activities and friends. They explained how as mothers they didn't have the time to socialise as they did before motherhood and they felt they had become less flexible and less available to their old friends and prior social activities.

What mothers are describing here is making different choices and prioritizing different aspects of their social world. It could be argued that mothers are choosing to leave their old social identity behind and adopt alternative social identities that embrace the values and priorities generated by their role as mothers. This social identity is driven by a mother's sense of responsibility for her children, her prioritising her children's needs first, and her awareness of her own changing needs as a mother.

All eight mothers in this research described 'losing' most of their 'old friendships'. Women spoke of feeling the loss of their old friends with whom they were no longer sharing interests, time and space. Stadlen (2004) describes how important it is for mothers to feel connected to their old friends. They can remind mothers what they were like as their 'old social self'. But as Stadlen (2004) also indicates, a mother's identity usually and unexpectedly changes the nature and dimension of friendships and not all friendships survive.

On the one hand, women described changes to their social life in a passive 'bad faith' mode, as not being in control of their time and not being flexible as mothers. On the other hand, they described a sense of authenticity and empowerment in making different choices in their new social life, according to their new values, responsibilities, priorities and needs. All mothers stated how motherhood categorized who their 'real' friends are, friends who made the effort to stay connected and supported them in spite of the changes to their social availability and interests. This theme shows how becoming a mother also changes women's social worlds and alters their social identities.

Women described leaving their social life behind and experienced the loss of a familiar social life and a connection to people with whom they used to share interests, and have fun. Some new mothers described feeling isolated and lonely. If new mothers do not feel they 'belong' to their previous social circle, to whom *do* they 'belong' now, as mothers?

The findings of this research echoed many other studies which similarly indicate the importance of support from other mothers during the transition to motherhood (Price, 1988; Arnold-Baker, 2014; Nicolson, 1998; Stadlen, 2004). Stadlen (2004:194) speaks about how local mothers suddenly feel comfortable talking to each other on the street, in the park or in the cafe 'as if she has now joined their informal club […] These co-operative links with

other mothers are vital'.

Women in this research described how they felt understood, comforted, reassured and affirmed in their novel, unfamiliar roles as mothers. They could now share those experiences with others, This finding reflects Arnold-Baker's (2014) study which shows how sharing their experiences enabled new mothers to see that other new mothers were in the same position as themselves and that they were able to identify and connect with each other and to support each other. New mothers experienced a sense of belonging with other mothers and they could allow themselves to follow each other's advice, follow the 'they' from this club of mothers who they feel they belong to, and hence feel less isolated in their responsibility for their choices. All mothers in this research described how they felt less (existentially) alone, less anxious and more reassured in making choices and taking on responsibilities. However, belonging to this motherhood club is by no means without its challenges. Some mothers interviewed for this research described comparing themselves to other mothers and feeling judged. That said, every mother mentioned finding like-minded mothers who shared their values in motherhood and felt supported by them. Stadlen (2004:248) captures this beautifully when she writes,

These flexible groups of mothers are as warm and supportive today as

they have always been. Being a mother can teach a woman the value of the generous support that other women can give her as never before.

In summary, this finding demonstrates how women's social dimension of existence is transformed dramatically for new mothers. The emergence of a mother-child relationship into a woman's social world prompts changes to values, priorities and connections with others. This finding also indicates that it is the weight of responsibility a mother feels for her children which prompts those values to be re-assessed and this in turn demands a re-construction of her relationship with her partner, her own mother, her friends, colleagues and extended family. Childhood experiences are also re-evaluated, informing mothers' expectations for their children and their social lives, with friendships and activities all moulded around the changing needs of mother and child. The new mother-child relationship instigates a 'being-toward' (Heidegger, 1962) mode of relating and a more authentic position with regard to 'being-with-others', as the new mother exercises her *choice* in the face of societal expectations, norms, demands and codes of ethics.

5.5 *Theme 4. Personal World: Personal Responsibility*

5.5.1 *Sub-theme 4.1 From 'self-centered' to 'self-giving'*

The discussion of the above chapters showed how the transition to motherhood has influenced the re-construction of mothers' physical and social dimensions of existence. Mothers' positioning across both these dimensions changed as a result of re-connecting with their existential givens, which in turn encouraged the development of a new set of values and choices. This chapter continues to explore how motherhood has influenced women's Personal dimension, their relationship with themselves and their sense of identity.

Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005:157) describe how,

> *(...) a person's sense of self develops over the years in a number of ways, through the capacities we discover in ourselves, through the things that we do, through the effect we have on others and on the world and through the things people tell us about ourselves.*

With the birth of a child, a 'mother' identity is born. This identity is not chosen, it is a *given* to a woman who gives birth to a child. This research raises the point therefore that a mother then has a choice whether to accept or reject responsibility for this newborn's existence, and through this choice

a mother is actively choosing motherhood. A mother's identity is thereby formed, her relationship with herself, her entire 'being-in-the-world' as a mother is under construction. For some mothers, this amounts to an all-consuming identity that supersedes all other identities, whilst for others, there may be a different balance. By choosing to take on the responsibility of motherhood, a woman is shaping her mother identity. Whether a mother accepts or rejects taking responsibility for her child, she will still be a mother. It could be argued, therefore, that a woman is not actually choosing a mother identity per se, but rather is choosing (or rejecting) 'motherhood' and it is in this choice that her mother identity is formed. Having a baby guarantees us an identity as 'mother'; choosing motherhood informs, shapes and develops that identity and this in turn generates changes to all other prior identities in the mother's life.

Vik & Haftin (2012) allude to this loss of former identities in their research and Barclay et al., (1997) similarly uncovered the loss of a sense of self. Other researchers described becoming a mother in terms of changes in the way women thought about themselves (Arnold-Baker, 2014); or in terms of the way in which the mother reorganises and transforms her self-identity (Stadlen, 2004; Stern & Bruschweiler-Stern, 1998; Prinds et. al. 2013). The mothers in this current study have not described a loss but a change, a

transformation in the way they relate to themselves and in the way they see themselves. All eight mothers stated that the main change in relating to themselves was the transition from a self-centered relationship with oneself to a self-giving relationship wherein the 'Other' (her child's) needs are prioritized over her own.

Women accepted responsibility for their children and chose to prioritise their children's needs before their own, to relate to their children as 'number one' when 'being-in-the-world' as mothers. The results of this study demonstrate that women chose to priorities their new identity as 'mother' over and above their other existing identities. The results of this study are in line with Barlow (1997) who demonstrated how women reflected on experiencing the loss of their freedom, autonomy, independence and self-centeredness, but did not forget their lives before motherhood. Their identities from the past had to shift to be able to make space and time for this new identity as a mother, which they chose as the predominant one, at least at the beginning of motherhood. As we already discussed, women were not aware and not prepared for the full impact of a mother's role and had to learn on the job, a job that involves accepting responsibility for a new life's survival and well-being, perhaps the most responsible job that a woman had ever experienced. This job came without clear instructions and a skillful team to help - no

wonder women felt unprepared, lost and not in control (vulnerable). Moreover, women had to learn and perform this motherly job in an unknown 'motherhood world' where they could not understand the language and where they had lost the familiarity of time and space, the support and comfort of the people they relied upon on a daily basis, and the feeling of being 'at home' in their 'lifeworld'. They found themselves in a new world where everything was *'upside down' (P4)*, everything was changed and unfamiliar to their 'everydayness' of existence. In this unknown 'motherhood world', women found themselves being the authors of their new projects as they accepted ultimate responsibility for their children. This authorship, this new identity as a mother, entailed a new relationship with the child, a new way of relating to the 'other', willingly giving 'number one' priority to the 'other' (her child). To make and embrace this choice, women were confronted by their existential givens: Awareness of mortality, possibilities and limitations, freedom and 'thrownness', facticity and authenticity, existential loneliness and connection with the 'other'. Mothers in this research demonstrated the way in which identity is held in flux during the transition to motherhood until a sense of 'groundedness' is achieved within the world of motherhood and identities can be re-balanced and 'figured out' as they are filtered through new and emerging value systems.

Mothers in this research reflected that they feel as if their lives do not belong to them anymore; it is all about their children now. But at the same moment, all mothers acknowledge that they have chosen to put their children before themselves. Similarly, Butterfield (2010) graciously described the responsibility accepted by the mother for her child as a profound commitment that takes root inside her and runs deeper than any duty known before. Butterfield suggests that it can be compared to the self-sacrifice that was required from the mother in caring for her child, but in return the mother gains a life that is imbued with new meaning *'everything was meaningful in a new way, and I was changed* (Butterfield, 2010:66).

The unique paradox in mothers' existence is being intensely bound together with another being, and at the same time being a free and separate individual self. The ambiguity of motherhood is in the tension of experiencing both at the same time (Butterfield, 2010; Arnold-Baker, 2014). Hartley (2005) reflects on woman's responsiveness to her child as 'other', even though this other originates from within the mother as an intrinsic part of her. Hartley (2005) notes that Kristeva (1986) compares a mother's responsiveness to her child with an image by Heidegger, 'She is simply there: the mother with a part of her that is already an other. Being there with: the dawn of difference*'.* (in Clement and Kristeva, 2001:56).

Drawing from the view that a mother sees a child as part of her and at the same time as the 'Other', I argue that 'a mother', through her responsiveness or responsibility for the 'Other' (her child), is learning to hold responsibility for her child's existence and her own existence simultaneously. The transition to motherhood is a transition into an existence with a new identity as a mother, which is a very individual journey for each woman. Even though all the women in this research described prioritising their children's needs before their own, I believe that the ambiguity of a mother's *new project* is to make choices and take responsibilities for both existences, her children's and her own. Those choices often generate rejection and acceptance, helplessness and control, vulnerability and power.

This finding echoes an existential perspective of self as something that the individual forms through the consequences of choice, something that they will into existence. As van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005:160) highlight *'there is no such thing as a substantial or solid self'*.

The selfhood of a human being is not fixed, for it is always becoming; it is emergent, under constant (trans)formation. Heidegger (1962) rejects the concept of self and instead speaks of *Dasein* (literally 'there being'), that is always in relation to others and to the world. A human being is in this way

always and already a 'being-in-the-world'. In reference to motherhood, when a mother accepts her new life project, which includes choices and responsibility for both existences, she accepts 'motherhood' the transformational journey that shapes her identity, her 'being-in-the-world'.

5.5.2 *Sub-Theme 4.2 The Vulnerability of Responsibility*

All mothers in this research demonstrated an acceptance of motherhood and the existential responsibilities that this entails. As a result, mothers experienced changes in their perception of themselves and their world. In this new 'being-in-the-world-as-mothers' they accepted the responsibility for the other's 'being-in-the-world', responsibility that permeates through the physical, psychological, social and spiritual existence of that 'Other'. Mothers described making choices about what is 'good' and 'bad' for both existences, their own and their children's. Mothers described choices based on their own and society's values and morals; through the choices they made for their children they evaluated themselves as 'good mothers' or 'bad mothers', which created a measure of anxiety and guilt, uncertainty and vulnerability.

Numerous studies demonstrated how mothers ensure that their child survives

and thrives, even at some considerable cost to themselves in terms of their loss of independence, their mobility and their psychological and physical well-being (see Barlow and Cairns, 1997; Parker, 2005; Sevon, 2009; Cudmore, 1997; Sethi, 1995; Smith-Pierce, 1994; Stadlen, 2004; Arnold-Baker, 2014). Parker (2005) goes so far as to suggest that this 'breaching' of physical and psychological boundaries that the mother experiences, and the vulnerability that this entails, ushers in an 'internal shift' that exposes a more ontological mode of existence not normally encountered in everyday ontic modes of living. This shifting from ontic to ontological modes of awareness, Parker proposes, perhaps accounts for mothers' anecdotal experience of ambivalence during the transition to motherhood.

All mothers in this research echoed this ambivalence within the theme of maternal responsibility. On the one hand, they chose to be responsible for their children and found taking care of their children a desirable and fulfilling experience. On the other hand, they all described experiencing the shadow side to maternal responsibility: a deep sense of vulnerability. Being responsible, making choices and learning how to provide the best physical and psychological care for their children is an exhaustive task (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). However, mothers in this research did not attribute the negative sides of motherhood to their children, but rather to the heavy

burden of care and to an evaluation of themselves as 'bad' mothers (Parker 1997). Through their vulnerabilities, mothers became more aware of the responsibility for their own actions, choices, values, ethics. They desired to be seen by others (and by themselves) as responsible mothers, as coping mothers, as 'good' mothers. Despite this, all the women in this study had feelings of not living up to the ideals of a 'good' mother, constantly juggling the demands placed on them by their own cultural narratives and by their own expectations of themselves as mothers (see Parker, 1997). Mothers had to learn to withstand the freedom to choose how to mother their children within the limitations of their own cultural expectations.

As Heidegger (1962) and Sartre (1943) pointed out, the awareness of responsibility triggers an awareness of authorship, an awareness of creating one's own destiny, encouraging one to re-evaluate one's own values, choices and feelings in more mindful, authentic modes of living. I believe the results of this research clearly demonstrate that the transition to motherhood is aligned with this description of existential responsibility. Mothers also described heightened feelings of guilt triggered by the uncertainties of making the 'right' choices around mothering. Heidegger (1962) reflects on feelings of guilt as the dark shadow of awareness of responsibility. This sense of guilt is considered as an uncomfortable sense of wrongdoing, which

has been described as anxiety and a sense of badness (Yalom, 1980). This philosophy corresponds with mothers' reflections on their feelings of guilt as a sense of 'wrongdoing' towards mothering their children. The accepted awareness of responsibility for one's own choices is broadening the scope of 'accountability', not only through wrongdoings against an 'Other' or against some moral or social code, but one may also be guilty of wrongdoing against oneself. It is important to highlight that Heidegger uses the same word to describe both *guilt* and *responsibility*. He states,

> *(…) being guilty also has the signification of 'being responsible for' –*
> *that is, being the cause, or author or even the occasion for something,*
> *or even 'being the occasion' for something* (Heidegger, 1962:327).

As all mothers in this research described feeling responsibility or 'accountability' for the well-being of their children, mothers are therefore judging themselves on the basis of the choices and decisions they make for them, striving towards the *idea* of a 'good mother'. Heidegger states that guilt is a fundamental part of 'Dasein' and is intimately related to *possibility*.

> *When the 'call of consciousness' is (that is, the call that brings one*
> *back to facing one's 'authentic' mode of being), one is always 'guilty'*
> *– and guilty to the extent that one has failed to fulfill authentic*

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possibility (Heidegger, 1962:327).

In relation to motherhood, we could relate the 'call of consciousness' to mothers' awareness of their freedom around choice, responsibility and the potential for an authentic mode of existence.

Rollo May (1967:70) similarly describes (existential) guilt as *'a positive constructive emotion…a perception of the difference between what a thing is and what it ought to be'*. The maternal experience of guilt, as witnessed in this research, is borne out of the accountability, anxiety and vulnerability inherent in this, as defined by socially constructed images and internalised assumptions of what constitutes 'good' mothering.   The imagined or expected version of mothering may not always match the reality of lived experience and this underpins a mother's ambivalence around developing her own unique mothering style.

What became apparent from the findings of this research is how a mother's heightened awareness of responsibility and accountability for their children places women in what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) refers to as an 'ambiguous space', a space between being the 'author' of one's life and a sense of 'thrownness'. The women in this research felt isolated, exhausted and consumed and it took time for them to be able to successfully re-

negotiate relationships to include this new sense of being a mother.

5.5.3 *Sub-themes 4.3 Find my feet as a mother*

All the women in this research described gradually re-establishing a sense of order in their lives, re-evaluating, re-conciliating and accepting their new roles as mothers (see Hartley 2005). This ongoing process was different for each mother and influenced by mothers' recovery of a sense of control over their lives.   Barclays et al., (1997) concluded that becoming a mother takes time, that it is a complicated process that involves a 'profound reconstruction of self' (p. 727). In line with the findings of this research, the above studies highlight how the transition to motherhood is a journey where women are re-constructing their sense of self; they have departed from the familiar world where existence was 'all about me', to a world that is unknown and, initially at least, ambiguous and chaotic.

Even though the transition to motherhood is a personal journey for each individual woman, all mothers in this research described the same theme as managing to find their own feet as mothers, their own 'mothering style'. Some mothers described that they learned to accept their children and themselves as unique individuals, with their own unique needs and values. In terms of the experience of responsibility and accountability, it could be

argued that this prompts mothers to become more mindful and protective of their own values, to reassess their own understanding of good and bad, acceptable and unacceptable, themselves and their children. This concurs with Stadlen's (2004) and Arnold-Baker's (2014) observations that, through constant openness and mindful observation, mothers learn about their babies as well as themselves, and gain knowledge and confidence as mothers.

