



DPsych thesis

Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches

Sansom, C.

Full bibliographic citation: Sansom, C. 2024. Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches. DPsych thesis Middlesex University / Metanoia Institute

Year: 2024

Publisher: Middlesex University Research Repository

Available online: <https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/12v9w6>

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be

sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address: repository@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <https://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/repository>

Final Project

Catherine F Sansom

Metanoia Institute & Middlesex University

Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.

4th April 2024

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the DPpsych (Professional Studies) programme, Post-Qualifying Doctorates Dept. Metanoia Institute, Middlesex University

Research Supervisor:

Dr Maxine Daniels

Academic Consultant:

Dr Shani Orgad

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of people who have made this research possible. I am very grateful to my six participant mothers, who took several hours away from their limited free time to assist in the research, and I appreciated their motivational words in the completion of this study.

I am indebted to my Academic Supervisor, Dr Maxine Daniels for her superb support throughout the doctoral course, and her wise advice for my work. To my Academic Consultant, Dr Shani Orgad, I add my immense thanks for her help in reviewing my research and in providing such clarity and motivation relative to my final write-up. Dr Alistair MacBeath provided me with advice and support in selecting a surveying tool for one of my resultant research products, for which I thank him, and I am also very grateful to Dr Kim Etherington for the consultations that she provided on the choice of Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology for the study, being a world-leading expert in the approach. Thank you to Cristina Harnagea and Michael McGinley for their wonderful help, clarity and support for this programme of study.

On a personal note, I want to thank my husband, Dr Nigel Sansom, for all his continued support and patience in helping me achieve a long-held ambition to study my passion at the doctoral level. To my father, Kenneth Shipstone, for his motivational, life-long belief in my ability to set a goal and to achieve it. To my children, James, Tom and Jon, I am proud of you, and thank you for always believing in mothers pursuing their career aspirations.

Abstract

Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.

This research is set within the wider context of mothers who also work and focuses on six mothers who have returned to work using Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days. KIT Days were introduced by the United Kingdom Government in 2006 as a way for women to return to work following their maternity and they are optional for both the company and the mother (United Kingdom Government, 2006c). Both parties must agree to them in advance of their use.

Pilot doctoral research conducted by Hampson (2021) indicated that the KIT Days were not delivering the intended benefits to the returnees. Informed by this study, the current research employs a Narrative Inquiry methodology, through interviews and follow-up interviews with six participants. The interviewees include three first-time mothers and three mothers with more than one child. All were in heterosexual relationships at the time of the KIT Days. One participant is Black British, another Mediterranean and there are four White British mothers.

In comparing the women's stories, the results differentiated the use of the KIT Days, compared the experiences of the women and considered the similarities. KIT Day usage ranged from an employer assuming it to be an early return to their job, one employer allocating a difficult project and even an employer declaring that a mother's role had changed so significantly, that it precipitated a job search on that mother's first KIT Day. Four predominant themes arose from the research, relating to 'Emotions', 'Support', 'Change' and 'Self-identity'.

A resulting product of this research is a survey of mothers' experiences of KIT Days that will be used, and continue to be refined, in commercial and private practice environments. The survey has already been tested (with 117 responses), having leveraged the Narrative Inquiry research insights in its creation. In the future, tailored versions of the survey can be produced at a company level and become a publicly available product, for mothers, companies and therapists, to aid the psychological readiness of mothers to re-enter the workplace.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and context.....	1
1.1 Introduction to this research study.....	1
1.2 Defining the context of the research.....	3
1.3 Defining the motivation and justification for the research.....	4
1.4 Introducing the research question.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature review and research question validity.....	7
2.1 Systematic literature review approach.....	7
2.2 “Do I return?”.....	10
2.3 Full-time and part-time work.....	12
2.4 Expectations.....	14
2.5 Support for women returning from maternity leave.....	17
2.6 Self-identity.....	19
2.7 Agency, commitment and job security.....	22
2.8 Employers’ encouragement.....	23
2.9 Breastfeeding.....	25
2.10 Postnatal depression.....	26
2.11 Impact of social status, race or income.....	27
2.12 Research question validity.....	29
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	31
3.1 Research question.....	31
3.2 Selection of methodology.....	31
3.3 Other methodologies considered.....	33
3.4 Participant recruitment.....	34
3.5 Briefing input.....	36
3.6 Research method steps.....	37
3.7 Transcripts.....	40
3.8 Analysis.....	40
3.9 Retelling aloud.....	41
3.10 Layering.....	42
3.11 Thinking across the stories.....	42
3.12 Developing the survey product.....	43
3.13 Ethical considerations and safeguarding.....	43
3.14 Ethical considerations and mitigants.....	44

3.15 Ability to withdraw	46
3.16 Reflexivity in the research	46
Chapter 4: Introducing the research participants.....	48
4.1 Introductions	48
4.2 Ann	48
4.3 Daisy.....	48
4.4 Dr Mama.....	49
4.5 Mary.....	49
4.6 Christine.....	49
4.7 Lou.....	50
Chapter 5: Results: Participants' retold stories.....	51
5.1 The retold story of Ann	51
5.2 The retold story of Daisy	65
5.3 The retold story of Dr Mama.....	79
5.4 The retold story of Mary.....	92
5.5 The retold story of Christine	105
5.6 The retold story of Lou.....	118
Chapter 6: Analysis.....	127
6.1 Narrative Inquiry method	127
6.2 Self-identity: career and motherhood	130
6.3 Support: employee-manager relationship.....	133
6.4 Similarities of self-identity and emotions	136
6.5 Similarities of change: the need for structure, guidance and certainty	139
6.6 Similarities of support needs and emotions: anxiety and stress	144
6.7 Differences in motivation for undertaking KIT Days	148
6.8 Differences in the content of the KIT Days.....	150
6.9 Differences in childcare coverage	151
6.10 Recommendations for improving KIT Day implementation	151
6.11 Reflections on the analysis of the narratives.....	153
Chapter 7: Discussion of the survey	155
7.1 Translating unique stories into a resultant survey	155
7.2 Emotions.....	156
7.3 Support	157
7.4 Change.....	158
7.5 Self-identity	158

7.6 Survey purpose and usage.....	159
7.7 Relevant psychoeducational practices.....	160
Chapter 8: Limitations of the research.....	162
8.1 Representation.....	162
8.2 Heterosexual bias	162
8.3 Job type diversity bias.....	162
8.4 COVID-19 context	162
Chapter 9: Future implications of this research.....	163
9.1 Potential future products of the research.....	163
9.2 Product survey.....	163
9.3 Survey creation.....	164
9.4 Distribution.....	164
9.5 Survey results	165
9.6 Survey themes	166
9.7 Discussion of the results: First versus a subsequent child.....	167
9.8 Restrictions of the survey	169
9.9 Future iterations of the survey.....	169
9.10 Training modules.....	169
9.11 Research communication.....	174
9.12 Potential future research and products	175
Chapter 10: Overall conclusion.....	177
10.1 Conclusion on the approach.....	177
10.2 Conclusion on the survey product.....	177
10.3 Conclusion on the value of the research and its products	178
References.....	181
Appendix 1: Example of Narrative Inquiry ‘broadening’	196
Appendix 2: Example of Narrative Inquiry ‘burrowing’.....	197
Appendix 3: Example of ‘re-storying and reflexivity’	199
Appendix 4: Similarities and differences	200
Appendix 5: Research Ethics Application Form.....	180
Appendix 6: Advertisement for participants	206
Appendix 7: Information pack.....	207
Appendix 8: Products’ matrix	209
Appendix 9: Ethical approval.....	210
Appendix 10: Research process flow.....	213

Appendix 11: Resultant survey.....216

Tables

Table 1: Database Boolean searches8
Table 2: Population, interventions, comparisons and outcomes (PICO)9
Table 3: Inclusion criteria for participants35
Table 4: Research method steps38
Table 5: Research questions39
Table 6: Contextual questions.....39
Table 7: Resultant participant demographics40
Table 8: Summary table of ethical considerations and mitigants45
Table 9: First- and second+ time mothers reporting support importance.....166
Table 10: Kit Day experiences167
Table 11: Full- and part-time mothers reporting support importance.....168

Chapter 1: Introduction and context

1.1 Introduction to this research study

This research study is structured in a set of chapters, described below. The topic is set within the context of Keeping in Touch Days, specifically in the United Kingdom (UK), known more commonly by the abbreviation of 'KIT Days'. KIT Days are a concept introduced in 2006 by the United Kingdom Government, with the purpose, and anticipated value, of reconnecting mothers with their workplaces during their maternity leave (United Kingdom Government, 2006c). KIT Days were designed, following consultation, to be a ten-day maximum number of days allowable during maternity leave without affecting statutory benefits and “enabling improved contact between mothers and their employers during the maternity leave period” (United Kingdom Government, 2006b, p.4). This number was set as the mid-point of the five to fifteen days suggested by the governmental consultation, and it was stipulated that the KIT Days had to be mutually agreed between the company and the mother (United Kingdom Government, 2006b). These governmental guidelines saw the ten-day approach as offering:

sufficient flexibility for employers and employees to benefit from these kinds of activities, without allowing excessive amounts of work to be carried out during the maternity leave period. It also has the advantage of being a readily memorable round figure and is the equivalent of two working weeks for many employees. (p.11)

The content of the KIT Days was designed to be flexible, allowing a company and mother to use them as they mutually agree. However, some possible uses were briefly mentioned in the consultation conclusion, stating that ten days would be “sufficient to allow employees to undertake activities such as attend important conferences or undertake training” (United Kingdom Government, 2006b). Although not explicit, the United Kingdom Government’s policy appears to assume that flexibility is advantageous. This research, via its results, will challenge whether that policy assumption is favourable to the mothers involved. In one part of the UK, the Law Society of Scotland (2024) covered ‘Keep in Touch Days’ (as it refers to them) and refers to anecdotal reports that suggest that KIT

Days lead to an easier return to work and the Society also note that there is no prescription regarding their format.

In Chapter 1, the context of the research is explained, including the personal motivation of the researcher to explore this subject matter. The results of a previous, small-scale piece of research by the same researcher acted as an input to this specific maternity leave research into Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days (Hampson, 2021). KIT Days are further defined and explained in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 details the literature review on KIT Days and covers the broader subject of maternity leave, as that transitional period is the context in which KIT Days occur. The chapter concludes with an affirmative summary of the research question's validity, including its potential to produce novel and valuable contributions to the psychotherapeutic community.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology, from the research question's ontological and epistemological bases to the explanation of the choice of Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology. The chapter covers the specific selection and execution of the research method within the flexible Narrative Inquiry methodology. The recruitment of the participants is covered, and details of the method employed are described. Communication and interactions with the participants are detailed in this chapter, including the ethical considerations and safeguards in place for the research to proceed.