Butterfield (2010) spoke about how authentic modes of living can be an overwhelming experience as we ordinarily strive to comfort ourselves with absolutes, with objective values that tell us what to do, in order not to confront the anxiety and responsibility of choice. This philosophy can provide a ground for the observed behaviour of mothers in this research, when, at the early stages of motherhood, they were craving comfort and looking for instructions from 'specialists' (reading books, consulting health-care professionals, surfing the internet), and talking to other mothers. However, Butterfield (2010) further argues that the only option is to make our own choices and create our own values even though this can be overwhelming and anxiety provoking. Mothers in this research demonstrated how, through re-considering their own values and finding their own way, they learned to resist and eschew the pressure to conform to normative societal expectations.

As Butterfield (2010) argues, the authentic mother doesn't seek any guarantee of her existence outside of herself, and doesn't accept the ideal of the good mother as an absolute value. This is mirrored by every mother in this research who stated that she knows her child and child's needs more than anyone else. They recognised that it is not a matter of being right in the eyes of 'Others' (God, or the in-laws, or other mothers, or anyone), but rather of being right on her own eyes. The findings of this study indicate therefore, that, by *choosing* how to mother their children, mothers had reflected on their values in life, the opportunities, possibilities and limitations of their own 'being-in-the-world' and through this new understanding, learned to accept themselves and others for who they are.

All mothers in this research demonstrated that they had challenged the social script of the 'good mother', and looked to finding a balance between operating as a more authentic Being, whilst maintaining awareness of the socio-cultural limitations of their own individual values and possibilities. In becoming more authentic Beings, women are becoming more authentic mothers, and vice versa.

5.5.4 *Sub-theme 4.4 Re-balancing identities*

As we discussed above, mothers in this research described how, at the

beginning of their motherhood journey, they experienced an intense oneness with their babies, an intense relationship with another existence that is now separate. At the same time, this existence of the 'other' (the child) is so dependent on them that mothers felt intense enmeshment with their children's existence to the extent that they felt that their lives did not belong to them anymore and their individual self (or old self) had been lost. This new 'mother identity' overshadowed all other identities women used to know. Women described how they felt 'thrown' out of their familiar 'being-in-the-world' and how it took time to familiarise themselves with their new existence as mothers, a world with different perceptions and values regarding how to relate to self and others. They reported having a new awareness of time and space, a new awareness of embodiment and other existential givens, and a new awareness of a world with novel responsibilities, freedoms, possibilities, limitations, values, priorities and meanings. This is a new world of ambiguity, where you see your child as simultaneously part of your own 'being-in-the-world' whilst at the same time separate. Women learned how to be in this relationship where they feel ultimately responsible and at the same time able to let go of the control and expectations of child, self and other. As mothers in this research described, they developed their 'mothering style', found their 'feet as mothers', which

could be paraphrased as the experience of becoming more grounded within their 'Being-in-the-world' as mothers.

In spite of describing their identity as the most important and fulfilling part of their self-image, all mothers reflected on themselves as being 'not just a mum'. This finding projects a new light on mothers' identity as 'Dasein'. Heidegger (1962) understands 'Dasein' as a Being that is always and already in the world with others. The experience of motherhood raises the philosophical problem of the complex relation between the individual and social, between Dasein's ontological characteristic of *'mineness'*, the 'fact that the world that I experience is always mine and not anyone else's' (van Deurzen, 2005:163) and the fact that it is always concerned with relationship to the other and to the world. Heidegger (1962:63) argues that,

> *I am not a self just because I am able to reflect on myself, my self is*
> *revealed when I reflect on my interaction with beings in the world (…)*
> *I learn about what it means to be human from the very activity of*
> *being human.*

Each mother has her own '*mineness*' but at the same time only within the context of her relationship with the 'they'. Heidegger's description shows selfhood to be elusive and something that cannot be thought of in essentialist terms. The way in which we understand ourselves in the average everyday

mode of existence is as 'they-self'; we look at ourselves in relation to other people and in doing so we look for the similarities and differences between us. Our '*existence precedes essence*' (Sartre, 1948a:26) or, the 'essence' of 'Dasein' lies in its 'existence', therefore 'One can never be a mother in the way that stone is a stone' (Butterfield, 2010:74).

Butterfield (2010) describes further the ambiguity of the human condition, since we are never completely alone as individuals, but we are also never completely lost in the social – the reality is in the tension of experiencing both at the same time.

All the women in this research reported that at some point, when they felt it was the right time, they began considering how their 'mother' identity fits in with their other identities. Women began re-evaluating their own interests and needs outside of motherhood, and how those needs could fit in in their new lives as mothers. The results of this study demonstrated how the decision to return to work caused women great conflict, ambivalence and anxiety that are in line with Bergum (1986); Hart (1981); Leonard (1993); Sethi (1995); Smith- Pierce, (1994)*)*. In this research, all mothers re-evaluated their career identities. They all said that they would like to have a balance of part-time work and part-time being at home with their children. Some decided to take longer before returning to work. Two of the eight

mothers who had not gone back into the workplace described seeing the work of motherhood as their main value, but that at some point they would return to work because it would teach their children that women are more than 'just a mother' (see Leonard, 1993; Smith-Pierce, 1994). Leonard (1993) highlighted that the decision-making process is different for each mother, and some mothers felt that motherhood was more important than their career, that their identity was not highly dependent on their career, having had little trouble leaving employment or modifying their schedule around their child's needs.

Some mothers described returning to work as returning to 'society', as 'going back' to the world of 'they', as if returning to 'their old self', their 'they-self' (Heidegger, 1962). Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005:163) echo Heidegger's view when they state that

> '*Dasein' can exist in either an authentic or inauthentic mode of being, which will affect its openness to life and experience*.

However, this authentic mode of living, this awareness of freedom and responsibility for creating one's own life, and being the author of one's own 'being-in-the-world' creates vulnerability. All mothers in this research demonstrated how the awareness of their freedom of choices and awareness of responsibility and authorship of their 'being-in-the-world' triggered a

great level of anxiety and guilt. Van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker (2005:166) further argue that there is a part of us that wants to affirm itself and have others affirm it too, and that prompts us to conform to the norms and expectations of the 'they'. They highlighted that,

> *If one resists the 'they' there is a risk of rejection, isolation and an anxious confrontation with one's freedom. So we attempt to relieve ourselves of choosing our own possibilities and play it safe – this lessens our anxiety by bringing us 'a tranquility for which everything is 'in the best of order* (van Deurzen and Arnold-Baker, 2005: 222).

Mothers in this research described feeling more balanced and complete when they juggled their existence between going back to a work situation, wherein they can follow the 'they' rules and share the responsibility for freedom (thereby living less authentic lives); and being a mother, wherein they feel the overwhelming heavy load of responsibility for their choices and actions, where they have to exist in a more mindful, authentic mode of living. It could be argued, therefore, that motherhood puts a woman in a unique position where she is challenged to become more aware and to redefine the balance between authentic and inauthentic modes of living. Mothers are confronted with a challenging choice: either to reject or to go back to their previous interests and needs, to reject or go back to the

previous interests and hobbies by which they previously evaluated themselves. Butterfield (2010) conceptualises this as either rejecting or going back to their freedom.

However, I believe that the freedom lies in the process of making a choice which will be influenced by the limitations of each woman's '*thrownness*' into existence (her past experiences, social values, personal situation). I could argue that women who choose their mother identity as their main value and main identity, and who reject other identities or career paths are making a valuable, authentic choice for themselves which is just a valid as the choice those women made when they decided to go back to work and return to their prior identities which lie outside motherhood. Further, I could argue that women who choose to be full-time mothers are still not 'just mothers', they are much more; they are individuals who are choosing to become teachers of life to their children on a full-time basis, and they are also wives, sisters, friends, daughters, and much more besides.

The findings of this research indicate clearly that mothering is an on-going, developmental process that involves constant negotiation and renegotiation as part of a mother's own narrative development. Both mother and child are changing within this development, growing and learning from each other, both gradually moving away from their intense togetherness through

constant recreation of their relationship:

> *In the relationship between mother and child, there is no ending. Like the mother herself, the mothering relationship should be understood as a work in progress. For better and worse, then, a mother's work is never done* (Butterfield, 2010:24).

To sum up, women in this research demonstrated that the transition to motherhood is in essence a process of acceptance of the responsibility for an other (her child) which challenges them to re-evaluate and reassess their values and beliefs, not just about what type of mother they want to be or what values are important for them to pass on to their children, or what type of teachers of life they aspire to be, but essentially to ascertain what it means for them to be a 'good mother'. Furthermore, and possibly as a result of this transitional process, women also are taking more responsibility for themselves, learning to live in more 'mindful', authentic mode, embodying their values of 'good mothering' as they assert themselves as 'beings-in-the-world'.

5.5.5 *Sub-Theme 4.5 The transformative power of motherhood*

This sub-theme clearly indicates how, during the transition to motherhood, mothers experience changes in their 'being-in-the-world'. Mothers in this

research described how, on the one hand, they felt overwhelmingly high levels of anxiety and guilt caused by this authentic way of being, but on the other hand, they felt somehow transformed into 'a better person', 'a happier person'. Mothers consistently described feeling *more* content, *more* empathetic, *more* compassionate and less judgmental towards themselves and others. They embraced an acceptance of their own limitations and garnered an openness to their own possibilities as "beings-in-the-world."

In her research, Cusk (2001) highlights that the sense of responsibility for their children, the daily hard work mothers do to ensure their children's survival and well-being, reinforces the love and the connection with their children and encourages a new way in which mothers see themselves. This is in line with the narratives of mothers in this research who reflected that motherhood changed the ways they related to themselves, stimulated better understanding about themselves and afforded a deeper awareness of their values and priorities in life. Motherhood facilitated a transformation of personal qualities, such as becoming less self-centered, more patient, grounded, self-confident, and compassionate towards themselves and others. All mothers described feeling happier, complete, content, indicating the lived experience of personal growth.

McMahon (1995) in her study, described how women experienced

themselves as new persons by becoming mothers. She demonstrated how becoming a mother led to a sense of profound personal change. She argued that these new qualities that mothers experience could be easily dismissed because we typically 'expect mothers to be giving, tolerant, and tired' (McMahon, 1995:129). In contrast to this, the mothers in my research demonstrated that they were fully aware of those changes and did not in fact take them for granted, but rather were surprised and honored by the depth of self-change they experienced.

All women in this research reflected that motherhood not only changed them, but that it was 'the best thing that ever happened to me', 'the best thing I have ever done', and they spoke about their experiences of motherhood as if talking about romantic love. Following Swidler (1980), McMahon (1995) compared a mother's self-transformation with the myth of romantic love. She asserted that,

> *These themes express love's symbolic power: Love transforms and reveals character; love allows us to find our true selves (and just reward); love is a moral test in which we discover our own true worth; love allows us to know and be known – and thereby to know one's self; love can overcome individual isolation and call the 'true self'; and love changes people and marks significant turning points in*

the development of self.   (McMahon, 1995:151).

All the women in this research described themselves as profoundly changed by motherhood, by their new way of relating to the 'other' (the child), to the world and by extension to themselves. It can be argued that motherhood occasioned both the transformation of self and the rediscovery of self. As McMahon (1995:151) also highlighted 'the self-transformation of motherhood was at once both integrating and liberating: The new and the old were born and reborn'. Furthermore, this self-transformation and self-recognition indicates self-evaluation. Returning to an existential view of self, van Deurzen and Adams (2011:71) describes it as ′the dynamic center of gravity of a person's network of physical, social, personal and spiritual world relations and these networks are continuously reordered and rebalanced'. She argues further that the sense of true-self shifts and changes on a daily basis and adjusts to new situations through new choices and relations:

> *The paradox is that we gain a resilient and coherent sense of self because of and not in spite of our ability to be different in different circumstances. In other words we gain a sense of authority, of being the author of our own lives.''* *(van Deurzen and Adams (2011:71).*

In summary, the results of this study demonstrate how the journey of

motherhood prompts women into a more authentic way of living, and as van Deurzen (2005) highlights, the personal nature of authenticity entails a dramatic change within the individual, a '*call for consciousness*' as Heidegger described it, a call for the revision of our values and beliefs, our potential, our freedom to make choices in life and resist our tendency to follow the '*they*'. All mothers in this study demonstrated the shift in their experience of self in relation to the other; they learned how to put the other before 'me', gaining a new awareness and balance between self and other. Mothers described the shift as 'less self-centered'. *'I am less selfish'* they claimed, but to these women, motherhood, I argue, did not mean the sacrifice of self. Instead, they re-constructed their sense of self through connectedness to their children. As McMahon (1995) states, women speak of a 'lost sense of self', using the language of a traditional motherhood ideology to symbolize the process of self-change, which, she purports, can be very challenging, but at the same time deeply meaningful.

5.6 *Theme 5. Spiritual World – Motherhood as Self-Transcendence experience*

5.6.1 *Sub-theme 5.1 Experiencing Unconditional love.*

Emmy van Deurzen (1984; 1988) identified the Spiritual dimension of existence as being concerned with the ability to see the world and ourselves from the above *Uberwelt*. This dimension is really about how we make sense of the world through our values, beliefs, priorities and how we create meaning of our life.

> *On this dimension of our existence we really come into the true complexity of being human, as we organize our overall views on the world, physical, social and personal and generate or are inserted into an overall philosophy of life* (van Deurzen, 1997:123*).*

The results of this study show the connections between the transition to motherhood and mothers accepting responsibility for their children, suggesting that motherhood is a relational process (a mother-child relationship) that generates changes in a mother's 'being-in-the-world', spanning physical, social, personal and spiritual dimensions. The focus of this chapter is to observe and gain further understanding of the potential impact of the mother-child relationship on the spiritual dimension of 'being-

in-the-world' as mothers.

As Emmy van Deurzen (1997) highlighted, the spiritual dimension is the most controversial level of human existence, and it may be confusing for people who link any notion of religion with that of spirituality. Athan & Miller (2013:221) summarized many researchers' attempts to locate spirituality within a multi-dimensional framework, identifying the following common and interrelated components,

> *Self-transcendence, interconnection with people and nature, meaning and purpose, unfolding process of discovery, heightened awareness and senses, enhancement of inner resources, experiences of the sacred or mystery, unconditional love, and ability to manage cognitive complexity such as paradox and ambiguity.* (DeHoff, 1998; Dyson, 1997; Epple, 2003; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; LaPierre, 1994; Lines, 2002; McSherry & Cash, 2004; McSherry, Cash, & Ross, 2004; Miller & Kelley, 2005; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Rose, 2001; Tanyi; 2003; Wink & Dillon, 2002).

It could be argued that all the above descriptions are echoed in the findings of this study, describing the changes within the transition to motherhood across all four dimensions of a mother's existence. The spiritual dimension

takes the mother-child relationship beyond the relational field and points to a spiritual connection that nurtures not only the growth of the child but also the transformational growth of the mother. As McMahon (1995:4) highlighted, mothering can be seen as an 'essence-making' process and therefore inverts the conventional idea that 'mothers produce children' and looks instead at how 'children produce mothers'.

As has been mentioned previously, motherhood is the ongoing relationship between mother and child, and we have been addressing this relationship throughout all existential dimensions. Addressing motherhood or the mother-child relationship through the Spiritual dimension of existence, I would like to recapture the experiences reflected upon by mothers as within the existential and other multi-dimensional frameworks described above.

Firstly, all mothers in this research described how the mother-child relationship provided them with the unique opportunity to experience unconditional love within their own being, a quality of ultimate trustworthiness and acceptance, often described as one in the same as the love of *'God for the world'* (McNeil, 1998:337). Athan & Miller (2013:229) in their study on how motherhood provides an opportunity to learn spiritual values, compared motherly unconditional love, the 'essential foundation for

love-of-other' to the quality of divine love experienced in 'the presence of the Creative principle (God)'. Mothers in this research admitted that the love they experience towards their children has no limits and can't be compared to any other feeling of love they experienced previously. All mothers stated that they were surprised by the intensity and deep emotional connection towards their children.

> *I am a bit surprised by how much you can love your child – it is absolutely magical and I don't think a woman before she becomes a mum can understand that, it is such a strong feeling of love* (Fiona, P2).

Mothers in this research described intense feelings of intimacy, a newfound sense of connectedness, interdependence and general relatedness. All this can be shown as an example of a spiritual tenet. Some mothers described how love for their children became some sort of *'awakening' of 'life energy'* (Masha P1) – another example of relational spirituality.

On the one hand, mothers described the deep feeling of emotional connection with their children as 'always carrying' them, literally and metaphorically, describing how the strong feeling of love triggers attachment, dependency, responsibility, connection, intimacy and unity in relation to their children. Mothers found it difficult, almost impossible, to

describe their feelings of love towards their children. Athan and Miller (2013:231) similarly showcase how 'Mothers insisted that they could not adequately capture the "profoundness," or "purity," with words'.

On the other hand, all mothers in this research stated an awareness of the cost, the flip-side of this unconditional love, '*I can see how this unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedication*' (Masha P1). This is the ultimate responsibility, the anxiety and guilt that accompanies this deep feeling of spiritual relation to the 'Other' (the child).