Chapter 4 introduces the six participants involved in the research, followed by Chapter 5, in which their unique and whole stories are told. The stories were co-constructed with the researcher, in line with an ontology that we "live storied lives and our world is a storied world" (Etherington, 2004, p.75) and that thinking represents "instances of storytelling" (Howard, 1991, p.192). The mothers' stories aligned with the interpretivist and constructivist epistemologies of this Narrative Inquiry methodology and method. All participants had the chance to consider, comment and read aloud their stories before they were agreed as being complete, resulting in a co-construction, unique to each mother and her context.

Chapter 6 details the Narrative Inquiry method followed, including the three-dimensional use of "place (situation)", a temporal aspect of "past, present and future" and the relational aspect of "personal and social" (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000, p.50). An analysis of the narratives of the six stories follows, in which the six stories are used to elicit themes, as in Polkinghorne's (2007) paradigmatic mode of analysis, or 'thinking across the stories', as described by Etherington (2020). In this research step, importantly, each mother's story remains whole in meaning, and the stories are compared in detail in the interest of highlighting any similarities and differences.

Chapter 7, in preparation for the innovation of subsequent psychotherapeutic products based upon this research, discusses the results of the analysis and explains the leverage of those results into key products. One such product is a tailored survey that has already been trialled with mothers, and that has contributed to the training modules for therapists, companies, and mothers and their partners, that comprise the suite of other research products.

Chapter 8 considers the limitations of the research, in terms of diversity representation, its heteronormative bias due to the participants involved, and the impact of COVID-19 on the maternity leave and the KIT Days for half of the participants.

The validity of the research, in adding to the subject body of knowledge and development of psychotherapeutic products, is evaluated in Chapter 9, including suggestions for future use of the survey and resultant training modules. Limitations of the survey are also examined in this chapter.

The overall conclusions of the research are drawn in Chapter 10. In summary, the research met its goals and used the intended Narrative Inquiry methodology faithfully, resulting in six unique stories that informed the development of a suite of psychotherapeutic training modules and a survey for future use with mothers.

1.2 Defining the context of the research

This research was inspired by the researcher's own maternity experiences, feedback from other mothers, and the results of her small-scale research on first-time mothers' experiences of returning to work (Hampson, 2021). Three in four UK mothers with dependent children were in employment between April and June 2021 (Office of National Statistics, 2021). Disproportionately, compared to working fathers, mothers compromised more regarding their employment, as

indicated by agreeing to special working arrangements (33.2% for mothers versus 23.6% for fathers) (Office of National Statistics, 2021). The same UK statistical study indicated that mothers with dependent children, who were employed, spent more time providing unpaid childcare and household work than employed men living with dependent children (253 minutes on average a day for the working mothers, over 50% higher than employed fathers at a daily average of 161 minutes) (Office of National Statistics, 2021). Research conclusions indicate a potential bias against working women; “one-third of women fell off the management ladder before reaching executive status” (Barr, 2010, p.6) and “mothers were expected to be less competent and were less likely to be kept in the running for advancement opportunities” (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008, p.198).

Mothers are disproportionately impacted by the arrival of a child, relative to working fathers (Bornstein, Williams, & Painter, 2012; Hill, 2005). This inequity motivated this current research study into the experiences of maternity leave returnees, the researcher having experienced maternity leave three times in her career, with a resultant negative impact on her career trajectory.

1.3 Defining the motivation and justification for the research

The first submission of the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies at the Metanoia Institute is the Review of Personal and Professional Learning (RPPL). In that review (Hampson, 2020), the researcher considered and conveyed their difficult returns to work after three maternity leaves. It was through a personal determination that she retained her job and position each time but at the expense of plateauing in her career. Any hope of career progression was shelved.

In response to that personal blow of a disrupted career, this research study regarding KIT Days was focused on helping mothers in a similar, future situation. In a smaller-scale research study (Hampson, 2021), two first-time mothers told their stories, and the research explored the mothers' feelings (Bruner, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Kvale, 1996). That prior study showed that there was a particular part of the maternity return process that did not appear to deliver against its potential. That part was the use of Keeping in Touch (KIT) days. KIT Days, introduced in 2006 in the United Kingdom, are optional for both

the company and the mother, but if both agree and a rate of pay is mutually suitable, up to ten days can be taken before the mother's return from maternity leave without affecting any of her other entitlements (United Kingdom Government, 2006c).

Mothers' statements from that small-scale research included references to the KIT Days such as: "I don't think being left to my own devices helped me. I didn't get anything out of the Days" and "Things have happened while you have been off, so, you just have to hit the ground running and either sink or swim" (Hampson, 2021, p.31).

'Sinking or swimming' did not seem adequate in delivering desirable, high-quality KIT Days, given the time taken by the mother away from their newborn child to attend the workplace. As a result, it was determined that there would be a specific focus on KIT Days in this subsequent research. Given that KIT Days are usually the first reintroduction of the mother into the workforce, they arise at a key stage in a mother's maternity leave timeframe.

The outputs of this research were designed to leverage the mothers' stories of KIT Days and the context in which they sit, to create a set of new practical psychotherapeutic products, designed for returning mothers. In all cases, the ultimate beneficiary is a returning mother, and the resultant products are designed to leverage several channels to maximise the opportunity to reach new mothers (Chapter 9 and Appendix 8).

The opportunity to have ten paid KIT Days, during a mother's preparation for a return to work, would seem to be a useful tool for employers and mothers. The earlier, small-scale research used Narrative Inquiry, and although limited to two mothers only, stimulated an interest to research the subject matter further. One conclusion of the research was that the KIT Days were neutral at best for one mother and detrimental to the other mother (Hampson, 2021), suggesting that there was value in researching KIT Day experiences further.

1.4 Introducing the research question

Before researching the existing literature, the title for the subsequent research was proposed as:

Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.

Chapter 2: Literature review and research question validity

2.1 Systematic literature review approach

Before the research was proposed, a systematic literature review was undertaken to gauge the need for this new research in terms of a gap in the body of knowledge on this topic. For a systematic review to be deemed 'systematic', it must follow a set protocol, to be "replicable, transparent, and (as much as possible) free from bias" (MacKenzie et al., 2012, p.196). The Literature Review was conducted as a Systematic Literature Review (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). Commonly for systematic reviews, the literature review followed a "PICO" format to define the Population, Intervention(s), Comparison(s), and Outcomes of interest to the review (Higgins & Green, 2013). The literature review demonstrates the seven key principles of transparency, clarity, integration, focus, equality, accessibility and coverage behind systematic literature reviews (Pittway, 2008). The details of the population search are shown in Table 1 and described further below. Further details of the 'PICO' elements are given in Table 2. The topic for the search was 'Keeping in Touch Days' specifically in the United Kingdom (UK), as the concept is a United Kingdom Government initiative (United Kingdom Government, 2006b). The systematic searches are shown in Table 1.

Search Criteria	Results
'Maternity leave' was used as a word search term with all languages, all databases shown in Table 1a, all countries, all fields, and all types of publication since the year 2000.	>160,000
'Maternity leave' AND "Keeping in Touch Days" were used as word search terms with all languages, all databases shown in Table 1a, all countries, all fields, and all types of publication since the year 2000.	301
'Keeping in Touch Days' was used alone as a word search term with all languages, all databases shown in Table 1a, all countries, all fields, and all types of publication since the year 2000. The vast majority of results link to the law around the provision of such days by employers.	379
'Keeping in Touch Days' AND 'UK' were used as word search terms with all languages, all databases shown in Table 1a, all countries, all fields, and all types of publication since the year 2000.	189
English (as the language).	188
The 188 broke down as: Articles - 95 (of which 18 were scholarly or peer-reviewed) News Articles – 78 Book Chapters – 8 Books – 1 Newsletter Articles – 3 Book Reviews – 1 Reports – 1 Web-resources – 1	
Of the material, there were articles relating only to the law and using Boolean searches of 'Keeping in Touch Days' NOT 'Law' NOT 'Legal'.	26
'Snowball' approach of reviewing references of relevant articles for more relevant literature, leading to discovering articles where the phrase 'Keeping in Touch Days" was incorrectly quoted as 'Keep in Touch Days"'. 	+15

Table 1: Database Boolean searches

	Search Criteria	Notes
Population	The databases in scope included EBSCO to access articles from databases including the Royal Society of Medicine, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Education Research Complete and Search Complete. Keywords were combined with Boolean phrases to refine the search returns ('AND', 'OR' and 'NOT').	The search included all Boolean-searched articles and policies related to 'Keeping in Touch Days' in the UK. Caution was applied in the literature review as maternity policies have changed significantly since the UK Employment Act of 1999, rendering older research potentially less applicable (United Kingdom Government, 1999a).
Interventions	In terms of 'Interventions', I was interested in how companies had dealt with the intervention that is the 'maternity return experience'.	The key 'Intervention' was the use of 'Keeping in Touch' days which are an agreed way between a company and a mother to use up to ten days, paid, of her maternity leave.
Comparisons	Regarding 'Comparisons', the alternatives that could be considered were what was provided to other long-term absence returners, such as people returning from long-term sick or paternity leave.	Long-term sickness return provision was outside of this research scope but could provide useful parallels for future research when investigating better maternity leave return interventions. Returning to work after long-term sickness was much better researched (Brouwer, Reneman, Bultmann, Van der Klink, & Groothoff, 2010).
Outcomes	The 'Outcome' sought was a seamless re-entry into the workforce for maternity leave returnees; one in which they could achieve their potential and regain their career trajectories.	This qualitative research is aimed at determining a better intervention and outcome for mothers via a programme that would complement existing therapeutic strategies.

Table 2: Population, interventions, comparisons and outcomes (PICO)

Maternity policies have changed significantly since the UK Employment Act of 1999, rendering older research potentially less applicable (Hampson, 2021; United Kingdom Government, 1999b). Such changes included provisions for a minimum statutory leave period of no less than eighteen weeks, allowing a mother to choose the start of her maternity leave, to be entitled to benefit of the terms and conditions of employment during her absence, allowed her to return to the same rights and role if returning within a statutory maternity leave period, and introduced the right to parental leave (United Kingdom Government, 1999a). An interesting result of the literature search, using the databases in Table 1, was that 'maternity leave' had over 160,000 returns. However, the specific term 'Keeping in Touch Days', the correct terminology for this United Kingdom Government initiative, returned results only in the low hundreds of returns, with the majority relating to legal matters only.

The results of the literature review led to the researcher's conclusion that KIT Days are not well-researched, especially about their therapeutic content or value. However, the review provided useful material in terms of working mothers, their maternity leave periods and subsequent returns to work, all aspects of the KIT Day experience context and environment for a working mother.

2.2 “Do I return?”

A mother's return to work decision can be a pivotal point in her life, engendering guilt and associated emotions such as anxiety in making that decision (Alstveit, Severinsson, & Karlsen, 2011; Davey, Murrells, & Robinson, 2005). The taking-up of KIT Days presumes that the mother has already decided to return to work, as they are typically taken towards the end of her maternity leave. However, her experience with them could have an impact on her eventual decision as to whether to remain a working mother.

There are costs to the organisation of mishandling this pivotal phase. A mother's expectations of herself and her perceptions of what others are expecting of her, can result in worry and guilt (Dillaway & Pare, 2008; Johnston & Swanson, 2006; Johnston, Swanson, & Luidens, 2008; Khalil & Davies, 2000;). Chen and Lappano (2023) noted that there are complex challenges for women returning to work, including self-concept alterations, some re-prioritisation, changes to a

woman's self-confidence and her career-related beliefs. The motherhood transition is a major change for a woman and has been documented as having a major impact on her life (Blum, 2007). Cowan and Cowan (1995) particularly noted that the impact is greatest when the mother is having her first child.

The return-to-work decision is multi-factorial, including social factors, the ability to engage with other adults, and the supportive nature of such a community. Such factors have been researched and determined to be important not only in the return-to-work decision but also as retention tools (Gould & Fontenla, 2006; Khalil & Davies, 2000). Factors noted in their literature were flexible working, corporate culture, career development paths and work/life balance.

KIT Days take place during the maternity leave period, when these mothers might require extra support, but are not in the work environment where they might receive some input. Killien (2005) researched returning mothers who had received support and encouragement and reported that around two-thirds of mothers with affirmative support reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their decision to return, in the following year after that return point.

The arrival of a new baby can require family members to reprioritise their responses to demands on their time. Bell et al. (2007, p.179) interviewed eighteen couples at one, six and sixteen weeks postpartum, and concluded that early family relationships are "messy processes" from which new ways of working as a family are forged, within the first four months after a baby's birth. In terms of a reprioritisation of demands upon a mother, A. Jackson and Scharman (2002) posited that women showed a preference to have their working lives adapt to fit in with their home lives, even if that meant returning at a lower level.

Vejar, Madison-Colmore, and Ter Maat (2006), interviewing four women who had decided not to return to work, considered the shift of goals if a mother decides not to return to work after motherhood. Vejar et al. (2006) suggested that women make both professional and personal sacrifices, each of which might be felt differently according to the introversion or extroversion personality traits of the women. An example was that the more extroverted women missed the personal interactions with their colleagues, and the more introverted women missed the ability to be alone, at work, rather than to be constantly with their children. Both

personality types of women therefore were missing work, but for different reasons.

Connected to the decision to return to work will be the mother's question of "when?". Wiese and Ritter (2012) researched the impact of maternity leave duration on regrets for mothers returning to work. The research concluded that the experience of stress, for the mothers who returned to work quickly, increased their level of regret at being back at work. The researchers noted that the early returners reacted more sensitively to stressors than women taking longer maternity leaves. The longer leave seemed to result in a higher resilience for those mothers.

Childcare provision can also affect a mother's decision-making about her return to work. A UK survey (Coleman, Dali-Chaouch, & Harding, 2020) concluded that only 56% of UK local councils had sufficient places for children, hence mothers could be pressured, from the very start of their return to work, to compromise on childcare. Leach et al. (2006) studied mothers returning to work in the first six months of their baby's life, relative to their approach to childcare, and determined that despite a mother's research and her pronounced intention to include the father in the childcare decision-making, the type of childcare ultimately used was more related to opportunities that arose, such as vacancies, schedules and referrals, rather than any pre-agreed parental strategy. In other words, supply issues and practicalities overtook any ideals being held for some mothers.

2.3 Full-time and part-time work

Houston and Marks (2003, p.1) researched women returning to work, relative to their preferences, and found that "almost a third of those who returned to work part-time perceived their new post to have lower status than their previous job". An older study, in which Macran, Joshi, and Dex, (1996) researched returning to work, found that older, better-educated mothers in higher-status occupations were better placed to take up any provisions made by employers, such as part-time work. Panteli and Pen (2010) suggested in their research that women need to shape their lives around their home life predominantly and that might necessitate changing the previous trajectory of their career to include part-time work.

In their research with part-time returning mothers, Tomlinson, Olsen, and Purdam (2009) noted that, although the UK has one of the highest rates of part-time working returners from maternity leave, they do not get enough choice in roles. The researchers refer to the poor design of part-time roles, meaning that women can be forced to take a lower-level role than their qualifications would suggest. Tomlinson et al. (2009) also noted that public sector roles could be redesigned to allow for a greater match between the women's qualifications and the roles offered. That need for a match between supply and demand for such roles was supported by a later literature review by Buehler, O'Brien and Walls (2011) that concluded that the demand for part-time work was felt and articulated by mothers. However, it was the uneconomic and psychologically unrewarding nature of the jobs that was unappealing to them.

Connolly and Gregory (2008, p.53), researching British mothers, used the phrase "occupational downgrading" to represent the one-quarter of women moving from full-time work to part-time work, transitioning to a role with lower pay and noted that it particularly affected professional women and women at a managerial grade. Also researching part-time work, via an extensive survey answered by three and a half thousand British women, Warren (2004) found that, regardless of the reported demand for part-time roles, there was no difference in general life satisfaction between part-time and full-time woman workers.

However, Barnett and Gareis (2000, p.171), in a different geography, researching United States mothers, found that part-time working mothers had less satisfaction than their full-time counterparts and suggested that "the failure to find the expected relationships between work hours and quality-of-life indicators may be due to several methodological and conceptual problems". The researchers cited factors such as the definition of what constitutes a part-time role. Other factors included whether the role was considered by the mother to be a good one, in addition to whether she selected it and its related working hours.

In an international research study covering Britain in comparison with West Germany and the United States, marital stability was researched. Cooke and Gash (2010) concluded that marriages in West Germany were the most stable when the mother worked part-time, and the researchers attributed that statistic to the high quality of part-time roles for mothers in that country. For British

women, the divorce risk remained the same regardless of the choice of part-time or full-time work and the incidence of higher divorce was linked instead with the unemployed status of the husband. Cooke and Gash (2010, p.1091) recommended, as a conclusion of their research, the “importance of considering the socio-economic context in structuring the optimal employment participation of both partners”.

In terms of social norms relating to part-time and full-time working mothers, a more recent research study by Madörin and Jacinto (2023, p.218) interviewed eight Swiss working mothers and reported that the interviewed mothers felt the need to “allow different standards and different family models to co-exist and to be recognised as being of equal value”. The mothers shared that they felt judged by others as working mothers and believed that their families should be free to take on both paid and unpaid work between the mother and father (and for the unpaid work to be valued). They felt that they should be able to earn enough to be free from economic coercion, to have time for household chores, to have family time and to handle the childcare themselves should they wish.

2.4 Expectations

Mothers, especially first-time mothers, are entering a new phase of their lives with expectations set by what they believe they know, garnered from people around them, watching how others are treated and, increasingly, by what they read on social media. Idealized portrayals have been shown to lead to “increased levels of envy and anxiety” and their research showed that it did not matter if the source was a well-known celebrity or another ‘normal mum’, illustrating that “anyone on social media who posts such idealized portrayals can have harmful effects”, (Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2022, p.8).

In addition to these more recent social norm developments via social media, the concept of ‘intense mothering’ was coined previously (Hays, 1996), to describe the cultural and social expectations and pressures relating to what a mother needs to do and achieve to be considered a ‘good mother’. The bar was set high and included much juggling of tasks. In doing so, the mother becomes overwhelmed and therefore is left feeling that she has a shortfall relative to the standard that she believes that she must reach. An unending cycle of aim and

failure. Contrasting the age range of mothers studied by Hays (twenty-one to forty-two years old), a study by Gunderson and Barrett (2017, pp.1004-1005) interviewed women averaging fifty-four years of age, and concluded similarly, that “intensive mothering diminishes women’s emotional well-being” and that “the emotional costs of intensive mothering span the course of motherhood”, with symptoms such as higher levels of depression. Perhaps contrary to expectations, Gunderson and Barrett (2017) found that reducing the amount of remunerated work outside the home, with the aim to provide more care for children at home, did not result in better well-being of the mother. Given that much attention is often given by companies to reducing a mother’s paid hours, the lack of a guaranteed upside is worthy of note.

Recent research by Schmidt, Décieux, Zartler, and Schnor (2023), considered the social norms of motherhood in WEIRD countries (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic countries) considering two decades of research that scoped in 115 Social Science Citation Index-referenced papers, and concluded that guilt was a predominant emotional response of mothers in the review. The researchers noted that mothers tend, as a societal norm, to be the main parents responsible for the well-being of their children, including their health. In the execution of that responsibility, the mothers appeared to use guilt as a regulating force in their lives to ensure their children’s development (Schmidt et al., 2023).

Schmidt et al. (2023) also identified five types of mothers in their research and corresponding normative expectations:

The present mother who is expected to secure the best care for her child; the future-oriented mother who is expected to ensure her child's success; the working mother who is expected to integrate her employment into her mothering; the public mother who is expected to control her mothering in relation to various others based on her informed status; and the happy mother who is expected to be contented with her role. (p.68)

The researchers identified the five types of mothers as having “strongly intertwined norms” and noting the need for compliance with them for mothers in various social positions (Schmidt et al., 2023, p.62).

Collins' (2021) research suggested three ways in which the maternal guilt level could be reduced, suggesting sharing parental responsibility more equitably between the mother and father, including financially, and requiring that fathers deliver more unpaid work, thus providing mothers with more time outside of work for her own needs. Collins (2021) also called on policymakers to be the vector for that directional work.