The findings of this research uncovered a central feature of motherhood – the acceptance of responsibility (across all four dimensions of existence) for their children which prompts a surrendering of self-preoccupation and an expansion of notions of self to include an 'Other'. This is similarly described as a central spiritual value, or self-transcendence. These results are in line with Athan & Miller's (2013) who defined one of their themes as 'Transcending the Ego or Self-centeredness", where they indicated a radical re-ordering of priorities as a result of dedicating themselves to their children and placing their needs above all else. Similarly, mothers in this study showed changes in lifestyle through an awareness of their own limits and possibilities of embodiment, altering their relationships with 'Others', re-thinking professional ambitions and obligations, re-prioritizing personal

needs and aligning their own motivations and goals around the needs of their children. All mothers in this research demonstrated that, as a result of their mother-child relationship, they willingly prioritized their children's needs and moved away from self-centeredness. Athan & Miller (2013:233) termed this *'turning away from the self as the main source of significance'*, whilst McNeill (1998:334) argues that spiritual development and growth are facilitated by *'free participation in the breaking down of an immature, prideful self'*.

Further, all mothers described their relationship to time and space as becoming more phenomenological, demanding an ability to live in the 'here and now'. Some mothers stated how they began to enjoy and value every day and every moment, noticing the changes in their children's development, appreciating the *'joy of the simple things in life'; 'the basic things in life'* (P2) that brought fulfillment and happiness. Athan and Miller (2013:246) beautifully described how mothers learned to see life through two sets of eyes, their own and their children's, experiencing it in a more phenomenological way:

> *'ordinary objects became extraordinary, and the natural world became alive and instructive of a new philosophy for life that brought ease and flow'.*

This transformation was not easy and many mothers described an awareness of loss of freedom and a struggle with the daily responsibilities of child rearing. However, even though mothers struggled with the consequences of surrendering self-preoccupation, they all also reflected that they faced it willingly, and reflected on and appreciated the positive self-transformation and self-expansion as a result of motherhood (also reflected by McNeil, 1998; Athan and Miller, 2005). Athan & Miller (2013:236) suggest that

> '*through mindful, authentic, present attention, mothers discovered an inner resource of patience and sensitivity, an ability to be available and responsive to their children'*.

Weaver & Ussher (1997) assert that the loss of ego experienced through mothering is a sacred calling to self-realization and evolution. This is backed up by the findings of this research that mothers did not describe self-sacrifice and self-loss, but self-reconstruction, enhancement and empowerment. It could be argued that the experience of empowerment and self-transformation in motherhood is a progressive, not regressive, process, a flourishing from inside, not outside, that accords with the philosophy of spirituality (Athan & Miller, 2013).

The results of this study clearly show (as do those of Weaver & Ussher,

1997) how a mother-child relationship ushers in a profound shift in ethical conduct as they become protectors of their changed values and priorities. All mothers reported the development of compassion (love, kindness, generosity, altruism) as a source of great strength, which re-aligned them with a deep experience of relatedness and connectedness to their children and others, transitioning them from self-centeredness to self-giving (see also Vieten et al, 2006; Athen and Miller, 2013).

All mothers recognized within them increasing compassion and empathy towards themselves, their children and others, mostly other mothers and children. Athan & Miller (2013:247) identified the theme *Empathy and Compassion* in which they described the pull towards empathic understanding of the experience of others, naming that as a *'halo effect' that was generated intensely within 'the mother-infant dyad and then rippling out concentrically to first–degree relatives and far and wide globally to strangers'* ((also see Arnold-Baker, 2014). And they argue that compassion and empathy for others is at its core a form of receptivity common in spiritual contemplation that can attend to realities that ordinary consciousness overlooks (Athan and Miller, 2013).

As discussed previously in this research, motherhood prompted women to

experience life in a *being* rather than a *doing* mode. Mothers demonstrated learning to understand and to see things as they are, which Vaughan (2002) termed 'spiritual intelligence'. This new way of being and seeing the world prompted mothers to 'embrace the notion of paradox and incorporate feelings as well as logic and reason in making judgements '(Wink & Dillon, 2002:80), as well as being able to tolerate ambiguity, ambivalence and paradox (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). And all this, not via passive acceptance, but by 'going with the flow', listening to and following their inner guidance and finding peace and equanimity in the face of life's existential challenges (Coward, 1989; Emmons, 2000).

It could be argued that the above description of a mother-child relationship is reflected in the core concepts defined as spiritual transformation. As the result of an act of willingly accepting the responsibility and commitment for their children, mothers experience profound and empowering spiritual growth. The transition to motherhood, the developmental relationship between a mother and a child promote transpersonal or mystical qualities, which prompt mothers to find their authentic self-nature, a heightened sense of understanding of the sacred, greater awareness of unconditional love within their own being and a shift in perception regarding the self in relation to the world. This could usefully be thought of as the search for

transcendent meaning in life (see also Athan and Miller, 2013; Matusu-Pissot, 1998).

The road or transition to motherhood is paved with 'the unknown' on all four dimensions of existence, and as Athan & Miller (2013) argued the 'not knowing' paradoxically allowed mothers to be open to their experiences. If spirituality '*connotes the self's existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred, then mothers indeed have lived this out fully*' (Wink & Dillon, 2002:73).

Similarly to Athan and Miller's (2013) study, in my research mothers' powerful narratives about their transition to motherhood demonstrated how women embarked on a spiritual journey and created new meaning from their 'being-in-the-world'.

5.6.2 *Sub-theme 5.2 New meaning in life*

All mothers in this research described finding new meaning through relationships with their children, seeing their new meaning and purpose through helping their children grow and develop. This goes in line with Arnold-Baker's (2014:193) findings who described how motherhood brought the participants a sense of purpose, a direction in their lives and a new sense of meaning.

As discussed above, for mothers in this research, motherhood, the mother-child relationship, the accepted responsibility for the 'Other' (her child) prompted them towards a deep appreciation of the complex nature of life, and seeing their 'being-in-the-world' through an authentic, mindful mode of living. From this new position of being, mothers demonstrated a striking ability to face and embrace the ambiguity, the ambivalence, the 'unknown' of their journey to motherhood, and an ability to create meaning and purpose out of their experiences of being mothers.

Yalom (1980:237) used 'purpose' in life and 'meaning' in life as interchangeable, and also aligned terms of 'significance' and 'importance' in his discussion of meaning. He described personal meaning (or 'terrestrial meaning') that

> (…) *embraces purpose: one who possesses a sense of meaning experiences life as having some purpose of function to be fulfilled, some overriding goal or goals to which to apply oneself.*

He highlights the important questions we ask ourselves, such as *How shall we live? How does one proceed to construct one's own meaning – a meaning sturdy enough to support one's life?* (Yalom 1980:346). All mothers in this research were confronted with these questions on their journey of transition to motherhood, *how do I mother*? *Or how shall I live as*

a mother? The scope of this study does not provide the space to embrace a full, deep discussion of meaning-making during the transition to motherhood. However, an overview of the changes to women's 'being-in-the-world' as mothers (across all four dimension of existence) clearly shows how mothers discovered their meaning in life through transcending their own self-interests and striving towards taking responsibility for their children's well-being and development. (Yalom, 1980).

Self-transcendence is the fundamental feature of Victor Frankl's (1978[1959]) approach to the question of meaning. What human beings need, Frankl says *'is not a tensionless state but rather a striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him'* (Frankl, 1978:38). Mothers in this research described giving all they had willingly to their children which echoes Frankl's belief that the striving implies freely orienting oneself towards something outside of the self.

Many researchers have shown how traditionally and continuously through history and across cultures, women are expected to sacrifice their needs and interests to motherhood, to play nurturing roles at home and in society. At the same time, these days women have been brought up in a society with many possibilities and choices in life, and choosing motherhood as their meaning and purpose in life is only one of many choices for women. It could

be argued therefore that, for women in this research, the choice of motherhood as their meaning in life was a willing and free choice.

This argument highlights the ambivalence in mothers' free choices in accepting the responsibility of motherhood, the responsibility that intensifies their awareness of existential givens and intensifies the (existential) anxiety awakened by their more mindful/authentic ways of Being. As Yalom (1980) points out,

> '*one's making of meaning' is anxiety soothing, it comes into being to relieve the anxiety that comes from facing a life and a world without an ordained, comforting structure*' (Yalom, 1980:463).

He argues that meaning gives birth to values, to some set of guidelines or principles that help us to decide how to live. We need values to navigate our way of behaving into some 'approval-disapproval hierarchy', to help us to exist in society or belong to a group. Even though, from an existential point of view, we are creating ourselves through free choice, we search for some sort of structure, rules or guidance on which we can base those decisions and choices. Yalom (1980:465) highlights that

> *Our human needs for overall perceptual frameworks and for a system of values on which to base our actions together constitute the 'pure'*

reasons that we search for meaning in life.

Addressing this side of the argument, we can assume that it was essential for women to create meaning out of their experiences of transitioning to motherhood. As we observed from the findings of this research (which are supported by many other researchers on motherhood), the transition to motherhood is a journey of 'defamiliarisation' from the 'known' (or familiar), socially-constructed world where mothers can follow rules and structures, to the 'unknown' world of motherhood, where they are confronted by the re-construction of values and by their existential givens which fill them with anxiety and guilt. It could be argued that mothers need to create meaning and purpose to be able to re-evaluate and re-build their value system, comfort their anxiety and make sense of their experiences, choices and responsibilities and to become 'at home' in their 'being-in-the-world' as a-mother. Notably, Sartre (1955) who said that 'it is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die' arrived at a position that

> *(...) clearly values the search for meaning . . . including finding a 'home' and comradeship in the world, action, freedom, rebellion against oppression, service to others, enlightenment, self-realization, and engagement – always and above all, engagement* (cited in Yalom,

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1980:431).

I believe the above description is aligned with my participant's experiences of the transition to motherhood. These women managed to discover deep meaning in motherhood, in their mother-child relationships, in unconditional love, in their deep commitment and ultimate responsibility for their children and in their new life project wherein they experienced themselves ultimately as less important but more authentic Beings.

In summary, as Van Manen highlighted, phenomenological research is a form of writing that emphasises a sensitivity to subtle undertones of language, words and silences, alongside a fundamental commitment to the aims of the research. The aim of this research was to observe and explicate eight new mothers' lived experiences of the transition to motherhood after the birth of their child, as they emerged through the four dimensions of existence (Physical/embodied experiences; Social/relationship with Others; Personal/relationship with oneself and Spiritual/values, beliefs and meaning in life).

The findings of this research highlighted and confirmed that even though the birth of a child is biologically granting a woman the status of mother, motherhood is an existential choice that triggers a woman to be confronted

by existential givens and issues on every dimension of her 'being-in-the-world'. Even though each mother had her own story to tell, I could observe how all the women, now mothers, spoke a common language of motherhood. All the mothers described how, in facing the new life of their babies, they were facing the reality of their own mortality. Every mother described experiencing high levels of anxiety about losing her child when faced with the fragility of her baby, and a high sense of responsibility for her baby's survival. Therefore, it could be said that, in accepting motherhood, a woman is accepting responsibility for her child. This existential responsibility for her child (the Other) is unlike any other, as it is closely intertwined with the existential responsibility for herself. Therefore, I argue that 'being-in-the-world' as a mother can be seen as an existential crisis, when, in order to be able to take responsibility for her child's 'being-in-the-world', a woman has to visualise, re-evaluate and re-construct her own 'being-in-the-world'. Using the theoretical frame of 'Four dimensions of existence' provided a clearer view of the existential issues that mothers grapple with, and enabled the observation of both the differences and similarities in their experiences of motherhood. What became apparent was the inevitability that each mother had to re-evaluate her lifeworld, and in making choices for her child and herself, develop a new identity as a mother.

Mothers in this research were describing their transition to motherhood as an ongoing life journey, an ever evolving '*being-in-the-word-as-a-mother*'.

In the next chapter, I have addressed the potential implications of this research for the field of psychology, psychotherapy and practice development, and considered some possible areas for further research. I have articulated the limitations of this relatively small homogeneous study, and presented a reflexivity statement of my experiences as a researcher, a mother and a psychologist during this research journey.

6. Conclusion

To have a child in one's life is a blessing. To have a child in one's life forces one to think about how one should live. To have a child in one's life means one is no longer is able to live only for oneself (Bergum 1989:156).

6.1 Summary

The findings of this study demonstrate how the complex and multilayered experiences of the transformative journey to 'being-in-the-world' as mothers, for the eight women participating in this research, were intertwined and interrelated across the Four Dimensions of existence. These findings are in line with many writers and researchers who addressed the experiences of the transition to motherhood. Moreover, they are in line with the researchers who argued that the transition to motherhood could be seen as an existential crisis.

Understanding the transition to 'being-in-the-world' as a mother as an existential crisis reveals a transformative journey that begins when a woman leaves the familiar world she knew before motherhood and through her irreversible choice of becoming a mother, finds herself in the unknown world of motherhood. There is no way back to where she came from and a

woman, now a mother, is compelled to re-evaluate and re-construct her new 'being-in-the-world'. This process of re-evaluation and re-construction within all four dimensions of existence, prompts a mother into a more mindful and authentic way of being.

On a Physical Dimension: Mothers in this research demonstrated facing the awareness of fundamental existential givens of life and death, the awareness and anxiety of mortality. They became more aware of the limitations and possibilities of embodiment, their own and their children's. Their perception of time and space became more phenomenological as 'here and now', as mothers learned to share their 'being-in-the-world' with their children.

On a Social Dimension: Mothers reflected on how the new relationship with their child altered their position of Being-with-Others, within society, with a partner, family and friends. They described a heightened awareness of existential issues of relationality, isolation and belonging, became more mindful of their position in the world as 'Dasein' (Being-there) as described by Heidegger, always 'with-world', in relationship and never in isolation.

On the Personal Dimension: Women in this research demonstrated facing existential issues of responsibility, choice, freedom and autonomy. Women were confronted with an awareness of personal choices around how to mother in the face of social scripts of what constitutes a "Good mother".

They became aware of responsibilities for their choices that entailed feelings of anxiety and guilt. The 'call of consciousness' triggered the mothers' awareness of their freedom, possibilities and authorship. This encouraged them to become more mindful of their own values, beliefs and priorities *in life* and living in more mindful, authentic modes of Being. These findings point to the existential perception of self as not a fixed and static entity, but rather as an ever changing, creative process marked by freedom and responsibility. Mothers in this research did not describe sacrifice or loss of self; Instead, they re-constructed their sense of self through connectedness to their children.

On the Spiritual Dimension: All mothers in this research described how the mother-child relationship provided them with the unique opportunity to experience unconditional love within their own Being, a quality of ultimate trustworthiness and acceptance. They described intense feelings of intimacy, a newfound sense of interconnectedness, interdependence and general relatedness. All this can be shown as an example of a spiritual tenet. The spiritual dimension takes the mother-child relationship beyond the relational field and points to a spiritual connection that nurtures not only the growth of the child but also the transformational growth of the mother. It could be argued that on this journey of existential crisis, it was essential for mothers

to find meaning and purpose to be able to re-evaluate and re-build their value system, comfort their anxiety and make sense of their experiences, choices and responsibilities, as well as to become 'at home' in their 'being-in-the-world-as-mothers'.

The findings of the research give voice to both the uniqueness and the commonality of mothers' experiences as they grapple with meaning in the disorientating world that is early motherhood. Whilst each mother's experience was unique to her, there were clear themes running across all participant narratives which could be loosely captured within physical, personal, social and spiritual existential dimensions. Whilst it is true that 'the map is not the territory', and for the mothers who participated in this study, the journey had involved a whole series of separate, yet interconnected, processes and actions, it was possible, through the theoretical structure of Four Dimensions of Existence, to offer a 'helicopter view' from which some clarity, simplicity and definition could be brought to bear on the otherwise emotionally and psychologically complex transition to motherhood.

What emerged most clearly as an overarching finding, and which was evident across all four dimensions was the way in which becoming a mother confronts women with a heretofore-unsurpassed experience of *existential responsibility*. All mothers described feeling an ultimate responsibility for

their children's physical and psychological wellbeing that became the main component of their new re-constructed lives as mothers. It could be argued, therefore, that to give birth to a child is to transform a woman into a mother, but it is the *acceptance of responsibility* for a child that represents the foundational step into motherhood.

6.2. Implications for Clinical Practice

The aim of this study was to produce a novel, fresh, in depth piece of phenomenological research which would not only expand and deepen the existing literature, but would be useful to other professionals working with this client group, as well as to mothers themselves.

The findings show how the complex nature of the transition to motherhood can be understood as a 'bio-psycho-socio-spiritual' transformation and suggests that this approach could be useful to all mothers who are seeking to explore their own 'being-in-the-world' as mothers. Addressing the transition to motherhood from an existential perspective may encourage women to acknowledge, appreciate and reflect on all the changes that their child brought to their lives, and how those changes are interrelated and interconnected. It is fundamentally significant for women to acknowledge the extent to which their lives have now been transformed, which may feel

overwhelming and ambiguous, triggering high levels of anxiety. It makes sense, therefore, that taking smaller steps and exploring mothers' experiences using the comprehensive framework of 'four dimensions of existence' may bring more clarity, the ability to explore more deeply and broadly, and provide a more grounded stance throughout the exploration for both professional and client. Moreover, each existential dimension has corresponding polarities that can assist any professional to support mothers in understanding the underlying changes within the context of that dimension, and relate those changes to the bigger picture of their new 'being-in-the-world' as mothers.