Morgenroth, Ryan, and Sønderlund (2021), building from the 'Think Manager, Think Male' paradigm of Schein, Mueller, Lituchy and Liu (1996), concluded that, in addition to a wage gap or wage penalty, research has shown that there is also a gender penalty for women in being less likely than men to be identified as having leadership qualities. Across their two studies they looked at the stereotyping of men, women, mothers and fathers and determined that, regardless of parental status, men are identified more as having leadership qualities than women. Interestingly, the advent of parenthood for both mothers and fathers increased the perceived fit with leadership, versus childless colleagues. In terms of expectations of a mother, to resume her career and be perceived again as a leader in her field, the Morgenroth et al. (2021) research suggests that there is an unconscious bias present that could affect her.

Earlier writing on an expectation of maternal feelings questioned the unconditional feelings of a mother towards her newborn child. Thompson (2017) suggested that the maternal instinct is a myth, and contingent on many factors in a mother's life, including her work. In terms of the origin of such social norms as unconditional feelings, Arendell (2000) noted that mothering, as a primary identity for women, emerged in the nineteenth century, making womanhood and motherhood synonymous, whereas previously they were not. Douglas and Michaels (2004) also consider the emergence of the era of 'new momism' including the need for constant vigilance of the child but also being 'fun-loving'; a definitive manner emerging in the culture as to how to be a mother.

Henderson, Harmon and Newman (2016) researched mothers who do not subscribe to the idea of being a perfect mother and concluded that such mothers still succumb to societal pressure, regardless of their lack of subscription. The research noted that mothers who feel guilty about not meeting societal expectations, even though they do not believe them to be valid, still experience

high levels of anxiety. Whether or not a mother might share her concerns with anyone, to address the anxiety, is uncertain. Maushart (1999) posited that any time that the mother faces difficulties then she will perceive it as a failure, because of cultural pressures to be successful both at work and at home, and hence her feelings of 'failure' could be counterproductive. Collins (2021) determined that there is a conundrum for mothers in that they can never achieve being good enough because there is always the assumption that they can try harder still.

More recent research, such as that of O'Reilly (2010), would suggest of the 'new momism' conversation, that attachment parenting is paramount, and adherence to putting the child at the centre of a new mother's world, as the main caregiver, is central to the new approach. O'Reilly (2010) spoke with mothers about who does the 'maternal thinking' in the household. By the phrase 'maternal thinking' she meant all the planning and organising aspects of the household and the child's life. A similar concept was suggested as early as 1959, as 'cognitive labour' (Goffman, 1959, p.2), and represented the 'backstage work' that ensures that the 'frontstage work' goes smoothly.

On the same theme, Daminger (2019), researched thirty-five US couples and concluded that much mental preparation is done invisibly, and used an example of maintaining a supply of toiletries and children's clothes, concluding that such planning tends to be done by the mother in the household. Such a mental process can create conflict because the other partner is unaware of the planning that is underway and simply observes stress in their partner.

2.5 Support for women returning from maternity leave

Support for women returning from maternity leave arises from several sources: internal work-related sources such as managers, colleagues, Human Resources departments and a woman's family, friends and partner being external-to-work ones. Although this research was open to all types of couples in principle, in practice due to the participants involved, it has specifically focused on heterosexual couples and hence has a heteronormative bias.

In terms of the impact on a mother's return to work, an assumption might be that her partner's support is important to her. However, if her partner is having trouble with the transition to fatherhood, it might be that she needs to find support from elsewhere. In terms of products from this research, the partner's needs are a feature of the indirect help that will be provided, therapeutically, with an impact on the returning mother.

In terms of a woman's partner being a source of support, therefore, the father figure occupies a potential role of supporter. A partner's ability and readiness to be a support to the mother was considered in the research of Hodgson, Painter, Kilby and Hirst (2023). These researchers interviewed twelve fathers about their own experience of their return to work after having taken time off for the arrival of a new baby. Descriptions of resultant emotions covered being excluded from discussions and decision-making, leading to a "sense of unworthiness" (Hodgson et al., 2023, p.7) and the husbands, in their wish to support the mothers, described their role more as "husbanding" than "fathering" (Hodgson et al., 2023, p.6).

In another preparedness study, Deave and Johnson (2008) researched the transition to fatherhood and noted the desire of fathers to be prepared in advance of the birth. The researchers suggested solutions such as fathers being invited into the conversation with midwives at the same time as the mother and highlighted the fact that inclusion needs to be tailored around the father's work pattern too. Pålsson, Persson, Ekelin, Kristensson Hallström, and Kvist (2017), also concluded in their research that guidance in the preparation phase was desirable for fathers, along with honesty and clarity about life with a new baby.

With similar conclusions, other research concluded that male partners had issues with which to contend, and therefore might not be able to support a mother to a sufficient degree. Dallos and Nokes (2011) noted that fathers can tend to experience loss and struggle with the readjustment needed after the birth of a baby, attempting to discover their role. Fletcher, Matthey, and Marley (2006), in researching the available mental health services for new fathers concluded that there should be similar services for new fathers as for new mothers.

Articles within the reviewed literature had a bias towards coaching maternity leave returners, rather than a more therapeutic nature. A need to support women in their return to work was first noted with the advent of maternity coaching as a transitional aid (Sparrow, 2009). Reviewed research included Filsinger (2012), situated in a UK law firm, in which she concluded that coaching did help the re-entry in three ways; emotionally, practically and by focusing on long-term career development. Similar research concluded that the use of coaching “can support women effectively in the short and long term” (Bussell, 2008, p.14). Corporate programmes, that are a focus of Human Resources’ departments and/or the manager of the mother, could offer a solution to a potential variability of managerial support. Hideg, Krstic, Trau and Zarina (2018), noted that agency perceptions and perceptions of others about a mother’s job commitment can be boosted using a relevant corporate programme. In terms of support, therefore, research suggests its value but also that it can be obtained from several sources available to a mother.

2.6 Self-identity

In their research of new mothers, Barclay, Everitt, Rogan, Schmied and Wyllie (1997) concluded that this transformation prompts a reconstruction of a mother’s self-identity. Alstveit et al.’s (2011) longitudinal research found that returning to work after maternity leave is a transitional phase, and they concluded that it can be critical for a woman’s self-identity and well-being. Motherhood appeared to have changed the women, according to their research. The mothers did not return to their former state as employees but, instead, searched for a different way of working. Alstveit et al. (2011) concluded that their research participants had needed to choose between being responsible employees and being responsible mothers, in addition to struggling with feelings of not being good enough as mothers. The researchers concluded that the mothers felt that their dual role of being mothers and employees resulted in the mothers feeling the emotion of guilt. In considering self-identity, in terms of what is expected of a good mother, Johnston and Swanson (2006) concluded that “it is difficult for mothers to negotiate a position that fulfils the expectations of both public and private sphere ideology”. (p.510)

Millward (2006) noted a shift in self-identity that could be prompted by how a mother is treated relative to her change of needs as a new mother:

Women who felt that their new needs were ignored or not actively acknowledged by others, appeared to cope with this by realigning themselves as primarily 'mothers who work', rather than as 'truly reconciled and valued employees with openly appreciated maternal responsibilities'. (p.526)

This realignment could have consequences for the mothers' employers, as a mother's self-identity turns away from her previous view of herself as a valued employee.

Self-identity was also explored in J. Smith's (1999) research into the transition to motherhood for a working woman. Although not affecting most of his participants, J. Smith (1999) concluded that this period had the potential to shift priorities and that it could result in a permanent change to a woman's self-identity. J. Smith (1991) also reflected, in his case study research with one mother, that self-identity is also complicated by the emergence of another identity, that of the newborn child. Stern, Bruschiweiler-Stern and Freeland (1998) noted that a mother is being metaphorically born at the same time as her baby arrives physically, via her new sense of what it is to be a mother.

Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) explored the emergence of self-identity, pointing to the state of 'liminality' when one is between states. The situation in the transition to motherhood as a working mother has the potential to be liminal. The authors researched whether, during the period of liminality, there was a suspension of self-identity. Whereas some mothers would be uncomfortable living through a long period of liminality, for example finding another job as soon as possible after losing one, other mothers could feel comfortable using the time to check their options before 'jumping' into another role. Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) noted that, during that period of liminality, there is a suspension of self-identity. How people transition to the next stage might depend on how well the scripts to follow are known. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) used an example of an engineer being promoted to a managerial level in their company. Because that path had been taken many times before, the script and the expectations of transitioning were

well-known, and the period of liminality was shortened as a result. In thinking of the experiences of a first-time mother versus a second-time mother, the script of returning to work has been played out before for the latter. KIT Days, if structured correctly, could become a proxy for a script for first-time mothers and assist in reducing the period in which a mother is questioning her self-identity.

Ladge, Clair, and Greenberg (2012) discussed a period of liminality starting during pregnancy and a self-identity change that can be traced back to that period. They identified three different types of reactions to the life event of having a baby, that can commence even in the liminal phase of pregnancy. They identified a group that reacted by rejecting their emerging mother identity. A second group delayed working through changes relating to their emerging mother identity. A third group embraced the emerging mother identity change with an inevitability about it and started the process of actualising a sense of their professional mother identity. The researchers noted that “feeling supported and socially validated in their work context influences the degree to which individuals envision their ability to integrate their work and non-work roles” (Ladge et al., 2012, p.1466).

Implications of these research outcomes, for a working mother, suggest that an adequate level of support would help mothers to be part of the third group that more quickly embraced their new identity. Ibarra and Obodaru (2016), noted that a person’s ability to manage a liminal state will correspond with their personal growth. For example, a mother understanding that something is changing, as opposed to being ‘wrong’ simply because it feels uncomfortable, could be important to her next stage of developing her self-identity as a working mother.

Bailey (1999, p.335) introduced the concept of the “refraction of self” during such a transition to motherhood, like light passing through a prism to display a rainbow. The effect was that the women’s personalities would reveal previously hidden elements. Bailey (1999, p.335) also noted that employment of a ‘middle-class’ social grade of women would typically be associated with work that provided an opportunity for the expression of self, as opposed to it just being a job and provided a hypothesis as to why pregnancy might have a greater impact therefore on this professional group. The concept proposed was that if these women have succeeded to date as ‘surrogate men’ then pregnancy could

interfere with that perception as the wholly committed work person. Bailey (1999) concluded that there was no change in self-identity, but, instead, the women were entering an altered world, and it was that new world that would affect how they perceived the different facets of themselves and, indeed they had a choice as to what facets to increase or diminish.

Whether social status has an impact on expectations of what it is to be a mother was researched in a 2002 study among fourteen 'working-class mothers' (Mitchell & Green, 2002). This research linked a mother's self-identity and female kinship. The researchers found that a mother's self-identity, believing herself to be a capable and caring mother, was closely interwoven with female kinship, noting its pivotal nature to the mothers, on practical, social and emotional levels.

Snir (2019) noted the impact of achievement at work for the maternity returner being the key to their perception as a valued employee. Harrison (2008), using a UK law firm perspective, noted that the return experience can be a tool in the retention and recruitment of staff and therefore a strategic asset if designed correctly. Millward (2006, p.332) noted that women struggled to "prevail their rights, needs and concerns as mothers while simultaneously also maintaining their identity as valued and functioning members of the organisation".

2.7 Agency, commitment and job security

Returning early to work after giving birth can be an exerting task both physically and psychologically. This early return to work may also strongly communicate a woman's dedication and commitment to her job, which is an indicator of career success (Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). Spence (1973) researched how job applicants signal to an employee their employability and future utility and concluded that it is possible to alter and manipulate those signals. Although that research was related to the first time an employee encounters the company in question, when a mother on maternity leave has been away from the workplace for a while, her reintroduction is like being a new hire. Her productivity and motivation could be in question, and, as much as the manager knows the employee before she goes on maternity leave, she is returning as something of an unknown quantity, especially when returning after her first child (Leslie et al., 2012).

The concept of credits that a mother might build up with her employer is explored in relevant research. How flexible an employer might be, in terms of variations to previous work patterns might depend on the credit that a woman has built via her time and performance, with her employer. During maternity leave, those credits might diminish or be considered spent and her credit balance, and hence relative power in the relationship, becomes depleted (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

In terms of how well a mother is motivated to perform, to increase her agency and to show commitment, her perception of job security could be influential. Job insecurity has been defined as “the perception that the future of one’s job is unstable or at risk, regardless of any actual objective level of job security” (Jiang, 2017, p.256). That there is a negative effect on job performance when job security is low has been extensively researched (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Muñoz Medina, Lopez Bohle, Ugarte, Chambel, & Wall, 2022; Piccoli, Reisel, & De Witte, 2021). However, also researched is the interesting buffering effect of giving help and prosocial motivation on the part of the employee (Jiang, 2017; Shin & Hur, 2021). The research concluded that an employee could help their performance if they also help their co-workers, suggesting that, for mothers taking KIT Days, some interaction with their colleagues could be helpful to their motivation for their return and subsequent performance (Shin & Hur, 2021).

2.8 Employers’ encouragement

The input of the company, its management and its Human Resources agents could be instrumental in delivering encouragement to the mother. How a mother perceives that intervention is the other side of that give-and-receive transaction. Buzzanell and Liu’s (2007) study noted that encouragement could help a mother reconcile herself to her ability to overcome perceived incompatibilities, such as the differences between her goals as a mother and those as an employee. The study noted that mothers who perceived their home and work goals to be incompatible differed in outcomes depending on whether they were actively encouraged. Although both types of women (encouraged and not encouraged) equally believed their home and work goals to be incompatible, the encouraged women did try to reconcile them, whereas the women without such an

intervention concluded that the incompatibilities were irreconcilable and that attempts to do so were futile.

Buzzanell and Liu (2007) further concluded that the encouragement of mothers on maternity leave also had the impact of building positive relationships with their management. In addition, the encouraged mothers expanded their ability to flex their behaviours, to find common ground on mutual concerns with their managers and to demonstrate themselves to be the same competent workers that they had been pre-maternity leave. In terms of discouragement, as the concerning opposite approach, Buzzanell and Liu (2007, p.488) noted its negative impact, being that “more than half of those [in their study] who felt discouraged left their companies after their [maternity] leaves”.

In terms of the most likely source of regular encouragement for a mother on maternity leave, Rouse, Atkinson, and Rowe (2021) concluded that it would be the mother’s individual manager’s willingness and capability that would be pivotal in the quality of a mother’s workplace pregnancy handling. Jones, Brady, and Lindsey (2022) also noted the impact of managers or supervisors but also added the importance of co-workers on the well-being of the returning mother. Their research found that the co-workers’ positive effect was most pronounced when managerial support was also present, suggesting that multiple sources of support are important to the mother. Greer (2013) noted that women who return to work need increased confidence and self-esteem, concluding that women who network with other women may gain benefit from that interaction. This suggestion of benefitting from interaction with other women corresponds with Mitchell and Green’s (2002) conclusions relating to the importance of female kinship to a mother. Given that KIT Days could involve a degree of networking, this additional input to the women’s returning experience could be useful.

In terms of whether employer support is equally important in different types of employment, Maxwell, Connolly, and Ni Laoire (2019) noted, in specific research with academics, that their research participants had an awareness of how their own reproductive choices were perceived as negative. That these academics could decide to have children was felt to be a potential future drain on the resources of the institution. A consequence was that it did not matter whether the individual woman had a desire to have children, simply being capable of doing

so raised these academics' perceptions of stumbling blocks in their career arising, relative to their male colleagues (Baker, 2008).

In the medical profession, another specific employment type, research was undertaken into the difficult returns of surgical trainees (Mohan et al., 2019). Nearly two-thirds of the research participants felt back to work as normal only after six months. In the UK National Health Service (NHS), sizeable discrepancies were found in a study by Whittock, Edwards, McLaren, and Robinson (2002) between three groups: men, women without dependents and women with dependents, relative to the time to reach a certain grade. The results ranged from just under seven years for an average man to nearly twenty-three years for the average woman with dependents.

In a related profession, Davey et al. (2005) researched NHS nurses and their motivations to return to work and found that for those nurses who would prefer not to work, the important motivators for returning to work were financial needs and the lifestyle, rather than their career. Van Boxel, Mawson, Dawkins, Duncan, and Gijs (2020) researched the time it took for confidence to return for trainee paediatric doctors returning from maternity leave in the National Health Service in the UK and its drivers. Causes, considered to be driving the longer time to regain confidence, included longer maternity leaves and the mothers returning on a part-time basis.

2.9 Breastfeeding

KIT Days being taken as part of a mother's maternity leave will mean that some mothers are still breastfeeding at the point that they take the KIT Days. In circumstances when attendance at the workplace itself is necessary for the women to take those KIT Days, breastfeeding will be interrupted and hence the expressing of milk might be required before and during the KIT Days. Rojjanasrirat (2004) reported on results of maternal guilt from failed attempts to balance the goals of mothering and work, including the mothers' perceptions that they were failing, because they did not take time away from work to express milk. The mothers concluded that it was too difficult to both express milk and to work. Rojjanasrirat (2004) concluded that planning was key to success and the positive attitude of the mother. To continue breastfeeding while in the workplace, a

continued belief in, and commitment to breastfeeding was important as well as flexibility, and use of any workplace resources, including an accepting and supportive manager.

In terms of the need for a supportive manager, Gabriel, Volpone, MacGowan, Butts, and Moran (2020) researched the factors that could lead to continued adherence to breastfeeding for the returning mother. They also concluded that factors included compassion from management and colleagues and the quality of the space in which the mother had to express milk during the working day. In research into a mother's breastfeeding intentions and practices, Gatrell (2011) noted that, in her research study of twenty-two working women, almost a third reported self-regulating their bodies so that they only produced milk in an evening, to avoid work incidents of leakage.

2.10 Postnatal depression

Dunford and Granger (2017) researched the impact of guilt and shame on postnatal depression. They concluded that women who experience guilt and shame are less likely to seek help with their symptoms, being concerned as to how other people would react. Although the feelings of guilt and shame were more likely to raise the probability of postnatal depressive symptoms, the same attitudes made it less likely that such women would seek help, and so it became an unsolvable problem for such women.

Beck (1992), in researching postnatal depressive symptoms in mothers with infants and older children noted that the correct support and treatment was important if depressed mothers were to recover from their symptoms and connected the depression being observed to the mothers being completely overwhelmed by their childcare responsibilities. Feelings associated with postnatal depression have included guilt and loss of control (Beck, 1992). Postnatal depression has been linked to a loss of identity in some cases, of "autonomy, identity and independence" and research into postnatal depression with thirty-six women concluded that the depression can be linked with motherhood being experienced against a social construct that this time should be a "one-dimensional, happy and joyous experience" (Lewis & Nicolson, 1998, p.191). Their participants struggled to speak of motherhood as problematic and

Lewis and Nicolson (1998) concluded that “depression can be understood as a reaction to the experiences of early motherhood”. (p.192)

This research study on KIT Day experiences is set within a COVID-19 pandemic timeframe in the UK that will have affected all participants to some degree. Three participants conducted their KIT Days during a COVID-19 lockdown. The impact of the first COVID-19 lockdown in the UK was considered in a study by Emmott and Myers (2021). Although there was some reported perceived benefit to the family due to the time that they were able to spend together, there were negative themes reported, including a lack of contact and support from others outside the immediate family and worries about the developmental impact on their baby. The researchers reported “consequential feelings of a burden of constant mothering, the inadequacy of virtual contact, and sadness and worries about lost social opportunities” (Emmott & Myers, 2021, p.1).

2.11 Impact of social status, race or income

Minnotte (2023) considered race and class status in the context of “intensive mothering” and noted that “enactments of mothering are more diverse and contested than is often assumed by the concept of hegemonic intensive mothering” (p.1). Minnotte (2023) described “privileged, predominantly White mothers” as mothers who can purchase other resources to display their adherence to intensive mothering, such as nannies, and therefore can be perceived as having more agency to redefine and live out their perception of good mothering, even to the extent of becoming vaccine and home-schooling experts (p.13).

Also researching the concept of the privileged mother, Vincent (2009) concluded that middle-class mothering exhibited an intensive approach, that was aimed at moulding her child and was both sensitive and professional at the same time. Vincent (2009) also considered social grades and concluded that working-class mothers gained their primary support from their nearby family, whereas middle-class mothers were more dependent on groups outside of the family, such as their ante-natal cohort. Considering that half of the participants in this KIT Days’ research were impacted by their Days taking place during a COVID-19 lockdown,

a reliance on individuals outside of one's 'COVID-19 bubble', could affect these professional women.