Since a significant finding of this study was the profound sense of new responsibility for the 'other' (her child), practitioners could encourage mothers to address how this responsibility instigates changes across every dimension: in relation to her embodiment, her relationship with others, with herself and her values, priorities, choices and meaning in life. This exploration could help mothers to reflect on their changes through the more mindful and authentic choices that lead to personal strength and empowerment. It may also help mothers to reflect on their journey of motherhood as a spiritual journey.

Furthermore, I believe that addressing the transition to motherhood as an

existential crisis instead of a pathological one, could entourage and support women to address motherhood as a life event that mobilizes self-reflection through existential questioning. This '*defamiliarisaton*' from the life they knew before motherhood offers opportunity for reflection on choices and responsibility, confrontation with existential anxiety and guilt, understanding the concept of living in a social web and being interconnected and influenced by others, acceptance of the fluidity of self and an appreciation of what authentic/mindful living might mean. This could help by navigating mothers *away* from self-criticism and self-blame towards a new opening and understanding of herself and her position in the world and towards *normalizing* and welcoming their powerful maternal experiences instead of rushing to change or 'fix' them.

6.3. Limitations of the Research

One of the limitations of this research is that it based on a small and homogeneous sample of participants. All mothers participating in this research are from similar ethnic and social backgrounds, they all have chosen to become mothers and were living with their partners or husbands at the time. Therefore, the findings of this research are somewhat limited to

reflect only the experiences of this group of mothers. On the one hand, the limitation of having such a homogeneous population is that it does not take into account the experiences of mothers outside of this participant pool. For example, single mothers, mothers with unplanned pregnancies, teenage mothers, older mothers, lesbian mothers, ethnically diverse mothers, mothers diagnosed with PND, and so on. On the other hand, a homogeneous population allows us to draw more valid insights and conclusions relevant to this particular participant group.

6.4. Reflexivity

The reflexivity process was a central part of this research. The research journey held strong parallel processes between my personal reflections as a mother and professional reflections as a researcher and psychologist. As previously stated, I began this journey wanting to find a solution to how I, and other mothers, could be supported through (what I came to understand as a result of this research process) the existential crisis of motherhood. This research journey has enlightened me to the way in which each and every mother must find her own way of embracing the fundamental and profound external and internal changes which permeate every single area of her life.

As with the journey of motherhood, this research journey was paved with complex experiences which were beset by feelings of ambiguity and ambivalence, as well as confrontation with paradoxes: Making the right choices, taking responsibility for those choices, being filled with anxiety and self-doubt, worrying about being judged – all parallel processes that I reflected upon throughout. I was tempted to follow others' directions in analysing and understanding my own and my participants' experiences, however, through constant engagement with this reflective awareness, I felt able to make choices according to my own values, priorities and meanings, and to stay clear and open-minded in my orientation towards the research question. I began this study by asking myself how I could better make sense of my own experiences of 'being-in-the-world' as a mother, whilst also setting out to explore how other mothers could be helped to understand their experiences with greater clarity. I asked myself what I could do, as a psychotherapist, to help other mothers feel less lost and shocked by the unknown and often overwhelming terrain of motherhood.

These ponderings initiated my search through the vast raft of literature on the experience of motherhood and I quickly became overwhelmed and confused, since every aspect of the experience felt fundamentally important and yet all were intertwined and interdependent. I felt lost and stuck, as I did

not know where to begin to untangle the dizzying array of competing and conflicting experiences. Upon reflection, these experiences began to 'settle' quite naturally when viewed through the prism of the 'four worlds of existence' which gave structure and meaning to the otherwise unruly and complicated assemblage of experiences that had previously seemed to bleed into each other. This 'map of motherhood' then usefully served as a heuristic with which to interrogate my own understanding of the transition to motherhood and I began to make sense of the journey motherhood had initiated. Although the experiences often overlapped and could not be neatly delineated, it gave me greater clarity and depth of understanding to categorise them (albeit fluidly) into the Four Dimensions of Existence (physical, personal, social, and spiritual).

This then gave me a method which could usefully be applied to answer my research question and provide rich, meaningful data which would throw light on the transition to motherhood in a way which would render it coherent, accessible and containing for others who, like me, had become lost and stuck whilst on the journey to motherhood.

It is fair to say that the consequences of having conducted this research have had far-reaching, positive, transformational effects on me both as a person and as a professional and, I hope, on the lives of the women with whom I

now work. It is my hope that the findings of this research will go some way to addressing and alleviating the ubiquitous experience of new mothers so aptly captured in the following:

An expectant mother is transformed into a 'Mother'; she herself may be the last to understand the physical and psychological changes taking place, and accordingly, by extension, may never communicate even deeper spiritual knowing. Without any rites of passage or alternative interpretive frameworks to illuminate the presence of their spiritual work, mothers are finding themselves traversing a path to enlightenment in isolation. (Trad, 1990) cited in Athan & Miller, 2005, p.342)

6.5. Suggestions for Future Research

These insights prompted me to consider the application of the research findings within the field of psychology and psychotherapy. As stated in the introduction chapter, my original intention was to find a way of helping mothers make sense of their transition to motherhood in a way that would demystify and contain their experiences and bring greater clarity and insight. As a direct result of my research journey, therefore, a Charity called

'Cocoon: Family Support' was born. I am a Co-Founder and Trustee of this Charity which has developed numerous ways to support parents, such as our 1:1 counselling service, peer support groups and other therapeutic groups. As part of this, I designed and am currently running a 12-week group based on the Four Dimensions of Existence, where mothers have the opportunity to explore the physical, social, personal and spiritual dimensions of their experiences. The outcomes and feedback from these groups are extremely positive and inspiring. These results have stimulated my interest in further research exploring the outcomes of therapy groups where the transition to motherhood is addressed as an existential crisis, and explored through the use of a therapeutic 'map' of the four dimensions of existence.

Moreover, further research could be conducted with different groups of participants, for example, single mothers and teenage mothers as outlined in section 6.4.) .

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8. Appendices

8.1 *Appendix 1. Advertising letter*

Dear mother,

I am a mother myself, and conducting the research study (as part of my doctorate in counselling psychology) addressing the experiences of becoming a mother. I hope to increase the level of awareness of the journey to motherhood. Through this study I am trying to discover a structure and clarity for mothers and others to reflect and understand the challenging and complex journey of becoming a mother.

From my personal experience, I believe that better understanding of the 'new you' could facilitate a woman to be happier and healthier as a mother, wife, daughter, friend, and so on

If you are a new mother,

- your baby is 6month-2years old,

- you are 30-40 years old,

- living with a partner

- and had a planned pregnancy

I would like to invite you to take part in my study. I believe that sharing your experiences of being a mother will be a valued contribution to a better
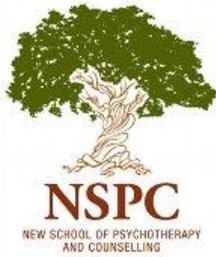
understanding of mothers' role in our society, and could help new mothers'

experiences be better understood and prepared for, in the future.

If you are interested to take part in this study, please contact me on

07900332367 or email me *victoriagaponenco@icoud.com*

Many thanks,

Victoria Garland

8.2 *Appendix 2. Participants information sheet*

NSPC Ltd   Middlesex University

Existential Academy   The Burroughs

61-63 Fortune Green Road   London NW4 4BT

London NW6 1DR

Participants information sheet

'Being-in-the-world' as a mother: Hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration of lived experiences of eight new-mothers' transition to motherhood Within the theoretical frame of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'

Researcher: Victoria Garland (Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCPsych) at NSPC and Middlesex University)

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the research? This study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC (New School of Psychotherapy & Counselling) and Middlesex University.

It could be argued that whilst the biological sense of motherhood is established with the act of giving birth, the emotional and personal sense of 'becoming a mother' takes some time. Regardless of race, socio-economic status, occupation, ability or other differences the transition to being a mother could be an overwhelming experience. Moreover, a body of research indicates that some mothers reported that the reality of motherhood was different from their expectations, and they argued that these findings highlight the lack of adequate preparation of pregnant women for new motherhood. Therefore, professionals need to help women to acknowledge

the complexity of the transition to motherhood, and facilitate the development and maintenance of a new mother's self-esteem.

As a mother, a psychologist and a researcher, I would like to increase the level of awareness of the reality, importance and complexity of the journey to motherhood. Through this study I hope to better understand the new mothers' experiences and investigate whether there is a map that could have helped them to understand and navigate their experiences in a broader, deeper and clearer way.

As a new mother I would like you to take part in my study to share your experiences of the transition to motherhood. Your participation will contribute to an improved understanding of that transition, and could help new mothers' experiences be more positive in the future.

What will happen to me if I take part? I would like to interview you on one occasion at any convenient time for you. For the best results, I would like you to be on your own, and I will reimburse the cost of child care (£10 per hour as professional babysitters' hourly rate), if required for the period of time you have spent on the interview and travelling. The interview will take

place at my house in a therapy room and will last for approximately ninety minutes. The interview will include an open dialogue during which I will ask you several questions about your experiences of motherhood. I will record your answers and send you the transcript of it for your approval. The information from this interview will be combined with other participants for statistical analysis. I will use a qualitative research methodology to extract the main themes that participants tell me about their experience of being a new mother.

What will you do with the information that I provide? The interview will be transcribed by another person. So I will not use your full or last name in the interview and the person transcribing the interview will not know who you are. I will be recording the interview on a digital recorder, and will transfer the files to an encrypted USB stick for storage, deleting the files from the recorder. All of the information that you provide me with will be identified only with a project code and stored either on the encrypted USB stick, or in a locked filing cabinet. I will keep the key that links your details with the project code in a locked filing cabinet.

The information will be kept at least until 6 months after I graduate, and will

be treated as confidential. If my research is published, I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used. Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act (*http://www.ico.gov.uk/for_organisations/data_protection.aspx*).

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part In the interview, I shall be asking you about your experiences of motherhood and it may cause you some distress. If so, please let me know, and if you wish, I will stop the interview. Although this is very unlikely, should you tell me something that I am required by law to pass on to a third person I will have to do so. Otherwise whatever you tell me will be confidential.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? Sharing your experiences of being a new mother may contribute to a better understanding of the complex experiences of motherhood. It is possible, that this knowledge will be helpful to other women and their families in the future.

<u>Consent</u>

You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

This study is a part of my doctoral programme and fully self-funded. All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics sub-committee has approved this study

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

If you have any further questions, you can contact me at:

Victoria Garland

07900332367

Email: victoriagaponenco@icloud.com

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London

NW6 1DR

If you any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisors:

Naomi Stadlen & Claire Arnold-Baker

NSPC

admin@nspc.org.uk
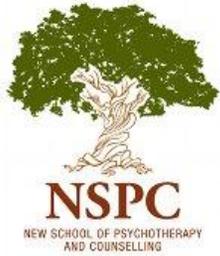
Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London, NW6 1DR

020 3515 0223

8.3 *Appendix 3. Consent Form*

NSPC Ltd

Existential Academy

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London NW6 1DR

Middlesex University

The Burroughs

London NW4 4BT

Consent Form

'Being-in-the-world' as a mother

Hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration of lived experiences of eight new mothers' transition to motherhood

Within the theoretical frame of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'

Researcher: Victoria Garland (Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCPsych) at NSPC and Middlesex University)

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication in an anonymous form, and provide my consent that this might occur.

(If using tape recordings) I understand that a recording is being made of this interview and will be securely stored until a verbatim transcript has been

made and the research has been completed and written up.

Print name of participant   Participant's Signature

Print name of researcher   Researcher's Signature

Date

Academic Supervisors:

Naomi Stadlen & Claire Arnold-Baker

NSPC,

61-63 Fortune Green Rd.

London, NW6 1DR;

020 3515 0223

8.4 *Appendix 4. Example of interview questions:*

• Could you tell me about yourself?

• How was your life before you became a mother?

• Do you feel different from the way you were this time last year?

• How is your life now that you are a mother?

• How did you expect it to be?

• Is there any side to motherhood that you enjoy most?

• Is there any side to motherhood that you do not like or find challenging?

• Have you experienced the expectations of others regarding how to be a mother?

• Has motherhood affected your relationships with others? How?

• Your partner/husband?

• Your parents / extended family?

• Your Friends / colleagues?

• How would you identify yourself now? (How do you see yourself?)

• How would you answer the question "Who am I"?

• Is there anything that I have not asked you or you would like to tell me?

• Could you tell me what this has been like for you?

• Tell me a little bit about your experience of participating with me in this research process.

8.5 *Appendix 5. Transcript of Participant 1 (Masha)*

Transcript of the participant (P1) interview

<mark style="background-color:red">*Physical*</mark>   <mark style="background-color:yellow">*Social*</mark>   <mark style="background-color:blue">*Personal*</mark>   <mark style="background-color:yellow">*Spiritual*</mark>

V-M can you tell me little bit about yourself, please

(P1.S 1). Just as general information, we are from a small country that was part of the former Soviet Union and we have been here for 10 years now. So, it has been quite a long period of my life in UK.

(*she acknowledges that she was brought up in a different culture, but has lived here for a significant portion of her life)* <mark style="background-color:yellow">Social</mark>

(P1.S 2) She is my first child and she is almost 18 months old.

(M has been a mother for eighteen month) <mark style="background-color:blue">Personal</mark>

(P1.S 3)We are here without our broader families, so the charge of a child is totally on our hands. Our grandmothers live in Estonia, sometime they come to visit, but we do everything, so it is full-time work.

(M describes not receiving any family support in upbringing her child and experiencing total 'the charge' or responsibility for her child) <mark style="background-color:yellow">Social</mark>

V- M are you working?

(P1.S 4)Yes, <u>I am working full-time,</u> Monday to Friday, 9-5.

(M is a working mother that spends most of the day at work). <mark>*Social*</mark>

Pause…

V- O, wow, ok

(Reflection (I could say: 'so another full-time job?')

V- and are you living together with your partner,

(Reflection (I didn't need to say that)

M- Yes, aha

V- and is your partner working?

(P1.S 5) Yes, <u>full-time for me and full-time for him too</u>. Our child goes to child-minder when we are at work.

(M describes how she and her partner are managing work life and parenting life. I thought that I could sense a regret in her voice) <mark>*Social*</mark>

(Reflection (I wish I did ask, "and how do you feel about it. I was worrying not to turn the interview into a therapy).

V-I see, and from what age has she been going to a child-minder?

(P1.S 6) Uhm, she joined her in November, she was 11 months, I guess.

V- And did you stay with her until she was 11 months old?

(P1.S 7) Ah, no I went back to work when she was 9 months old. My mum came and stayed with her, and sometimes I was taking time off, using all my holidays. Her daddy managed to stay with her for 2 weeks. It was a mixture of everything and everyone who could help, to be honest. It was a shared approach to child-minding.

V- Right. How was your life before you became a mother? (Could you tell me little bit about your life before you have become a mother?)

(P1.S 8) (paused and smiled) very active, attending every social event possible, traveling a lot, reading a lot, seeing friends a lot, gym, mmmm I have forgotten what I was doing; ah, gym, yoga, photography, exploring places, like we would take an area in London or

England and at the weekend just go and explore what it was like. These were often instant decisions, like waking up and deciding where we were going and what we are going to do.

(M describes experiencing more freedom to choose her preferred activities (spending her time) before she had the responsibility of childcare. She described been active and spontaneous in her decisions). Social; Life before motherhood: values, choices, responsibilities.

V. Aah, so you liked spontaneous decisions

(Reflection (I am very judgemental here, I should not say that)

(P1.S 9) Yesss… sometimes, we did plan, but there was also a lot of just spontaneous stuff. We were very active before, we never stayed at home

(M describes remembering feeling more freedom and control over her time and choices that were about her and her husband's interests). The social; Personal

Life before motherhood described as life about herself

V. Aha, (smile) sounds like lots of fun

Reflection (I should not have said that! Is that a reflection of my life?)

(P1.S 9) Yes, yes, we had a fun life. It was much easier.

(M reflects on life before motherhood as easier). Personal/Social

V. Aha, right…Is your life different now, since you became a mother?

M. Oh yes! Definitely yes!

V. How is it different?

(P1.S 10) Well, first of all because now you are responsible for someone, you have to look after someone who is very precious to you. You feel totally responsible for what you are doing so that yours decision do not affect your child badly. *(M described how being a parent brings a strong feeling of responsibility for the 'Other' her child who is precious to her, and the pressure of making the right choices for the child's wellbeing)* *Personal;* *Social*

(P1.S 11) Secondly, obviously, everything changed and that affects your lifestyle. Like your life doesn't belong to yourself anymore.
(M described how the feeling of responsibility for her child (the "Other") influenced all her choices, decisions in life, her values and priorities. She reflects not feeling 'number one' in her life, as her life (choices) are all about her child (the 'Other'). The personal

V. Mmmm..(nodding)

(P1.S 12). For example, we could stay in bed until like 10am, why not? Now it's 6.30am and it doesn't matter that its Saturday; tired, sick, lazy,… no way, you have to get up and smile. That's a big change!

(M describes how the responsibility for her child influence her choices and priorities and she is choosing to sacrifice of personal needs in favour of the child) Personal

(P1.S 13) Before I was selfish. Well, not selfish but let's say I was like any other woman: manicure and pedicure

(M is reflecting that her pre-motherhood behavior was self-focused, whereas that has had to be subordinated as a mother) Personal

V-Looking after your self?

Reflection (I wish I reflected on how does she feel different to 'any other woman' now being a mother)

(P1.S 14) Yes, massage, gym, sauna. Now I have to forget about it. (pause)

(M highlighting that she is prioritizing her child's needs over her own.) Personal

V. Mmm

 (P1.S 16). I am back to work and I can't waste my time on anything else because I want to spend my time with her.

(M is highlighting her choices, how she wants to spend her time.   It shows how time has become a more precious and considered commodity) The personal Physical

(P1.S 17) So I don't miss those precious hours when she starts walking or talking, or all the new things in her development.

(shows how she values the time she has with her child. How important it is to be part of your child's development (life)) Personal

V- Is what you saying that looking after yourself like you did before feels as waste of time now?

(P1.S 18) Yes, yes, it is like I take it from her. It is not like wasted, but I need to spend it with my child.

(M indicates the change in her needs and priorities, it is more important for her to spend time with her child then on her own physical needs) Personal

(P1.S 19) It is such a precious time for me on Sunday and Saturday.

(shows how much M values her time with her child) Personal

(P1.S 20) I am leaving her with a babysitter and I am seeing her only 2 full days a week, so it is traumatizing.

(M describes feeling traumatized by living her child for such a long time. She indicates how difficult is the choice to work full-time.) Personal

V. You feel traumatized that you are with your daughter only 2 days a week

M. Yes, I do

Reflection: (I wish I asked more open question like, 'traumatized?' and prompt her to expand on it more)

V. How do you feel about going to work?

(P1.S 21) Well, I have no choice, I have to work so I can support her financially

(M experiences that she has no choice over the situation.) Personal

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V-Sounds like it is a difficult choice for you?

Reflection: (again, I asked closed question that did not prompt her to explore on her choices)

M. It is difficult, of course

V. Hmmm, what would be your preferable choice?

(P1.S 22) I would probably go part-time.

(M indicate that she would like to work but at the same time to spend more time with her child. However, she said 'probably', which I could interpret as the described 'traumatic' feeling maybe is a reflection of her feeling Guilty leaving her child, not fulfilling 'Perfect Mother' role) Personal

V-You would go part-time?

(P1.S 23) Yes, I would. I would still go back to work because I like socializing, being a full-time mum is not for me.

(even though M treasures the time with her child (mother identity), social life (status) is important to her too. She shows her values and prioritizing to balance the mother identity with her other identities) Personal

(P1.S 24) I feel… it's not like I don't want to spend my time with my child. It sounds a bit of a contradiction to what I said earlier.

(sounds like she is experiencing two sets of needs as contradictive to each other (all her or a child) As she is judging herself and maybe judged by me (and Others), Feeling Guilty, 'Not a Perfect mother' that will sacrifice all her other needs) Personal Social

(P1.S 25) But I want to develop myself, and when I am going to work I am an adult again. *(M indicates that she values her 'other' identities , time and space when she can make choices about other things then her child's needs, perhaps be able to share responsibilities with others, feeling belonging to what she knew before motherhood Personal*

(P1.S 26) I am going for an adult coffee, I have adult chats, read the news. I dress up differently than when I am with a child, so it gives me a chance to be myself and to understand how I can progress.
(Sounds like M separates her life as a mother when she chooses to prioritise her child's needs, and the life (identity) when she goes to work (as before motherhood) when she make choices about herself, 'dress up differently', 'adult coffee', 'to be myself'   Personal

V- So something you do for yourself?

Reflection: (I should not said that! It is just my interpretation. I wish I have explored how does she feel when she is with her child, (is she not an adult? Not herself?)

(P1.S 27) Yes, yes, how I work, what I have for lunch, how I dress, they are all my decisions about myself, so I can be myself like I was before having a child.

(Sounds as M is describing the need for a space when she make choices and decisions about herself, instead of feeling the ultimate responsibility and prioritizing the choices for her child (the 'Other'). She describes how at work she can be what she knew before 'her self', sharing the worries ('the news') with the world, make decisions 'how I work' and share the responsibilities with others, her colleagues. Even by 'dress differently' feeling as she is not seen just as someone's mother, but a woman for 'her self'.) ==Personal==,

(P1.S 28) It is development for myself, when I am at work; I am fitting in with a social life and other people.

(M describes that being at work she feels belonging 'fitting in' with a social life and other other people, perhaps it indicates that she is not experiencing that when she is with her child. I can interpret that as M experiencing mother's role as not valued by society, and she is not 'developing' and not 'fitting in' when she is mothering her child) ==Social==

(P1.S 29) When at home you are lost from other people, from a busy life; and maybe it would be difficult for me to know how to go back to society.

(M described that being at home with her child felt isolated, perhaps cut off from the 'busy', 'doing' society). ==Social==

V- Is that how you felt, lost from busy life?

(P1.S 30) Yes, that you are not so compatible if you stay long with a child. It is not an easy topic to discuss. Hmmm.

(interesting how M described stay home mother is not 'compatible' with the 'busy social life' . It can be interpreted that she sees a 'mother' identity is not compatible with the social 'carier' identity).Personal

V. How do you mean, it's not easy?

(P1.S 31) If I had a choice, I would work 3 days and stay 4 days with my child. So it would be kind of balanced.

(M desire to balance her different values: achievements outside of her role as a mother and as a mother with her child). Personal

(P1.S 32) Now, my work is taking over, so that is why it is not easy. At the moment I have no choice because we have no support from our families, so financially it is very difficult.

(M describes as she doesn't have a choice as to work full-time because of the financial reasons, she experience difficulties of making choices between all her needs and values) Personal

(P1.S 32) It is not possible for her father to support us so I could stay at home. So there is no choice, that is just how it is.

(sounds that it is too difficult for M to see her own choices, perhaps avoiding the guilt of

seeing herself as a 'Bad mother') Personal

V-Right…. how do you feel about it?

(P1.S 33) Well, we are working hard on it to improve, so we will see

(I felt that M was not willing to talk about her choices)

V. nodding…..

(P1.S 34) You mean hmmm…… I am not sad, because I kind of understood that not all

jobs could bring the money to support your child, so I am accepting

(Now M reflecting that she is not sad that she has to make a choice to work full-time, she

is accepting it. I feel that she is afraid to be judged by me and Others for her choice to be

a working mum) Social

(P1.S 35) That why I made the decision to go back to work earlier than I would like too.

It is our mutual decision, I agreed to it, so….

(M is mentioning her decision (choice) now as it has a good reason, to support

financially her family, perhaps she feels less being judged by herself and Other).

Personal

V. How do you feel being a mother in comparison to how you experienced yourself

before?

(P1.S 36) As a person I feel much, much better, much more content. This is something I should have done earlier.

(seems like her role as a mother has created a level of deeper satisfaction about who she is, bringing another layer and richness about herself , deeper meaning, meaning beyond herself). Personal Spiritual

V-Ah (smile)

Reflection: (I should have asked, "what do you mean much better?". Explore these feelings!)

(P1.S 37) Yes, as a mum, I am a good mum. I think I am quite a natural mum, so yes, I am not regretting it. You know, at this stage it was the right time to have a child.

(Interestingly, I never asked her if she is regretting having a child. I felt as if she needed to tell me and herself that she is a good mother. However, it felt that she described confidence in her role as a mother) Personal

(P1.S 38) There is nothing I could have done that is better

 (M describes deep value and meaning of motherhood)

(P1.S 39) She is a very happy child, very demanding, but it is enjoyable.

(M reflects that there are both sides to a relationship with her child, challenging but enjoyable) Social

(P1.S 40) And I think it happened just at the perfect time. I was starting to think that I had enough of traveling and fun and I was ready to commit.

(M is describing that she choose the right time to have a child, she felt ready for a change) Personal *Decision to have a child*

V-Mmm, right…

(P1.S 41) Because thirty-three was perfect time to stop and do something else. You know, not just traveling, party, cocktails after work, you know what I am talking about.
(M describes that she choose thirty-three as a good age to create a family. Sounds as did not made a decision if to have a child or not, but the decision was about the right time for it.) Personal *Decision to have a child*

V. Yes, so you felt that you were ready to have a child

M. Yes, and I am still think that it was the best time.

V. Oh, that is beautiful

M. Yes

V-What are you enjoying the most in being a mother?

(P1.S 43) Well, first of all every morning, she comes to me and says, "mama kiss", then it doesn't matter if it was a bad night or a good night… 'it is just ahhhh, come here'. She is

very cuddly. Maybe it is because she is a girl, or maybe she is just a child like that. She loves kissing and cuddling. Every morning she brings my shoes to me. So all these small things makes you appreciate why she is there.

(M describes that the best part of motherhood is the relationship with the child, feeling of love and being loved)<mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 44) Also, seeing how she is developing, how she starts crawling, and chatting. Well, her first word was 'kissa', which means a cat in Russian, because we have two cats. First, I was upset why it was not 'mama', but then I thought that I was always telling her 'kissa kissa', so the lesson was learned. (Smile)

(M describes the joy of seeing her child grow and develop) <mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 45) I can see how much joy she brings to my parents, her daddy and his parents. He loves her to bits, more than he does me, I am jealous, but it is fine (smile).

(M describes how her child bring family together, create a new focus and meaning for the whole extended family). <mark>Social</mark> <mark>Spiritual</mark>

(P1.S 46) So all these things make me to understand why I am struggling, why I have to go to work - to make her life better.

(M is reflecting on motherhood different polarities, struggle and joy. <mark>Personal</mark>

(P1.S 47) Yes, she gives me a kind of settled down feeling, like you have done something, not just work

(I believe M describes her feeling of unconditional love on a spiritual level, her achievement as giving birth to another life). <mark style="background-color:#00ff00">Spiritual</mark>

V-hmm, sounds like she brought a different meaning to your life?

(P1.S 48) Yes, yes, that for sure. Even though life become much harder, but she makes it easier in some sense, if you see what I mean. Not in a practical way (smile)
(M reflects on difficulties and challenges she is experiencing being a working mother, but at the same time describing her life much more meaningful and joyful) S<mark style="background-color:#00ff00">piritual?</mark>

V. yes…..yes (smile)

Reflection: (I should have asked , in what way)

V. Is there any part of being a mother that you find particularly challenging, or that you are not enjoying much?

(P1.S 49) Hmmm, challenging…. yes, maybe in the beginning, when she was too small, I was very panicky. I was one of those worrying and panicking mums. *(shows that she is not 'one of those mums' (she doesn't want to be), and she is feels confident as a mother now)* <mark style="background-color:#0000ff">The personal</mark>

V-Can you tell me more about it?

(P1.S 50) Before she was 6 months. When she was very tiny, tiny baby, I was panicking, it was my weakness because I didn't know what to do.

(M reflects on how the beginning of motherhood was challenging, full of anxiety 'panicking' as she had no experience 'what to do' when looking after a fragile 'tiny baby' facing the fragility of embodiment and mortality) Physical

(P1.S 51) But after some time it disappeared and I become a natural mother. If she is crying, it is just because she is hungry or because she has a dirty nappy. *(M described learning how to take care of her baby's needs). The personal*

But this very first moment, I didn't know if she was breathing and I was panicking. *(M reflects facing the mortality)* Physical

(P1.S 53)   So I think I destroyed this precious moment of enjoyment because I was paranoid over whether she was ok or not

(M describes her anxieties at the beginning of motherhood, how aware she was of the fragility of her child, aware of mortality) Physical

(P1.S 54) And maybe now, because we still have sleepless nights. I still breast feed her and she still loves it. And I am kind of too soft to teach her not to breast- feed.

(Describing the difficulties of sleepless nights)Physical

 I know that I need to finish this lovely breast-feeding with her, but it is a very challenging task, so I still breast feed her. *(perhaps M experiencing guilt & anxiety of a separation as a working mum. Also reflecting how challenging motherhood is) Personal*

(P1.S 55) Even though I still enjoy feeding her, and I think it is a mutual enjoyment, but sleepless nights, no.

(M describes difficulties of sleepless nights) *Physical*

(pause)

V-It sounds very tiring….

(P1.S 56) Yes, probably when you are younger you can cope better without sleep, but you still need to have 3 or 4 hours to sleep. Sometimes with her she still wakes up 8 times per night. She still wakes up, just to check if I am there.

*(shows how physically tired she is)**The physcial***

V- Is there anything else you are experiencing as challenging in comparison to your life before you were a mother?

(P1.S 57) Yes, as I said we don't have family here, so it is difficult or impossible to set up any breaks or time for us.

*(M reflects how difficult to raise a child without a support from an external family)**Social***

(P1.S 58) Before, we used to love to go to the cinema at least maybe 2 or 3 times a month, but it is just a mission to find a babysitter.

*(indicates how little time is available for the parents' needs)**Social***

(P1.S 59) Would you trust her?

(shows the level of responsibility she feels for her child) Personal

(P1.S 60) It is always a question about money.

(the priorities how to spend their money have changed) Physical

(P1.S 61) So there is a hassle to find a babysitter, we have to pay her money, and so the cinema trip is not worth it anymore and we just stay at home.

(The priority between parents changed, less available time for each other) Social

(P1.S 62) I think maybe later on we will find a solution to it.

(The priority at the present is on a child's needs) Social

(P1.S 63) And also, in London there is this problem with schooling. This awful story about not being in the right catchment area to get into a good school.

(M reflects on her responsibility for the child's future) Personal

(P1.S 64) Ah, so for me it is so stressful. How do we manage it? How we will get her into a good school and later on into a good university? So I think that like any mum, it worries me already. (P1.S 65) Even if she is not ready to go to a primary school yet, it is always on my mind and I worry about how we get her into a good school.

(M indicates how worrying and stressful motherhood is because of the responsibility for her child's well being and future. As a mother, she accepted the full responsibility of her child's life, education and future well being.) Personal

(P1.S 66) Where we grew up, it was like, if you are a smart kid you will get into a very good school whatever your catchment area or your parents' money, yes, here it is a combination of luck, persuasion and finance. Not easy.

(comparing the cultural difference. Demonstrating the values and beliefs that are embedded in her from her culture.) Personal

V. I can hear that you have lots of worries on her mind. Is there anything else that you find challenging for yourself at the present?

(P1.S 67) I am struggling always feeling tired, the fatigue.

(M reflects on physical challenges). Physical

(P1.S 68) I always feel tearful and cry easily. Before, you would never see me cry.

(M demonstrate high level of emotions, perhaps partially influenced by physical tiredness). Physical

(P1.S 69) I have a strong and positive mind, even though I am still strong and positive, but this tiredness, hmmm, sometimes I feel that I can't function anymore.

(shows how she tries to stay positive and strong, but recognizes how difficult that is).

<mark>Physical</mark>

V-Right

(P1.S 70) The biggest challenge for me, every evening, is that I am tired. I can't function at work and I am grumpy. It eats my energy, and it effects how I am as a mum and at work. So the biggest challenge is to find the energy.

(M describes physical tiredness as one of the biggest challenges of being a mum)

<mark>Physical</mark>

V – Being a mum is a tiring work, but being a working mum probably even more challenging.

(silence… M is nodding her head).

V- Have you experienced the expectations of others on you, how to be a mother?

(P1.S 71) Yes, the model of bringing up a child here in England, in London, is quite different from where I grew up.

(M is acknowledging the expectations and influences of society on how to be a mum)

<mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 72) So if you have your relatives visiting from Estonia, they are very strict about how your child should be dressed, fed and developed. If your child is not doing certain things at this time something is 'wrong'. They are always checking if everything is alright. So they are not enjoying what the child has done at that moment but they are asking why she is not doing something better.

(P1.S 73) So sometimes, I become like, guys please do not interfere. Sometimes I become a quite defensive mum, like 'my child is doing well, so leave us alone'. I don't like it when anyone advises me how to be a mum, because I believe that every mother has a feeling if something is going wrong, with their child's health or development.

So I think that it is quite good to have grandmothers at a distance so they can't interfere too much. You know, away from this challenge.

(M reflects on the expectations from the Others on her mothering, and express confidence in her mothering style. Also, shows complex relationship with grandmothers) <mark>Social/</mark> P<mark>ersonal</mark>

(P1.S 74) My English friends, for example, admire my style because they find me a calm mum. They are saying 'Maria you are so good with her, you are so calm, you are not shouting at her'. It is so good to see that this society welcomes things like that.

(shows the importance of recognition and positive feedback, approval from others) <mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 75) And breast-feeding. Like every time, some people are criticizing me, like 'she is too big', or 'give her some freedom so she can start to develop more'. For me, I am saying that, please guys, it is my choice so let me do what I feel is right. So don't approach me, it is my choice.