There are potential interactions with other impacting factors for mothers, of breastfeeding and whether a mother returns as full-time or part-time. Qiong, Tatjana and Ming (2021) noted the impact of breastfeeding as creating challenges, particularly for low-income, working mothers due to a lack of support at work and related anxiety associated with continuing to express breastmilk at work. Baughman, Di Nardi and Holtz-Eakin (2003) concluded that women who request flexible or part-time work accept being side-lined or receiving low pay as inevitable.

A family may incur a wage penalty in the welcoming of children to the family which could have an impact on their social status or income. Gangl and Ziefle (2009) posited that motherhood is the likely, major factor driving the critical event behind the gender wage gap in the Western world. Waldfogel (1997) conducted a study in Britain that found the arrival of the first child incurred a 9% wage penalty that rose to 16% for a subsequent child. A later United States study by Budig and England (2001), published results of a wage penalty of 7% per child, with larger penalties in the case of married women than cases of unmarried women. Maternity leave naturally reduces a woman's years of job experience, but even after adjustment for that factor, a penalty of 5% per child remained statistically.

Cukrowska-Torzewska and Matysiak conducted a meta-analysis in 2020 of the wage penalty and concluded that there is a gap of around 3.6–3.8% between women with children and childless women, in favour of the latter receiving higher pay. The meta-regression analysis revealed that the wage gap is at its maximum when mothers have small children but, interestingly, it does not hold for highly skilled mothers. The research concluded that the wage disparity derives mainly from the lost work time of the mothers, when on maternity leave and via other child-related interruptions. Although the research recognised that work conditions conducive to being a working mother were important, they were less important than the lost human capital during the employment breaks.

The UK's position in the meta-analysis is of importance to this doctoral research and is categorized in a group along with the United States, Canada and Australia.

The conclusion on this grouping of four countries includes findings consistent with those of Esping-Andersen (1999) and McDonald and Moye (2010) regarding poor childcare provision in these countries and adds that the same countries share common parental leave factors, such as a short time duration and poor financial support during such leave periods.

In a highly regulated and government-directed country such as China, a maternal wage gap exists in the private sector although was not found in the public sector, indicating that governmental policy can be used to offset such a bias (Du, 2023). The wage gap was found to exist for all women however versus their male counterparts in the private sector, regardless of their personal decisions whether to have children or not, leading to a conclusion that the impact of being of child-bearing age, for a woman, already carries a wage penalty.

The implications therefore for maternal wage penalties might affect women to some degree anyway, simply for working during their years of fertility. Felfe (2012, p.59) considered, rather than the maternity wage gap, the “family wage gap”. He interviewed women who stayed in the same job and on the same working hours and noted that his specific participants had an accommodating stance towards their employer. The research concluded that the woman’s family still experienced a family wage detriment of 11.9% versus the family’s previous position, regardless of the factors of the role, the hours and the accommodating approach being in place.

2.12 Research question validity

The literature research revealed a paucity of academic literature relating to mothers’ experiences of their KIT Days but with an implicit assumption written into policy sites that they are of use to both the company and the returning mother (United Kingdom Government, 2006b). KIT Days were once considered innovative and open to negotiation as to content (Community Care, 2007), heralding a new era for mothers. However, the reality of the lived experience of the KIT Days is under-researched.

Given that maternity leave time away from employment was determined to be a primary cause of gender inequality (Stumbitz, Lewis, & Rouse, 2017), research

into the maternity experience of KIT Days has the potential to add to the body of knowledge regarding this issue. The literature review suggested that the KIT Days might not benefit all mothers equally but their usefulness to professional women, such as the research participants, was expected to be at the higher point of the outcome range (Wiseman, 2006). In terms of the utility of KIT Days for a mother's return to work, James (2007) noted that "there are a number of potential flaws with KIT Days which suggest a misunderstanding (or lack of research) regarding what is desirable or feasible during the maternity leave period" (James, 2007, p.316).

Such as James' (2007) article supported the view that an understanding of women's stories of their return to work using KIT Days was lacking and hence these Days were a valid topic for new research. KIT Day research has continued to be poorly represented in the literature since James' 2007 article and, specifically, there is no consideration of therapeutic needs during maternity leave, that KIT Days might address.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research question

The research question, confirmed by the literature review, was finalised as: Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.

3.2 Selection of methodology

The research was conducted using interviews and using a Narrative Inquiry approach. Narrative Inquiry is an in-depth study of a few, four to six, participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interviews were recorded, with the participants' permission. The researcher's Field Notes and Texts were logged, and general knowledge and reflexivity were added, bringing the researcher directly into the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.171). The researcher's Narrative Inquiry reflexivity was used as "an imaginative kaleidoscope" (Kim, 2016, p.248). Narrative Inquiry was a suitable methodology for the research question, as it employs the use of interviewing in the elicitation of stories and uses the reflexivity of the researcher in the co-construction of those stories. Given the researcher had her own stories of three maternity returns, and her career involved the management of several returning mothers, co-construction was consistent with the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs.

This research was founded on a relativist ontology in recognising researcher's stance that the "nature of the world" has "a diversity of interpretations that can be applied to it" (Willig, 2013, p.12). 'Social constructionism', used as an ontological term, "refers to the way in which the real phenomena, the perceptions and experiences, are brought into existence and take the particular form that they do, because of the language that we share" (Burr, 2015, p.105). As this research question was set within a social construct of a belief as to what a KIT Day in the UK would entail, the research methodology allowed for that interpretation by a mother. Complementary to that ontology, was the epistemological belief that "interpretivism recognizes that ... beliefs are particular believers' ways of representing the world" (Curry, 2020). In asking "what can we learn?" about

mothers' lived experiences of KIT Days, the researcher's epistemological belief is that "each person perceives the world differently and actively creates their own meanings from events" (Burr, 2015, p.21) and therefore hearing each mother's whole KIT Day story is valid for adding to the body of knowledge.

Newman (2008) noted that qualitative research using narratives finds the 'said' from the actual spoken words. Such research operates by searching for meaning within and between the words and is a goal of the Narrative Inquiry approach. In terms of the intended collection of the stories in a natural, flowing manner, Narrative Inquiry as a qualitative method, "involves collecting data in the form of naturalistic verbal reports" (J. A. Smith, 2015, p.2). Polkinghorne (1988), regards meaning-making as a goal of such qualitative research, and melding the mothers' stories with Field Notes and Texts, and adding reflexivity, is in line with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) view that there is always an element of autobiographical input in such research. Narrative methods view "the researcher as having an active role in the research process" (Willig, 2013, p.153) and this acknowledgment of the relationship of the researcher in the research topic, in the methodology and in the method, all contributed to the selection of Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the dimensions of "relational (personal and social)", "temporal" and "situational" to help track and analyse the story (p.50). Narrative Inquiry was selected as the way to get as close as possible to the experience of another human being. Aware that this research would deal with ambiguous representations of another's experience (Riessman, 1993), the researcher's reflexive notes allowed for variations in the meanings, looking for contradictions and confirmations throughout.

Given the topic of the research, there is a feminist research element involved in the evolution of motherhood as a concept, for example, discussing whether there is a 'myth of motherhood' in Western societies that comprises three aspects: "children need mothers, mothers need children, and all women need to be mothers" (Oakley, 2018 p.186).

3.3 Other methodologies considered

Other qualitative research methods considered were Grounded Theory (Engward, 2013), Descriptive Phenomenology (C. Jackson, Vaughan & Brown, 2018) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019). Narrative Inquiry, as a methodology, shares a similar theoretical approach with these other methodologies; one differentiator being the deliberate higher degree of reflexivity in Narrative Inquiry, described as more of a sense of 'a re-search' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Romanyshyn, 2013).

The concept of exploring a research topic in which similarities and differences emerge as potential themes included the consideration of Grounded Theory. Classical Grounded Theory shares with Narrative Inquiry a constructivist view that a person's experience, in this case that of a returning mother, exists in both objective and subjective realities (Engward, 2013). However, as the research question is focused on hearing the complete stories, treating each as a whole in its own right was vital to the methodology selected. A methodology that requires specific code allocation, categorisation and theme-making focus, as in classical Grounded Theory was considered as not wholly compatible with the aims of the research question, that of telling the mothers' complete stories. The goal of the research was not to develop theories from patterns, but instead to understand the lived experiences of these six mothers, recognising the role of storytelling as a natural human process in sharing such experiences.

Descriptive Phenomenology (C. Jackson et al., 2018) is useful for researching lived experience and shares similarities with Narrative Inquiry in that it can use interviews to share those experiences. However, Narrative Inquiry was the best fit for the research question in that the Narrative Inquiry methodology assumes that the researcher is 'in the research' already (Kim, 2016, p.105). This KIT Day research question had been selected specifically because the researcher had her own experience of returning to work after three maternity leaves and was interested in developing co-constructed research.

In contrast, "the Descriptive Phenomenologist "brackets", or "suspends", prior knowledge and beliefs about a particular phenomenon" (C. Jackson, Vaughan and Brown, 2018, p.3315) and hence this methodology was not considered to be

the most suitable selection for this research question. Instead, the more suitable choice of Narrative Inquiry allowed the use of the researcher's knowledge and the reflexivity of the researcher to supplement the interview narratives. In particular, the timing of the research, in an environment of the COVID-19 pandemic, affected the KIT Days of three of the six participants and made the 'situational' dimension of Narrative Inquiry an additional benefit for exploring the emergent similarities and differences across the stories. In addition, the 'broadening' stage of the Narrative Inquiry analysis, which encourages the leverage of the 'common knowledge' of the researcher (Kim, 2016), was important to the chosen approach, congruent with a constructivist epistemological stance.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2019) was another alternative methodology considered. It offered the ability to add some reflexivity into the research, however with less personal involvement of the researcher than in Narrative Inquiry. Narrative Inquiry allows the researcher to be in dialogue with the participants, including the sharing of the researcher's reflections, if pertinent. What was also mismatched for Reflexive Thematic Analysis, relative to the research question, was that the reflexivity intended was to be applied at a 'complete stories level' rather than on a 'codebook' created from the research data. It was important to allow also for reflexivity about 'the not-said', and not only 'the said', as only the latter would be coded using a Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology.

In conclusion, the researcher being included in the research was pivotal in the selection of Narrative Inquiry. Additionally, the methodology shared the researcher's belief that people are "natural storytellers who make their experiences meaningful by telling stories about them" (Willig, 2013). Having considered alternative methodologies, the conclusion reached was that Narrative Inquiry was well-suited to a small-scale, reflexive, rich and deep, qualitative research topic in which the goal was to hear the complete mothers' stories.

3.4 Participant recruitment

Before approaching potential participants, it was important to first identify the parameters for selection. Those parameters were identified and used to

construct an advertisement. The parameters were: a mother who has returned to work after having a baby, the use of Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days in their return to work, that their child was still of primary school age, that they were aware in advance of what was required, that the time commitment required was acceptable and that they were aware and willing for the research to be published (with detail-obscuring and pseudonym use). It was important that the research timing should fit around their child or children’s schedules, and their time commitments. The research request was advertised at local schools and nurseries and via the researcher’s network, including working mothers, to broadcast it more broadly.

Six mothers were selected from advertisement respondents (Appendix 6), using a selection checklist (Table 3), in which the selection criteria of having used ‘Keeping in Touch’ Days, within their planned return to work, is described.

Anonymity was assured via pseudonymisation and detail-obscuring, and settings for the interviews were secure, confidential interviews that could be conducted online for the majority, with one interview taking place in person.

Given that mainly on-line interviews were used, the potential narrative impact of on-line media in my research was considered including disinhibition (Joinson, Reips, Buchanan, & Schofield, 2010; Teli, Pisanu, & Hakken, 2007).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	Fully Met	Partially Met	Not Met
Is a mother who has returned to work following a maternity leave?	Meets the requirements	Would not be selected	Would not be selected
Has used Keeping in Touch Days as a means of her return?	Meets the requirements	Would not be selected	Would not be selected
Has received information and has agreed with all components for signing?	Meets the requirements	Would not be selected	Would not be selected
Has participated in the presentation and call and confirmed an understanding of the time commitment?	Meets the requirements	Would not be selected	Would not be selected
Time availability meets the requirements of the research?	Meets the requirements	Could agree to lengthen the duration of the research to accommodate – to discuss with the participant	Would not be selected

Table 3: Inclusion criteria for participants

The subsequent survey, a product of the results of the Narrative Inquiry, was passed as acceptable by the Ethical Committee of Metanoia Institute (Appendix 9) and subsequently distributed via networks to a wide variety of websites. Demographic questions of each mother were embedded in the survey so that its results could include the diversity of the respondents.

3.5 Briefing input

For each respondent, a briefing pack was sent out explaining the purpose of the research and, importantly, the time commitment of the mother. As a result, two mothers decided not to be involved, having made an initial contact. However, five participants decided that they would like to take their involvement to the next step. That next step was a half-hour call in which the prospective participants were taken through a presentation of exactly what the research entailed about them and the prospects for later publication. Each participant was then given a further two weeks to decide if the commitment was feasible for them before they signed their consent forms and booked their first interview.

At that point in the research, five participants had been suggested and accepted by the Project Approval Panel at Metanoia Institute, and it was later in consultation with an Academic Consultant to the research that a greater diversity was suggested, to broaden the scope, and a sixth participant was sought. She was recruited via an established network from the first advertisement and was a working Black woman with children. Her recruitment proved to be a valuable addition, as she provided a very different viewpoint about being contacted while on maternity leave which is borne out in her story.

The benefit of having the initial briefing call was that there was less time taken in the first interview to explain the purpose, so more directly useful input was gathered for the research and was time-efficient for the participants. It was also a means by which to ensure an optimal environment for Narrative Inquiry by putting the participants “at ease” and able to “feel comfortable to answer questions” (Willig, 2013, p.146).

3.6 Research method steps

Each of the six mothers in the study was interviewed via on-line or face-to-face (one instance) sessions. Outcomes derived using the Narrative Inquiry review methodology used the researcher's reflexive notes and a re-storying of the mothers' narratives. Those stories were read out loud by the mothers so that they could simultaneously check the output and comment on their feelings as they re-read their story.

Ten steps were followed to set up, conduct and conclude the research. The process flow is displayed in Appendix 10 and a description in Table 4. A further two steps were added to take the research further into a survey product that was designed to leverage the six stories and to help create a product that would extend beyond the completion of the research study itself. At the time of writing, the survey has met with interest in the psychotherapeutic community, including an accepted offer to lecture using the psychotherapeutic module for counsellors and therapists and in the corporate world. The survey formed the basis of a delivered speech for maternity returnees during Maternity Health Week 2023 (Sansom, 2023b).

Research Steps	Detail
1	Before the research commenced, approval of the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee was sought, and work did not commence until permission was granted.
2	Advertising was via several media outlets, including the leverage of academic and professional contact networks. The advertisement was distributed via personal networks to schools and nurseries.
3	Participants were briefed ahead of a call, with an Information Pack (Appendix 7).
4	A separate call per participant was held to answer any questions.
5	Before booking any interviews, signatures of the participants were collected on the Participant Consent Forms.
6	The interviews were booked to meet the needs of the participants.
7	The interviews were personally transcribed to become familiar with all the nuances, pauses, and intonational changes of the voices.
8	The narratives were rewritten using words from the 'Field Notes' and Texts' and added further reflexive notes, following the Narrative Inquiry methodology of first 'broadening' the transcribed words, putting them into context, adding general knowledge, and then 'burrowing' to elicit meanings.
9	The re-storied narrative was shared with each participant, disguising their identity, using their own pseudonym, and without losing the meaning of the story.
10	'Thinking across the stories' (Etherington, 2020) was performed, across all six 're-stories', and rather than dissecting or thinking between the stories, each story was kept whole.
Survey Product Steps	Detail
1	A survey was created, as a product of the Narrative Inquiry research, from its outputs and was distributed to a diverse group of mothers, via various networks, capturing demographic data in the survey.
2	The results of the survey were analysed, and the results organised for further survey iteration and use in other subsequent therapeutic and informative products.

Table 4: Research method steps

The approach involved very few interview questions, to let the mothers' stories be told in an uninterrupted dialogue. However, to commence the interview and to ensure that KIT Days were considered in the stories, the commencing

questions in Table 5 covered the research question but were also very open, as described in Etherington’s (2004) notes on reflexivity.

Please tell me your story of using your Keeping in Touch Days. Start at any point you want.
Looking back on your story, in what ways did the KIT Days play a role in your return?
If you had the chance to redesign the KIT Days that you had, what would you change?

Table 5: Research questions

Only a few, open, semi-structured questions were designed into the research to ensure that the participant could engage quickly to build a rapport with the researcher and to allow for free expression. “The research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest” and that “knowledge evolves through a dialogue” (Kvale, 1996, p.125). Kvale also noted that “at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions to follow up the answers given, and the stories told by the subjects” (Kvale, 1996, p.124). Separately, details of the mothers were collected for context and suitably anonymised to preserve confidentiality (Table 6).

Place of work, position/role, length of service, previous career trajectory
Length of maternity leave, number of children (and which was the newborn position in the family)
Number of KIT Days taken

Table 6: Contextual questions

The final point at which participants were able to withdraw consent was well into their commitment, at the point of re-contracting after the interview stage. Hence it was a risk to the research, as much time could have been lost in re-advertising for participants. However, this approach accords with the Drama Spiral method of re-contracting with a participant at key stages of the research process, explained in Baim’s Professional Knowledge (PK) seminar (Baim, 2021). If a participant had chosen to leave the research programme before that point, one

leaving would be acceptable, as five participants is an acceptable number for a Narrative Inquiry approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). However, a second leaver would have been replaced via re-advertising, and the research would have had a longer duration, accordingly. No participant left the study, however, or at any time intimated that they were considering exiting.

Following the recruitment of the sixth participant, Lou, the resultant demographics of the women, at the time of the KIT Days, with pseudonyms agreed upon and in place, were as follows:

Participant pseudonym	Age	Children	Marital Status (at time of KIT Days/at time of interview)	Job level	Ethnicity	Ability	Sexuality	Days working/ Per week pre/now	Days working in the office now	KIT Days taken	COVID-19 Period or Not?
Ann	36	1	Married/ Married	Senior	White, British	Fully able	Heterosexual	5 / 4	2	5	Yes
Daisy	41	1	Married/ Married	Senior	White, British	Fully able	Heterosexual	5 / 5	0-1	10	Yes
Dr Mama	37	2	Cohabiting/ Cohabiting	Middle	White, British	Fully able	Heterosexual	5 / 2.5	1	10 and 6	Yes
Mary	42	2	Married/ Married	Senior	White, British	Fully able	Heterosexual	5 / 5	3	10 and 5	No
Christine	42	1	Married/ Widowed	Senior-Middle	Medi-terranean	Partial ability	Heterosexual	5 / 2	1	3	No
Lou	36	2	Married/ Divorced	Junior-Middle	Black, British	Fully able	Heterosexual	5 / 0	0 (left the job)	10	No

Table 7: Resultant participant demographics

3.7 Transcripts

As intended in the research method design, each participant was interviewed twice to cover all the content of their stories and followed up with a written transcript for review for their comment and change if needed. On one point for Christine, a communication from her led to a correction being made, having re-listened to the recording. The transcripts were all created by the researcher via listening and typing and required multiple checks against the recorded materials.

3.8 Analysis

The research analysis followed the Narrative Inquiry methodology. The approach used three analytical tools that require the researcher to broaden, burrow and re-story the participants' narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Kim (2016) advocated the use of interim texts, and that approach was followed, to build interpretative accounts of the participants' stories. Narrative thinking was employed to create a complete story for each mother, from their shared experiences (Kim, 2016). Examples are shown in Appendices 1 to 4.

The Narrative Inquiry methodology employed the use of the three dimensions of the relational, the temporal and the situational aspects of the stories, and each dimension was covered in the re-storying phase. The research expanded the stories of the participants with reflexive notes and commentary, introducing more general knowledge to create a framework around the whole transcript of each participant (Mishler, 1986). Feelings and dilemmas were considered, and stories emerged when considering the influences of the events on the lived experience of the participant (Kim, 2016). Patterns were noted, and any tensions against the Narrative Inquiry dimensions.

The aim was to question the influences on the lived experiences of the participants and how the details of the events affected that experience (Kim, 2016). The research was then expanded to re-tell the participants' narratives and capture the situational aspects of the interview, for example, a participant might act differently when at home than on a workday (Joinson et al., 2010; Teli et al., 2007).