(M become assertive in her choices (authentic). She reflects how breast-feeding is judged by the society). Social (expectations/breast-feeding)/Personal (choses)

V- *So to me it looks like that you have found your way of mothering, you are strong-minded and trust yourself with your choices?*

Reflection: (she already told me that, I should not ask this).

(P1.S 76) No, from the beginning I was lost. I wasn't sure what was going on at all. I was like, "Oh, a baby" (expressed surprise), and I wasn't feeling great because after delivery I developed some kind of infection. I had a high temperature and for a week or more I didn't feel good at all. So that probably spoiled the few first months as a mother.

(M reflects how challenging was the beginning of motherhood, child birth and no experience of looking after a little baby/ Unprepared for the reality of motherhood). Personal

(P1.S 77) But now I have developed a good understanding of what she wants from me and what I want from me as a mum.

(Learning her role as a mother, how to take care of her child's needs) Personal

V-*How long did it take you to develop your own mothering-style?*

(P1.S 78) To be honest, quite early, maybe because of my age. I am not like a young mother. I am quite a good age mum, it gives you some confidence.

(M believes that age and experience helped her to be more confident as a mother) Personal

(P1.S 79) In my first profession I was a teacher, so that helped me. Some of it rings a bell on what should be happening.

(M reflects that some extra education/preparation is helpful in a mother's role. Also, shows the resourcefulness of mother to use the knowledge and skill from various sources) Personal

(P1.S 80) And most of my friends already had babies so I had seen those examples of what to do and what not.

(learning from observing other mothers is important) Social

V- So you learned from other mothers?

(P1.S 81) Yes, I was observing, noting what was good for me and what was not a good approach. So that's how I developed my own approach.

(M chose from all sources what felt right for her and developed her own approach to mothering). Social *(learning from others)/* Personal *(development)*

V. I see. Have you experienced any expectations from your husband?

(P1.S 82) Expectations from my husband are different. We have always had these small battles, since she was born. He thinks that it is so important that she will eat, but for me it is ok. She didn't eat now but she will eat it at lunch. He doesn't understand that breast-

feeding will substitute. He is on the worrying side, he is always worried about everything, like she is not eating well, that she is ill, or not sleeping well. He is attending to her physical needs first, but I am attending to psychological more.

(Challenges in relationship with her husband. differences in values and beliefs of the child's upbringing) Social (relationship)

V. Ok. Sounds like you have developed your mothering approach, make your own decisions and stand by them.

Reflection: (And how is it affecting your relationship).

(P1.S 83) Yes, it is good that you have pointed that out, staying by my decisions. Everyone is trying to influence you by pointing out what you are not doing right, they are trying to change you. I can agree with some of them, but now that I know what I am doing, so far I am still progressing well.

(M describes how she become more aware and protective of her values and believes, she makes choices according her own values instead of following Others (become ore mindful and authentic of her values) Personal/ Social (expectations from others)

V. Masha how has becoming a mother affected your relationship with other people? (Maybe I should clarify and give an example (e.g. husband, family, friends, work colleagues) to avoid confusion.)

M. You mean others, friends or?

V. Your husband, your friends, your family, all of them

(P1.S 84) First of all with my mum, I think it is important. Now I understand her and why she was worried at many points of my life. I was angry and saying "why are you checking on me, why are checking on what I am doing?" Now I know that I want to know exactly everything about my daughter, if she has eaten, if she is happy. Now I am sharing mum's worries for me and sympathizing a bit more. Not like before, "live your own life and leave me alone". Now I am spending more time with my mum and I want to improve our relationship. The relationship was always good, but I didn't want her to be with me on too many occasions. Now I think whenever I have a chance, I will give her a chance to spend more time with my daughter and me.

(shows how becoming a mother herself helped M to empathies and relate to her mother in a different way/ as mother to mother) ==Social==

V. Sounds like, you are appreciating her more now…

(P1.S 85) Yes, more, more, and I am listening to her more. Now I am sometimes agreeing just to please her, just to show that I appreciate her. And I think it is great because it opens your eyes to a different perspective. So I think our relationship is much better.

(again, shows how motherhood helped M to see the relationship with her mother from a different perspective. Developed new values & beliefs) ==Social==

(P1.S 86) And my dad and I were quite distant before. In a good way because he lives in a town and has a busy life, but now I know why he calls me and asks me to call him once a week to check how I am doing. So I definitely learned my lesson from here. I think it is a positive moment

(shows how she re-evaluated her relationship with her parents) ==Social==

(P1.S 87) With the father of my child, when Mila was born it was magical moment between us. It was WOW, it was fantastic. It was just like love had just tripled, multiplied, you know.

(shows how a birth of a child is a spiritual moment). ==Social==*/ the* <mark style="background:green">Spiritual</mark>

(P1.S 88) It was just great, but it was just for a moment before some difficulties came to play bad games. When she was sick, I wanted to do things my way and he wanted to consult our parents all the time. He was saying, why don't we call my mum, or why don't we call your mum. He still didn't trust that I was capable of looking after the child as a mum because I didn't have any experience. In my opinion, I have an experience that is given to us by nature. So this is how we have our battles between us. It is not all so pinky and nice. So you could see how much he changed as well, you know. Also, the domestic life is not so brilliant. It has this all ups and downs.

(M reflection on the changes and challenges of the relationship between as they learn to be parents; both experiencing responsibility for the child and M is no feeling trusted or values as a mother by her husband, dynamic between three people instead of two,) ==Social==

V. What do you mean, ups and downs?

(P1.S 89) Now we are more into her, she comes first. If food is not prepared or the laundry is not done, it is not so important for me. Important, but I can leave it. But he sometimes complains that it is not clean, it is untidy, "where are my trousers" and I will say "I don't know, find them yourself". Before it was different, but now he is not my first priority, at least not at this very moment. He probably feels left out, and that we don't have time for us as a couple. We are more parents then a couple.

(The priority shifts from each other to the child/ Responsibility for the child) Social

V. what do you mean, we don't have time as a couple?

(P1.S 90) For example, I am too tired and he is too tired. At night I am attending to her needs not to us. So we don't go out, maybe only in the day time all together. But in the evening, he goes in his own and I am on my own. As I told you she is so close to me that she would not go sleep without me. So this is a little problem: I developed this relationship and she wants me to go to sleep with her. She doesn't want daddy, and she screams badly if I am not there.

(the child's needs come first and there is no mental and physical space for the parents to give to each other.) Social

V. It sounds like this prevents you from having any time together with your husband as a couple…

(P1.S 91). Yes, and even if we sometimes decide to watch a movie on TV, half an hour and I am done. I am too tired and fall asleep, so..

(physical tiredness) (relationship with her husband is struggling) ==Physical== / ==*Social*==

V. So there is no time for you two anymore?

(P1.S 92) Yes. We are trying to connect, but it is not easy. The energy level is down, we are too tired, and maybe not so happy at work, so I just say, ok, why don't we just go to sleep. So..

(The priority is child's need and parents don't have physical and mental availability for each other/ disconected). ==Social==

V. Mmm. How do you feel about it?

(P1.S 93) It is not great. It's upsetting, but as I said at the moment she is my priority. I feel very guilty that she is not with me most of the time that is why any moment I have I will take her everywhere. Some people will say, oh, why don't you leave her, but I can't see how I can leave her and miss this little time.

(M is reflection on her feeling of guilt and anxiety of not being a 'good mother'; Highlighting that her child is her priority and not her husband.) ==*Social*==/ ==*Personal*==

V. So your child is your priority and it is influencing the relationship with your husband?

(P1.S 94) Yes, definitely. And sometimes we have these little arguments, they are just domestic ones. They show how different the approaches we have are now. For example for me it is not important if I have had chance to hoover or not. For me it is more important that we draw one more picture together, or we go to see some friends or we go to the park. But he tries to maintain the same rules as it was before the child; he doesn't understand that now it is impossible. For me now on my weekend, to clean, to iron to entertain her and to still look nice and be ready for something else, it is impossible, I will be dead by then. That is why I invited a cleaner, but at the beginning he was asking me, why can't you do this yourself.

(feels that her work as a mother is not understood and appreciated by her husband)

Social

Just a bit of this attitude I don't find great. For me is more important to spend more time with my child than to do cleaning. Before, I didn't mind, but now *(shake her head)*, so..

(all her focus and priorities are on the child)Personal (values changed); Social

(relationship with her partner)

V. Do you feel not understood and appreciated?

(P1.S 95) I don't know. It is quite frustrating, very frustrating. I think he needs to understand that it is not easy to be a full-time mum and work full-time. I am still a full-time mum. I mean I am still always in charge of her needs, even when I am at work. Morning runs to the child minder are very stressful. To get to the child-minder in time means to dress her, feed her, to put her in a pram, because she wants to walk and she doesn't always want to do that. I have to be on time there to be on time at work.

(shows that M feels responsible for her child even when she is not with her). ==*Personal*==

(P1.S 96) Some people do not sympathize. Why should they? If you come to work it was your choice, so you need to do everything like the others. Everyone there has to perform, and I am quite tired of that. A couple of times I was quite close to resigning, but as I thought it would be too difficult financially I didn't.

(shows that M is taking responsibility for her choices, even though they are very tough at times) (Shows that she feels not understood and supported either at home or work).
==social==

V. Yes

(P1.S 97) But it is frustrating, why can you just be understood on these small things. You know…

(M reflects on not being valued and appreciated for her work as a mother by society)
==*Social*==

V. What about your relationship with friends. Friends you had before you become a mother, new friends?

(P1.S 98). To be honest now I understand my friends who had kids before me. How they just could disappear for months. Because time just absorbs you, there are no weekends, no time. Before I wondered why it was so difficult to contact or meet with friends.
(new values and beliefs regarding her understanding of 'others', 'being-with-others' is restructuring). Social

(P1.S 99) When I was childless, I though that I will be different and I will find time and energy for my friends and other stuff that I want to do. Now, hmmm, now I have got you, now I understand you.
(shows M's expectation of motherhood was very different to the reality). Personal (Expectations of Motherhood)

(P1.S 100) I think now I could see who my true friends are, because even some friends who don't have children still come and see us, so this part of life is still ok. Only that I would not join them in activities that I used to before, going to exhibitions, going to the parties.
(re-evaluation of the relationships with others/ her friends). Social

V. How do you feel about it?

(P1.S 101) Uh, some times I am missing it, it would be nice to put make up on and go and have some fun, but again I don't have the energy to enjoy it now. I went to a Xmas party on my own. We agreed that Alex would go to his Xmas party at his working place, and I would go to mine on my own. I stayed there for two hours and I enjoyed it to the beads, but at 10 pm I was so tired. You know, I thought, ok that is mum's hours kicking in. But for those two hours I enjoyed every minute of it. Probably like I never enjoyed it before. Being in a nice dress, drinking cocktails, receiving complements about how nice I looked and everything. It was a great time. Thank god that we had agreed that he we would go separately and I had the chance to go. It was great. It was a nice venue, in Courts of Justice. I thought 'hey, life exists'. I am not saying that life doesn't exist for me now, I enjoy being a mum. But, you want to see more. I think as a mum you understand what I am talking about.

(M looked very exited when she was telling me about the Xmas party, her eyes sparkled) (shows how much M is missing and enjoying her previous style of life. The life that she used to live before, that doesn't exist anymore) Social / Personal

V. You want to feel like there is something more to life…

(P1.S 102) Yes, yes. But, I am a lucky case because I had so much before I had my daughter. I went to so many concerts, I traveled a lot, and I went to so many parties and so many restaurants. Sometimes I was board from all those parties, but now I think hmmm, can I have one party, you know (smile) I am missing it a bit, yes.

Like last weekend we went to Oxford, with the child but we still wanted to see something different, not just your local area, something else. Because it gives you new energy, …you know.

(Sounds like living the previous lifestyle was not enough either, but it would be good to be able to have both parts). <mark>Personal</mark>

V. Have you meet new friends since you became a mum?

(P1.S 103) Oh yes, a new road opened to me. All of them are local mums , who attended groups with their children, like new babies or something. Every week we used to go there and there would be a specialist from local council who would talk about some subject, for example how to choose shoes for children. There were lots of mums and we became regulars, came every Tuesday not just to listen to this specialist, but to chat. We would go for walks, coffee, go to playgrounds, so it was our socializing. When the babies were sleeping, we could talk.

(shows M's needs to socialize, identify with other; feeling of belonging) <mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 104) That how I found my style as a mum. Because English girls are more open, they are not strictly to the rules, maybe it is just my opinion, and maybe it was the girls I met. And they loved the way I was as a mum and we became friends. It was good. Most of them were British mums and it was easy to talk to them, to be honest, because they had the same approach to me towards bringing up a child.

(M reflects how important it to be supported, recognized and identify with others). <mark>Social</mark>

V. Hmm, so it was easy to make new friends?

(P1.S 105) Yes, because we were speaking about the same topics. Some mothers had the same problems as me, their children would not sleep at night and we had sleepless nights, eczema, we went through the battle with eczema. So we went through the same problems, like "I didn't have a chance to have a shower today", "ok, me too". They understand and accept you, they love your baby. So it was great. It was a great support from those groups. There were 8 mums, and with 4 of them we still have a good relationship.

(M describes being understood by others because they shared the same experience. Belonging/Reassurance) <mark>Social</mark>

V. Great

(P1.S 106) And I was the youngest mum there. So for me it was a bit of benefit there, you know. Most of them had their second child

(shows how beneficial M experienced being with experienced mothers) <mark>social</mark>

V. Ah, so they had some experience as well?

(P1.S 107) Yes, yes, and that's how you develop very useful contacts, you know. Like that's how we found our child-minder, and some other local advice. I felt more powerful because now I knew where I was and what I was doing. So I never felt alone, that is a good thing. I never had these symptoms of withdrawnness. Sometimes we had so many invites that I had to pick which one to attend. I think it is a good thing. I didn't feel like

oh, what is going on. I felt sometimes that I just need to get out of my house, I didn't care about the state of the house, it could wait. You know, it was a great support to have those groups.

(Sounds that being part of 'others' gave her a feeling of reassurance, normality, belonging and being understood) (indicates how mothers gathering together is important and useful! Shows the need for organising groups for mums)*. Social

V. Right, do you think that helped you to stay happy and be in touch with your child's needs, and yours?

(P1.S 108) Yes, to say in state of balance, you know

V. You had a sense of balance.

M. Yes!

V. How would you identify yourself now? If you would ask yourself a question, who do you think you are? If it is just about you?

(P1.S 109) I think, just to describe myself I would say, I am the mum of the lovely girl who brings us happiness, and the future has become so bright because…. I think what she will do … first, I would say I a mum, but second I still want to develop, because I am still at this early stage at my career. It is not forgotten, so I will be developing as a person as well.

(I believe that M indicating that her 'mother' identity is the most important one for her, then she is describing that not 'just a mother' and 'Other' identities are also important for her and she wants to be able to balance them in life). Personal

(P1. S 110) Also, maybe thinking about a second child, but when to do that. Maybe I need to wait, maybe I need some rest. Maybe she could help when she is a bit older. But we will see, but also, I don't want to leave it too late because I don't want to be a mum again when I am 50, so maybe another 5 years max. It is in our book.

(In spite of challenges, M is considering a second child. Perhaps indicating her believes of 'good' family structure). Personal

M. I think it would be better for her; I was a single child and my husband too, so that is why we want to give her a sibling.

(Interestingly, M even thinking about a second child is part of considering what would be better for her child) Personal

V. How would you describe your meaning of life? What keeps you going?

(P1.S 111) I would repeat myself, it is my daughter, but also it is my family. My extended family, my mum, my grandmothers and my godmothers. They are happier. Before, it was all the same, now they can look at the progress of my child. Like what she will be doing next summer. It is like awakened for everyone. Everyone became more alive. It gave energy to everyone, more happiness in the air. Everyone loves her, gives her presents. They are all asking how she is. Sometimes I am a bit jealous. Like before

when I went to my home town my grandfather would give something to me, but now forget it, it's all about my daughter. So I feel like 'what about me guys' (smiling)

(M describes her child as meaning of her life) <mark>spiritual</mark>*/ Also, reflects how she become closer to her family, more mindful of her belonging and how her child brought diffirent dynamic and meaning to the whole family* <mark>Social</mark>

V. How do you feel that you become not 'the first' anymore, not the centre of attention?

Reflection (I should have expanded on how motherhood become the meaning of her life and the deeper connection with the family!!!)

(P1.S 112) For me it is sometimes a little bit like 'give me at least one compliment', because they all say 'she looks gorgeous, she is so beautiful'. Well, does it mean that I look awful, too tired or too old now?

(she is not the priority anymore even for her family) <mark>Social</mark>

(P1.S 113) But, some people started to recognize this. Like my father, or like my partner sometimes. They know that I like compliments. Well, yes we are getting there. Because sometimes, like any woman, you should be given some of those compliments.

(M is missing to be the centre of attention).<mark>social</mark>

Silent

(P1.S 114) Yes that is a big change. Everywhere we go she is the centre of attention. But at the same time it is nice that people are sharing your joy with you. Sharing my attention.

(M reflect that her family is sharing her love for her child) <mark>Social</mark>

V. Is there anything that I haven't asked you, that you would like to tell me? About you being a mother?

(P1.S 115) I would say, if you had asked me the question, 'what about being a mother?' like three years ago, when we started thinking about whether we should have a child or wait, I would say, no, it should wait. Now I think, every woman should go for it. It is something that gives you enjoyment, but is tough. Motherhood is not easy. I thought it was much easier, honestly. I though 'why is she so tired?' Is it that difficult to put a child to bed and tell her to sleep? Read a book and she will sleep. I think I over estimated my skills. It is a good challenge to bring a child up.

(M reflects how her expectation of motherhood were different to the reality, but in spite all the challenges she is happy to be a mother. Also, M described that she did not considered to have a child or not, but when.). <mark>Personal</mark> Expectation of motherhood/ Decision to have a child was always there

V. So your expectations about motherhood, about what how it would be were different?

(P1.S 116) Yes! It is much harder, but I never thought that I would be so attached. That unconditional love exists. Now I can see how this unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedication.

(M reflects that motherhood is much harder then she expected.) <mark style="background-color:navy; color:navy">personal</mark>/ Describing Unconditional love and feeling full responsibility for the child <mark style="background-color:green">Spiritual</mark>

V. How does it affect you?

(P1.S 117) I think overall, I am much happier. Even though I am saying, ' oooo it is so tough", to you now. I think that it is the best thing that ever happened to me, despite of all the difficulties. So if you ask me will I do it again, yes, I will do it again. So, motherhood is a great thing that comes with lots of responsibilities and sacrifices. Everyone has their own ways and their own sacrifices. In my case is my thing, so there we go.

(M reflects on responsibilities and sacrifices as a main theme of motherhood) <mark style="background-color:navy; color:white">*Personal*</mark>, <mark style="background-color:yellow">*Social*</mark>, <mark style="background-color:red">*Physical*</mark>, <mark style="background-color:green">*Spiritual*</mark>

Reflection: (I wish I asked her more questions about experiencing the responsibility for the Other (her child))

V. how was the experience of giving this interview for you?

(P1.S 118) To be honest, I think it was very good. First of all, as I said I am very sociable so I like chatting. Doesn't matter what about, but this topic is quite dear to me now as a young mum. So for me it was kind of reflection. I would never have thought or talked like that about myself, but when you ask questions it is like a reflection exercise. It has been quite useful for me. Because you learn when you look inside. And in a settled manner. Those questions were quite open ended questions, so it actually let me say what I

felt. Not what you should say. But I was ready to share things with you that maybe I would not to say to friends. Because I still want to be seen as strong, like 'come on girls, I am still very strong'.

(Interesting because that is the message I heard through the interview. Sounds that it is very important to M to appear as a strong person and a 'good mother' to 'other's and to herself.)

V. So did you feel comfortable to share some weaknesses with me? (Not sure what is happening here; sounds like I am trying to say something to her. My opinion on how I experienced her not being able to admit, hold and own being weak, powerless and struggling. Like she has not fully fulfilledmy expectations of what I expected to hear from her).

(P1.S 119) Yes, yes, I didn't want to look like everything is fine, and I am not genuine.

Silence.

8.6 *Appendix 6. Step 1 of analysis for Participant 1 (Masha)*

Analysis step 1.

Participant 1 (Masha)

Cuts of transcripts according to 4 dimensions of existence:

Physical Dimension:

Theme: Responsibility:

(P1.S 10) Well, first of all because now you are <u>responsible for someone</u>, you have to look after someone <u>who is very precious to you</u>. You feel totally responsible for what you are doing so that yours decision do not affect your child badly.

Life and death:

(P1.S 50) Before she was 6 months. When she was very tiny, tiny baby.

 I was panicking; **it was my weakness** because **I didn't know what to do**. <u>(fear of failing as a mother)(indicates that not feeling confident as a mother means being weak to her; she didn't know what to do, so now she has learned her role and she feels that she is good at it) PersonalPhysical</u>

(P1.S 51) But after some time it disappeared and **I became a natural mother**. If she is crying, it is just because she is hungry or because she has a dirty nappy. But this very first moment, I didn't know if she was breathing and I was panicking.

Theme: Concept of time:

(P1.S 17) So I don't miss those precious hours when she starts…

Theme: Sleep/ tiredness

(P1.S 55) Even though I still enjoy feeding her, and I think it is a mutual enjoyment, but sleepless nights, no.

(P1.S 56) Yes, probably when you are younger you can cope better without sleep, but you still need to have 3 or 4 hours to sleep. Sometimes with her she still wakes up 8 times per night. She still wakes up

(P1.S 67) I am struggling always feeling tired, the fatigue.

(P1.S 68) I always feel tearful and cry easily. Before, you would never see me cry.

(P1.S 69) I have a strong and positive mind, even though I am still strong and positive, but this tiredness, hmmm, sometimes I feel that **I can't function anymore.**

(P1.S 70) The biggest challenge for me, every evening, is that I am tired. I can't function at work and I am grumpy. It eats my energy, and it effects how I am as a mum and at work. So the biggest challenge is to find the energy.

Theme: Financial values:

(P1.S 60) It is always a question about money.

(P1.S 66) Where we grew up, it was like, if you are a smart kid you will get into a very good school whatever your catchment area or your parents' money, yes, here it is a combination of luck, persuasion and finance. Not easy.

Theme: *Life before becoming a mother:*

P1. S8. <u>very active</u>, attending every social event possible, traveling a lot, reading a lot, seeing friends a lot, gym, mmmm I have forgotten what I was doing; ah, gym, yoga, photography, exploring places, like we would take an area in London or England and at the weekend just go and explore what it was like. These were often <u>instant decisions</u>, like waking up and deciding where we were going and what we are going to do.

P1. S9.sometimes, we did plan, but there was also a lot of just spontaneous stuff. <u>We were very active before, we never stayed at home</u>

(P1.S 58) Before, we used to love to go to the cinema at least maybe 2 or 3 times a month, but it is **just a mission** to find a babysitter.

Theme: Social life now as a mother:

(P1.S 61) So there is a hassle to find a babysitter, we have to pay her money, and so the cinema trip **is not worth it anymore** and we just stay at home.

(P1.S 62) I think maybe later on we will find a solution to it.

(P1.S 101) Uh, some times **I am missing it**, it would be nice to put make up on and go and have some fun, but again **I don't have the energy to enjoy it now**. I went to a Xmas party on my own. We agreed that Alex would go to his Xmas party at his working place, and I would go to mine on my own. I stayed there for two hours and I enjoyed it to the beads, but at 10 pm I was so tired. You know, I thought, ok that is

mum's hours kicking in. But for those two hours I enjoyed every minute of it. Probably **like I never enjoyed it before**. Being in a nice dress, drinking cocktails, receiving complements about how nice I looked and everything. It was a great time. Thank god that we had agreed that he we would go separately and I had the chance to go. It was great. It was a nice venue, in Courts of Justice. I thought **'hey, life exists'**. I am not saying that life doesn't exist for me now, I enjoy being a mum. But, **you want to see more**. I think as a mum you understand what I am talking about.

P1. S102. <u>I had so much before I had Mila</u>. I went to so many concerts, I traveled a lot, and I went to so many parties and so many restaurants. Sometimes **I was bored from all those parties**, but now I think hmmm, can I have one party, you know (smile) **I am missing it** a bit, yes.

Like last weekend we went to Oxford, with the child but we still wanted to see something different, not Chiswick High Road, not Kew Gardens, or Chiswick Green, something else. Because it gives you new energy, …you know.

(P1.S 114) <u>Yes that is a big change</u>. Everywhere we go <u>she is the centre of attention.</u> But at the same time it is nice that people are sharing your joy with you. Sharing my attention.

Theme: Work is important as a social connection outside of motherhood:

(P1.S 4)Yes, <u>I am working full-time,</u> Monday to Friday, 9-5.

P1.S 5) Yes, full-time for me and full-time for my husband too. Our child goes to child-minder when we are at work.

(P1.S 26) I am going for an adult coffee, I have adult chats, read the news. I dress up differently than when I am with a child, so **it gives me a chance to be myself** and to understand where I now need to go to progress.

P1.S 28) It is development for myself, when I am at work; **I am fitting in with a social life and other people.**

(P1.S 29) When at home you are **lost from other people**, from a busy life; and maybe it would be **difficult for me to know how to go back to society**.

(P1.S 30) Yes, that you are **not so compatible** if you stay long with a child. It is **not an easy topic** to discuss. Hmmm.

(P1.S 31) If I had a choice, I would work 3 days and stay 4 days with my child. So it would be kind of balanced.

Theme: Relationship with a child:

(P1.S 39) She is a very happy child, **very demanding, but it is enjoyable**.

(P1.S 43) Well, first of all every morning, she comes to me and says, "mama kiss", then it is doesn't matter if it was a bad night or a good night… it is just ahhhh, come here. She is very cuddly. Maybe it is because she is a girl, or maybe she is just a child like that. She loves kissing and cuddling. Every morning she brings my shoes to me. So **all these small things make you appreciate why she is there**.

(P1.S 45) I can see how much joy she brings to my parents, her daddy and his parents. He loves her to bits, more than (he does) me, I am jealous, but it is fine

(P1.S 46) So all these things make me to understand why **I am struggling**, why I have to go to work - **to make her life better. (Responsibility)**

Theme: Expectations/ Judgments from 'others' how to be a mother:

(P1.S 72) So if you have your relatives visiting from Estonia, they are very strict about how your child should be dressed, fed and developed. If your child is not doing certain things at this time something is 'wrong'. They are always checking if everything is alright. So they are not enjoying what the child has done at that moment but they are asking why she is not doing something better.

(P1.S 73) So sometimes, I become like, guys please **do not interfere**. Sometimes I become a quite defensive mum, like 'my child is doing well, so leave us alone'. I don't like it when anyone advises me how to be a mum, because I believe that every mother has a feeling if something is going wrong, with their child's health or development.

So I think that it is quite **good to have grandmothers at a distance** so they can't interfere too much. You know, away from this challenge.

(P1.S 75) And breast-feeding. Like every time, some **people are criticizing me**, like 'she is too big', or 'give her some freedom so she can start to develop more'. For me, I am saying that, please guys, **it is my choice** so let me do what I feel is right. So don't approach me, it is my choice.

(P1.S 83) Yes, staying by my decisions. Everyone is trying to influence you by pointing out what you are not doing right, they are trying to change you. I can agree with some of them, but now that I know what I am doing, so far I am still progressing well.

(P1.S 96) Some people do not sympathize. Why should they? If you come to work it was your choice, so you need to do everything like the others. Everyone there has to perform, and I am quite tired of that. A couple of times I was quite close to resigning, but as I thought it would be too difficult financially I didn't.

(P1.S 97) But it is frustrating, why can you just be understood on these small things. You know…

Theme: Relationship with the family

(P1.S 3)We are here without our broader families, so the charge of a child is totally on our hands. Our grandmothers live in Estonia, sometime they come to visit, but we do everything, so it is full-time work.

(P1.S 57) Yes, as I said we don't have family here, so it is difficult or impossible to set up any breaks or time for us

(P1.S 111) The meaning of my life **is my daughter**, but **also it is my family**. Not just my extended family, not just my mum, my grandmothers, and my godmothers. They are happier. Before, it was all the same, now they can look at the progress of my child. Like what she will be doing next summer. **It is life awakened for everyone.** Everyone became more alive. It gave energy to everyone, more happiness in the air. Everyone loves her, gives her presents. They are all asking how she is. Sometimes I am a bit jealous. Like before when I went to Estonia my grandfather would give something to me, but now forget it, it's all about Mila. So I feel like 'what about me guys' (smiling)

(P1.S 112) For me it is sometimes a little bit like 'give me at least one compliment', because they all say 'she looks gorgeous, she is so beautiful'. Well, does it mean that I look awful, too tired or too old now?

Theme: Relationship with her mother:

(P1.S 84) First of all **with my mum**, I think it is important. **Now I understand** her and why she was worried at many points of my life. I was angry and saying "why are you checking on me, why are checking on what I am doing?" Now I know that I want to know exactly everything about my daughter, if she has eaten, if she is happy. Now I am sharing mum's worries for me and sympathizing a bit more. Not like before, "live your own life and leave me alone". Now I am spending more time with my mum and I want to improve our relationship. The relationship was always good, but I didn't want her to be with me on too many occasions. Now I think whenever I have a chance, I will give her a chance to spend more time with Mila and me.

(P1.S 85) Yes, more, more, and I am listening to her more. Now I am sometimes agreeing just to please her, just to show that I appreciate her. And I think it is great because **it opens your eyes to a different perspective**. So I think our relationship is

much better.

Theme: Relationship with her father:

(P1.S 86) Yes, for sure. And **my dad** and I were quite distant before. In a good way because he lives in a town and has a busy life, but now I know why he calls me and asks me to call him once a week to check how I am doing. So I definitely **learned my lesson from here**. I think it is a positive moment

(P1.S 113) But, some people started to recognize this. Like my father, or like my partner sometimes. They know that I like compliments. Well, yes we are getting there. Because sometimes, like any woman, you should be given some of those compliments. Attention, that is the word.

Theme: Relationship with friends:

(P1.S 74) My English friends, for example, **admire my style** because they find me a **calm mum**. They are saying 'Maria you are so good with her, you are so calm, you are not shouting at her'. It is so good to see that this society welcomes things like that.

(P1.S 98). To be honest now I understand my friends who had kids before me. How they just could disappear for months. Because time just absorbs you, there are no weekends, no time. Before I wondered why it was so difficult to contact or meet with friends.

(P1.S 99) When I was childless, I though that I will be different and I will find time and energy for my friends and other stuff that I want to do. Now, hmmm, now I have got you, now I understand you.

(P1.S 100) I think now I could see who my true friends are, because even some friends who don't have children still come and see us, **so this part of life is still ok**. Only that I would not join them in activities that I used to before, going to

exhibitions, going to the parties.

Theme: Relationship with other mothers/ support

(P1.S 80) And most of my friends already had babies so I had seen those examples of what to do and what not.

(P1.S 103) I have met new friend, **a new road opened to me**. All of them are local mums in Chiswick, who attended groups with their children, like new babies or something. Every week we used to go there and there would be a specialist from Chiswick council who would talk about some subject, for example how to choose shoes for children. There were lots of mums and we became regulars, came every Tuesday not just to listen to this specialist, but to chat. We would go for walks, coffee, go to playgrounds, so it was our socializing. When the babies were sleeping, we could talk.

(P1.S 104) That how I found my style as a mum. Because English girls are more open, they are not strictly to the rules, maybe it is just my opinion, and maybe it was the girls I met. And they loved the way I was as a mum and we became friends. It was good. Most of them were British mums and it was easy to talk to them, to be honest, because they had the same approach to me towards bringing up a child.

(P1.S 105) Yes, because we were speaking about the same topics. Some mothers had the same problems as me, their children would not sleep at night and we had sleepless nights, eczema, we went through the battle with eczema. So we went through the same problems, like "I didn't have a chance to have a shower today", "ok, me too". **They understand and accept you, they love your baby**. So it was great. It was a great support from those groups. There were 8 mums, and with 4 of them we still have a good relationship.

(P1.S 106) And I was the youngest mum there. So for me it was a bit of benefit there,

you know. Most of them had their second child

(P1.S 107) Yes, yes, and that's how you develop very useful contacts, you know. Like that's how we found our child-minder, and some other local advice. I **felt more powerful because now I knew where I was and what I was doing. So I never felt alone,** that is a good thing. I never had these symptoms of withdrawnness. Sometimes we had so many invites that I had to pick which one to attend. I think it is a good thing. I didn't feel like oh, what is going on. I felt sometimes that I just need to get out of my house, I didn't care about the state of the house, it could wait. You know, **it was a great support to have these groups**.
<u>(P1.S 108) It helped me</u> **to stay in a state of balance,…**

Theme: Relationship with her husband:

(P1.S 82) Expectations from my husband are different. We have always had these small battles, since she was born. He thinks that it is so important that she will eat, but for me it is ok. She didn't eat now but she will eat it at lunch. He doesn't understand that breast-feeding will substitute. He is on the worrying side, he is always worried about everything, like she is not eating well, that she is ill, or not sleeping well. **He is attending to her physical needs first, but I am attending to psychological needs more**.

(P1.S 87) With the father of my child, when Mila was born it was **a magical moment between us**. **It was WOW**, it was fantastic. It was just like love had just tripled, multiplied, you know.

(P1. S88) It was just great, but **it was just for a moment** before some **difficulties came** to play bad games. When she was sick, I wanted to do things my way and he wanted to consult our parents all the time. He was saying, why don't we call my mum, or why don't we call your mum. He still didn't trust that I was capable of looking after the child as a mum because I didn't have any experience. In my opinion,

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I have an experience that is given to us by nature. So this is how we have our battles between us. It is not all so pinky and nice. So you could see how much he changed as well, you know. Also, the domestic life is not so brilliant. It has this all ups and downs.

(P1.S 89) Now we are more into her, she comes first. If food is not prepared or the laundry is not done, it is not so important for me. Important, but I can leave it. But he sometimes complains that it is not clean, it is untidy, "where are my trousers" and I will say "I don't know, find them yourself". Before it was different, but now he is not my first priority, at least not at this very moment. He probably **feels left out**, and that we **don't have time for us as a couple**. **We are more parents than a couple.**

(P1.S 90) For example, **I am too tired** and **he is too tired**. At night I am attending to her needs not to us. So we don't go out, maybe only in the day time all together. But in the evening, he goes in his own and I am on my own. As I told you she is so close to me that she would not go sleep without me. So this is a little problem: I developed this relationship and she wants me to go to sleep with her. She doesn't want daddy, and she screams badly if I am not there.

(P1.S 91). Yes, and even if we sometimes decide to watch a movie on TV, half an hour and I am done. I am too tired and fall asleep, so..

(P1.S 92) Yes. We are **trying to connect**, but it is not easy. The energy level is down, **we are too tired**, and maybe not so happy at work, so I just say, ok, why don't we just go to sleep. So..

(P1.S 93) It is not great. **It's upsetting me**, but as I said at the moment **she is my priority.**

(P1.S 94) Yes, definitely. And sometimes we have these little arguments, they are just domestic ones. They show how different the approaches we have are now. For

example for me it is not important if I have had chance to hoover or not. For me it is more important that we draw one more picture together, or we go to see some friends or we go to the park. But he tries to maintain the same rules as it was before the child; he doesn't understand that now it is impossible. For me now on my weekend, to clean, to iron to entertain her and to still look nice and be ready for something else, it is impossible, I will be dead by then. That is why I invited a cleaner, but at the beginning he was asking me, why can't you do this yourself.

P1. S95. I don't know. It is quite frustrating, **very frustrating**. I think **he needs to understand that it is not easy to be a full-time mum and work full-time.**

Personal Dimension:

Theme: Life before become a mother:

(P1. S8) very active, attending every social event possible, traveling a lot, reading a lot, seeing friends a lot, gym, yoga, photography, exploring places, like we would take an area in London or England and at the weekend just go and explore what it was like.

These were often instant decisions, like waking up and deciding where we were going and what we are going to do.

(P1. S9) **we had a fun life. It was much easier**

(P1.S 13) **Before I was selfish**. Well, not selfish but let's say **I was like any other woman:** manicure and pedicure

(P1.S 14) Yes, massage, gym, sauna. Now I have to forget about it.

(P1.S 40) And I think it happened just at **the perfect time**. I was starting to think that I had enough of traveling and fun and **I was ready to commit**.

Theme: Life/ Identity as a career:

(P1.S 4) I am working full-time

P1. S21. Well, **I have no choice; I have to work** so I can support her financially

P1. S22. If I had a choice, I would probably go part-time.

P1.S 23. I would still go back to work because **I like socialising**, being **a full-time mum is not for me**.

(P1.S 25) **I want to develop myself**, and when I am going to work **I am an adult again**.

(P1.S 26) I am going for an adult coffee, I have adult chats, read the news. I dress up differently than when I am with a child, so **it gives me a chance to be myself** and to understand where I now need to go to progress.

(P1.S 27) how I work, what I have for lunch, how I dress, they are all my **decisions about myself, so I can be myself like I was before having children**.

P1.S 28) It is development for myself, when I am at work; **I am fitting in with a**

social life and other people.

(P1.S 30) Yes, that you are **not so compatible** if you stay long with a child. It is **not an easy topic** to discuss. Hmmm.

(P1.S 31) If I had a choice, I would work 3 days and stay 4 days with my child. So it would be kind of balanced.

(P1.S 32) Now, **my work is taking over**, so that is why it is not easy. At the moment **I have no choice** because we have **no support from our families**, so financially it is very difficult.

(P1.S 37) Yes, as a mum, **I am a good mum**. I think I am quite a natural mum, so yes, I am not regretting it. You know, at this stage it was the right time to have a child.

(P1.S 38) Still, **there is nothing you could have that is better**.

Theme: Life/ Identity as a mother:

(P1.S 11) …**everything changed** and that affects your lifestyle. **Like your life doesn't belong to yourself anymore**.

(P1.S 20) I am leaving her with a babysitter and I am seeing her only 2 full days a week, so it is **traumatizing.**

(P1.S 36) As a person **I feel much much better**, much **more content**. This is something **I should have done earlier**.

(P1.S 38) Still, **there is nothing you could have that is better**.

(P1.S 109) I think, just to describe myself I would say, **I am the mum** of the lovely girl who brings us happiness, and the future has become so bright because…. I think what she will do … **first, I would say I am a mum, but second I still want to develop**, because I am still at this early stage at my career. It is not forgotten, so I will be **developing as a person as well**.

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(P1.S 116) Yes! **It is much harder**, but I never thought that I would **be so attached**. That **unconditional love exists**. Now I can see how this **unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedication.**

(P1.S 117) I think overall, **I am much happier**. Even though I am saying, ' oooo it is so tough". I think that it is the best thing that ever happened to me, despite of all the difficulties. So if you ask me will I do it again, yes, I will do it again. So, **motherhood is a great thing that comes with lots of responsibilities and sacrifices.** Everyone has their own ways and their own sacrifices. In my case is my thing, so there we go.

Theme: Values, believes and priorities:

(P1.S 16). I am back to work and I can't waste my time on anything else **because I want** to spend my time with her.
(P1.S 17) So I don't miss those precious hours when she starts…
(P1.S 18) Yes, yes, it is like **I take it from her**. It is not like wasted, but **I need to spend it with my child.**
(P1.S 19) It is such a **precious time** for me on Sunday and Saturday.

(P1.S 32) Now, **my work is taking over**, so that is why it is not easy. At the moment **I have no choice** because financially it is very difficult.
(P1.S 32) It is not possible for her father to support us so I could stay at home. So **there is no choice**, that is just how it is.

(P1.S 34) **I am not sad** because I kind of understood that not all jobs could bring the money to support your child, so **I am accepting** it. (P1.S 35) That why I made the decision to go back to work earlier than I would like too. It is our mutual decision, I agreed to it, so….

(P1.S 41) Because before I was 25 probably I had the mind of an 18 year old girl. **33 was perfect time to stop and do something else.** You know, not just traveling, party, cocktails after work, you know what I am talking about.

(P1.S 46) So all these things make me to understand why **I am struggling**, why I have to go to work - to make her life better.

(P1.S 47) Yes, <u>she gives me a kind of settled down feeling</u>, like <u>you have done something,</u> not just work

(P1.S 48) She brought a different meaning to our lives, that for sure. Even though **life becomes much harder, but she makes is easier in some sense**, if you see what I mean. Not in a practical way

(P1.S 59) it is **just a mission** to find a babysitter. Would you trust her?

(P1.S 61) So there is a hassle to find a babysitter, we have to pay her money, and so the cinema trip **is not worth it anymore** and we just stay at home.

(P1.S 63) And also, in London there is this problem with schooling. This awful story about not being in the right catchment area to get into a good school.

(P1.S 64) Ah, so for me <u>it is so stressful. How do we manage it? How we will get her into a good school and later on into a good university?</u> So I think that like any mum, it worries me already. (P1.S 65) Even if she is not ready to go to a primary school yet, it is always on my mind and I worry about how we get her into a good school.

(P1.S 94) for me <u>it is not important </u>if I have had chance to hoover or not. For me it is more important that we draw one more picture together, or we go to see some friends

or we go to the park. **But he tries to maintain the same rules as it was before the child….** For me now on my weekend, to clean, to iron to entertain her and to still look nice and be ready for something else, **it is impossible**, I will be dead by then. That is why I invited a cleaner. <u>For me is more important to spend more time with my child than to do cleaning.</u>

(P1.S 99) When I was **childless**, <u>I thought that I will be different</u> and I will find time and energy for my friends and other stuff that I want to do. Now, hmmm, now I have got you, now I understand you.

(P1.S 111) The meaning of my life **is my daughter**, but **also it is my family**. Not just my extended family, not just my mum, my grandmothers, and my godmothers. They are happier. Before, it was all the same, now they can look at the progress of my child. Like what she will be doing next summer. **It is life awakened for everyone.** Everyone became more alive. It gave energy to everyone, more happiness in the air. Everyone loves her, gives her presents. They are all asking how she is. Sometimes I am a bit jealous. Like before when I went to Estonia my grandfather would give something to me, but now forget it, it's all about Mila. So I feel like 'what about me guys' (smiling)

(P1.S 115) I would say, if you had asked me the question, 'what about being a mother?' 3 years ago, when we started thinking about whether we should have a child or wait, I would say, no, it should wait. Now I think **every woman should go for it. It is something that gives you enjoyment, but is tough. Motherhood is not easy.** I thought it was much easier, honestly. I though 'why is she so tired?' Is it that difficult to put a child to bed and tell her to sleep? Read a book and she will sleep. I think I over estimated my skills. It is a good challenge to bring a child up. Judgmental ***towards mothers before***

Theme: Filling of Guilt; Anxiety; Vulnerability:

P1 S49. in the beginning, when she was too small, I was very panicky. <u>I was one of those worrying and panicking mums.</u>

(P1.S 50) Before she was 6 months. When she was very tiny, tiny baby.
 I was panicking; **it was my weakness** because **I didn't know what to do**. But this very first moment, I didn't know if she was breathing and I was panicking.

(P1.S 53) So I think **I destroyed this precious moment of enjoyment** because I was paranoid over whether she was ok or not

(P1.S 76) <u>At the beginning I was lost</u>. I wasn't sure what was going on at all. I was like, "Oh, a baby" (expressed surprise), and I wasn't feeling great because after delivery I developed some kind of infection. I had a high temperature and for a week or more I didn't feel good at all. So that probably spoiled the few first months as a mother.

(P1.S 93) The relationship with my husband is not great. **It's upsetting me**, but as I said at the moment **she is my priority. I feel very guilty** that she is not with me most of the time that is why any moment I have I will take her everywhere. Some people will say, oh, why don't you leave her, but I can't see how I can leave her and miss this little time.

Theme: Feeling of Responsibility:

P1. S10. <u>My life is very different now</u>. Well, first of all because now **you are responsible for someone**, you have to look after someone **who is very precious to you. You feel totally responsible for what you are doing so that yours decision do not affect your child badly.**

P1 S95. …it is not easy to be a full-time mum and work full-time. I am still a full-

time mum. I mean **I am still always in charge of her needs, even when I am at work.** Morning runs to the child minder are very stressful. To get to the child-minder in time means to dress her, feed her, to put her in a pram, because she wants to walk and she doesn't always want to do that. I have to be on time there to be on time at work.

Theme: Prioritising her child's need over hers:

P1. S12. For example, we could stay in bed until like 10am, why not? Now it's 6.30am and it doesn't matter that its Saturday; tired, sick, lazy,… no way, you have to get up and smile. That's a big change!

P1. S14. massage, gym, sauna. Now I have to forget about it.

(P1.S 54) And maybe now, because we still have sleepless nights. I still breast feed her and she still loves it. And I am kind of too soft to teach her not to breast- feed. **I know that I need to finish** this lovely breast-feeding with her, but it is a **very challenging task**, so I still breast feed her.
(P1.S 55) Even though I still enjoy feeding her, and I think it is a mutual enjoyment, but sleepless nights, no.

Theme: Developed her own way of being a mother:

P1. S51. But after some time, it disappeared and **I became a natural mother**. If she is crying, it is just because she is hungry or because she has a dirty nappy.
(P1.S 73) So sometimes, I become like, guys please **do not interfere**. Sometimes I become a quite defensive mum, like 'my child is doing well, so leave us alone'. I don't like it when anyone advises me how to be a mum, because I believe that every mother has a feeling if something is going wrong, with their child's health or development.

So I think that it is quite good to have grandmothers at a distance so they can't interfere too much. You know, away from this challenge.

(P1.S 77) But now I have developed a good understanding of what she wants from me and what I want from me as a mum.

(P1.S 78) I develop my won mothering-style quite early, maybe because of my age. I am not like a young mother. I am quite a good age mum, it gives you some confidence.

(P1.S 83) Yes, staying by my decisions. Everyone is trying to influence you by pointing out what you are not doing right, they are trying to change you. I can agree with some of them, but now that I know what I am doing, so far I am still progressing well.

Theme: Previous Experience:

(P1.S 79) In my first profession I was a teacher, so that helped me. Some of it rings a bell on what should be happening.

(P1.S 80) And most of my friends already had babies so I had seen those examples of what to do and what not.

(P1.S 81) Yes, I was observing, noting what was good for me and what was not a good approach. So that's how I developed my own approach.

Theme: Learning to balance her needs and child's needs:

P1. S7 I went back to work when she was 9 months old. My mum came and stayed with her, and sometimes I was taking time off, using all my holidays. Her daddy managed to stay with her for 2 weeks. It was a mixture of everything and everyone who could help, to be honest. It was a shared approach to child-minding.

Theme: Enjoys the most of being a mother:

(P1.S 43) Well, first of all every morning, she comes to me and says, "mama kiss", then it is doesn't matter if it was a bad night or a good night…. She is very cuddly. Maybe it is because she is a girl, or maybe she is just a child like that. She loves kissing and cuddling. Every morning she brings my shoes to me. So **all these small things make you appreciate why she is there**.

(P1.S 44) Also, seeing how she is developing, how she starts crawling, and chatting.

(P1.S 45) I can see how much joy she brings to my parents, her daddy and his parents. He loves her to bits, more than (he does) me, I am jealous, but it is fine

Spiritual Dimension

Theme: Meaning in life

(P1.S 38) Still, **there is nothing you could have that is better**.

(P1.S 40) And I think it happened just at the perfect time. I was starting to think that I had enough of traveling and fun and I was ready to commit.

(P1.S 47) Yes, she gives me a kind of settled down feeling, like you have done something, not just work

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(P1.S 87) With the father of my child, when Mila was born it was **a magical moment between us**. **It was WOW**, it was fantastic. It was just like love had just tripled, multiplied, you know.

Theme: Unconditional Love:

(P1.S 116) Yes! It is much harder, but I never thought that I would be so attached. That **<u>unconditional love exists</u>**. Now I can see how this unconditional love affects me. It is difficult because of dedicatio

8.7 *Appendix 7.   Debriefing Sheet*

After the interview participants will be thanked for sparing their time and for making a valuable contribution to the research. They will be given the opportunity to talk about the interview and the nature of the research they have participated in. The participant can decide not to take part in the debrief if they wish and can end the discussion at that point. However, in these cases the researcher will make it clear that the participant is free to make contact again and have a debrief at a later date if they change their minds.

For those that wish to take part in the debrief the researcher will begin by explaining that the main aim of this research is to explore and investigate first-time mothers experiences of transitioning to a new Being (or living) as mothers. Further, the participants will be briefly informed of the outlines of a theory of Four dimensions of existence and the intention of this research to explore/investigate how this theory can be used and be useful in the exploration of the transition to motherhood.

The participant will be given an opportunity to talk about what the interview had been like for them. They will be invited to describe how they had felt about talking about their experiences in this way. The researcher will be sensitive to any upset or potential upset and will try to sensitively discuss

this with the participant. Participants will be left with information regarding who they can contact if they decide they wish to talk about their experiences some more with a qualified person. The researcher will end the debrief by encouraging the participants to get back in touch if they have any further questions or queries.

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Debriefing Sheet

'Being-in-the-world' as a mother: Hermeneutic-phenomenological exploration of lived experiences of eight new-mothers' transition to motherhood. Within the theoretical frame of 'Four Dimensions of Existence'

Researcher: Victoria Garland (Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCPsych) at NSPC and Middlesex University)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project and for making a valuable contribution to our knowledge about women's experiences of the transition from life before motherhood to Being or living as a mother.

I hope you have understood the overall aim and purpose of this study and enjoyed your participation in it. Should you be left with any areas of doubt or confusion as to your participation or have any queries regarding the research, please feel free to contact me (tel: 07900332367 email: victoriagaponenco@icloud.com).

Should you wish to explore any issues that have arisen for you as a result of participation in this research please contact me or:

- Please contact your GP or ask Health Visitor for further advice

- You can find a therapist:

https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist/

https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/how-to-find-a-therapist/

https://emdrassociation.org.uk/find-a-therapist/mapping/

- Example of books to read:

"What Mothers do, especially when it looks like nothing" Naomi Stadlen

"How Mothers Love, and how relationships are born" Naomi Stadlen

"The Mask of Motherhood. How becoming a mother changes our lives and why we never talk about it" Susan Maushart

"A Life's Work of becoming a mother" Rachel Cusk

"Mother Shock, Loving every (other) minute of it" Andrea Buchanan

- Example of useful websites:

NCT;

GP toolkit on RCGP;

Netmums;

Postpartum Progress;

PND Hour (twitter);

BabiesBabiesBabies;