3.9 Retelling aloud

Following a consultation with the main Academic Consultant to the research, a third interview was held with each participant to have each read their retold story aloud and add any further commentary on emotions or feelings arising. It was a useful step in the research, as all stages had been shared with the participant to consider, however reading aloud was something that none of them had attempted at home. Also being busy mothers, they had read the transcripts and stories at a quick speed and slowing it down, via reading out loud, was a way to help them digest it. As a research tool, there are some negative views on the value of reading aloud as a research methodology (Lashley, 1923; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Smagorinsky, 1994; Zabrocky & Moore, 1989). However, the use of the approach continues to grow (Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Pressley, Harris, & Marks, 1992).

Kucan and Beck's (1997) research suggests when reading a text out loud, the thinking itself is changed and noted that research by investigators such as Chi, de Leeuw, Chiu, and LaVanher (1994), Miller (1985), and Schunk and Rice (1985) showed that readers who were asked to think aloud or to verbalise, had

the effect of bringing a focus to the subject matter being read compared to running through their words just mentally. The slowing down aspect, via reading out loud, was a way for the mothers, research suggests, that vocalisation could also increase their sense of agency over their words (Ohata, Asai, Imaizumi, & Imamizu, 2022).

3.10 Layering

The resultant stories are presented through the postmodern method of a layered account (Ronai, 1997). This approach is demonstrated by the interweaving of the researcher's own 'Field Notes and Texts' and further reflexive thoughts within the narrative of the mother. It is a format that enables researchers to use social theory, lived experience, and emotions as varied resources (Ronai, 1997). Layering was part of the reflexive nature of this research and was congruent with the selection of Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology. Staffans (2016) explained the benefits of a layered narrative as one that can affect more readers, as the layers strengthen the story, and the approach allows for collaboration.

3.11 Thinking across the stories

The final stage of the research method was to perform a "thinking across the stories" stage in which similarities and differences across the six stories were examined (Etherington, 2020, p.87). In practice, this was the conclusion of an organic, continuous process throughout the research. Etherington (2020) advocates "thinking with stories rather than about them" and the approach in this research employed that method (p.87). The stories were each read in their entirety again before drawing any conclusions on similarities and differences and drew in the researcher's notes and thoughts upon the re-reading. An example is shown in Appendix 4, in which similarities and differences between stories were explored, after considering each story as a whole in its own right. The similarity in the example is the need to feel the support of management and that the Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days highlighted a basic support level typically experienced that was below the mother's requirements.

There were differences experienced in reading the complete stories. For this specific example, the stories of the second-time mothers overall had a sense of

expecting more from their management and, particularly, the participant working in academia had a role that was more autonomous of her management in general, even before her maternity leave. In keeping with a Narrative Inquiry approach, the stories were treated as knowledge, and co-constructed between the researcher and the participant.

3.12 Developing the survey product

Following the Narrative Inquiry stage of the research, a survey product from the output was devised, to bring greater diversity to the research (Chapter 9). The survey aimed to capture the demographics of the respondents and asked an open-ended question on emotions that the Narrative Inquiry stage suggested could apply to a wider, more diverse audience. Workplaces are diverse environments, and therefore the inclusion of survey results will, in the future, help represent the diverse environments to which the mothers are returning.

3.13 Ethical considerations and safeguarding

This research carried the challenge of the researchers' question posed by Josselson (1996):

Do you really feel like interfering in his or her life? Will you be able to live with the consequences of this encounter or intervention? Is it justified from the interviewee's own perspective? (p.293)

The conclusion was that suitably supported, working mothers can achieve more in their careers via an optimal re-entry to the workforce (Graham, 2019) and that further research on KIT Days, as that re-entry point, was beneficial and justifiable.

The research was supported by the ethical requirements of the institutions, Metanoia and Middlesex University, the governing body, and was conducted per the following frameworks: the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018), of the British Psychological Society (British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics, 2018) and of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct, 2019). "Feminist principles relating to quality

and power” (Etherington, 2007, p.601) were heeded throughout the research, for example, each participant had the power to pause or withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Their ongoing consent was checked at each stage of the research process.

3.14 Ethical considerations and mitigants

Each ethical issue in Table 7 was identified as plausible during this research. For each issue, practical and adequate steps were proposed and resourced. Ethical approval is shown in Appendix 9.

Ethical issue	Mitigant(s)
Vulnerability of a sleep-deprived participant	<p>Check for sufficient rest and readiness before commencing any interview.</p> <p>Ensure that the participant is reminded at each interview of their power to break or terminate the interview and the overall project.</p>
Hormonal changes/imbances	<p>Check for suitability of day/ time/ other commitments before commencing any interview.</p> <p>Ensure that the participant is reminded at each interview of their power to break or terminate the interview and the overall project.</p>
Emotional reactions to questions	<p>Have signposting ready for follow-up help such as counselling and Employee Assistance Programme numbers for their workplace (if relevant).</p> <p>Check the support structures that the participant has in place to have more immediate support to hand post-interview, such as family and friends.</p> <p>Check if the employee (where relevant) has access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and if they would wish to access it.</p> <p>Where no programme is in place, prepare for 2 follow-up sessions of counselling by a qualified practitioner (paid for by the researcher) if required.</p>
Confidentiality – concerns about an Employer/close person discovering information from the research	<p>Explain how you will keep separate the identity from the research notes – simply calling the participant ‘Participant 1’ and ‘Participant 2’ etc.</p> <p>Use encrypted and password-protected files to transfer the Transcripts and Narrative.</p> <p>Follow the General Data Protection Regulation (2016) (GDPR) requirements for data.</p>
Concerns/legalities re: COVID-19	<p>Make meetings face-to-face via Zoom or another platform.</p>

Table 8: Summary table of ethical considerations and mitigants

Previous research (Hampson, 2021) encountered the vulnerability of sleep-deprived mothers during the interviewing stage, and so there was an awareness of the situation of the mothers. The offer to postpone was made and accepted in one case on that occasion. The research involved realistic accommodations of the mothers' time commitments and interviews were always concluded on time, respectful of their other time commitments.

It was anticipated as possible that the interview could be the first time that someone has asked this new mother truly how she was feeling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Emotional support via signposting to independent counselling for two sessions (researcher-funded) was available, but none was required.

Assurance of confidentiality was given, and documents were sent under password protection. Pseudonymisation and identity-obscuring were used, with the participant choosing their pseudonym (four participants) or directing the researcher to select on their behalf (two participants). Data was held in securely locked cabinets, in line with the European Union's General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR). Any perceived power imbalance between the researcher and the participant was addressed, in that the participant was given the power to terminate or pause a session or the overall agreement, for any reason, at any time, without justification.

3.15 Ability to withdraw

Providing the opportunity to hear the worst-case time commitment that the research would require, ahead of consenting, allowed for an easy withdrawal of the women, citing time constraints. However, the early preparation work proved to be advantageous as none of the women asked to leave the research programme from that point. They were asked again after their first interview if they wished to remain with the research, before transcribing, and all women stayed with the research study programme.

3.16 Reflexivity in the research

The researcher being invested personally in the research question potentially poses an epistemological challenge. However, the basis of this research being

founded on a social constructionist philosophy (Lock & Strong, 2010) facilitated each mother to tell their own unique story and, in this research, those stories have been accurately depicted and retained as unique, pseudonymised testimonies, (Polkinghorne, 1988) as well as looking across the stories to determine similarities and differences (Etherington, 2020). Deliberately choosing, as a researcher, to be part of the research process, via the chosen Narrative Inquiry methodology was a conscious aspect of the approach.

Chapter 4: Introducing the research participants

4.1 Introductions

The six participants are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

4.2 Ann

Ann is a 36-year-old, White, heterosexual, fully able, married mother of one. She has a senior role in financial services. Ann's story was one of a very successful career, a supportive husband, family living nearby to her offering childcare and a well-established career. Her company was very generous with maternity leave and in allowing Ann great autonomy over her maternity leave and KIT Days. Ann arranged all her own KIT Day content and timing. She was the only one of all six participants who booked her KIT Days in advance to fit with work commitments, such as the annual budgeting cycle. As might be expected with such control, Ann felt satisfied and supported during them and took them from her home office. Seemingly, therefore, all factors should have been in place for very successful KIT Days. However, Ann overbooked herself by filling every hour of the day, not realising that, as a breastfeeding mother she would become engorged and had a very painful first KIT Day as a result.

4.3 Daisy

Daisy is a 41-year-old White, heterosexual, fully able, married mother of one. She has a senior role in education. Daisy was the only participant to speak of somewhat missing work as soon as she was on maternity leave and keen to pick up her career and continue her upward trajectory when she returned. Daisy showed her keenness to her manager who took it a step too far by allocating to Daisy a highly politicised project for her KIT Days. It would have been a tough assignment for someone anyway, but to try to do it via KIT Days and then to be away from that environment after the KIT Days ended, left wondering what fall-out was ensuing in her absence and without the ability to assuage tempers, was tough for her.

4.4 Dr Mama

Dr Mama is a 37-year-old White, heterosexual, fully able, co-habiting mother of two. She has a mid-tier role in education, a good level for her stage of career. Dr Mama was unusual as the line between leaving work for her maternity leave and her KIT Days was blurred, as she never really stopped doing her role anyway. Of all the participants, Dr Mama felt like the one mostly left to her own devices. Her manager even forgot she was pregnant, such was the lack of involvement, accentuated by the era of COVID-19 lockdown. Her KIT Days therefore felt the most chaotic, unplanned and unnoticed by anyone in her organisation.

4.5 Mary

Mary is a 42-year-old White, heterosexual, fully able, married mother of two. She has a senior role in the public sector, in mental health. Her experience of KIT Days required getting involved back in the role as there was little else available that she could have done except get back into real work. As some of the work was very harrowing, it was a difficult reintroduction to the workplace. Mary also had a difficult time in leaving her son at his nursery, on a KIT Day, that made her question if she could even return to work on the date planned.

4.6 Christine

Christine is a 42-year-old Mediterranean, heterosexual, self-classified as partially disabled, married mother of one, at the time of the KIT Days. Christine has a middle to senior management role in financial services. Christine was the one participant who had not planned to use KIT Days, except for one to practice the logistics of the run to the nursery, a rehearsal in effect. However, her story is an important one to tell because she ended up having to find another job within her company after the first KIT Day. It was quite traumatising for her. She attended her workplace, expecting a pleasant, social day, to find that she had a new manager and could tell immediately that it was not going to work out well.

4.7 Lou

Lou is a 36-year-old Black, heterosexual, fully able, married mother of two. Lou's story is an important one to tell for a different reason. Lou used her KIT Days to prove that she could do her old job on just two days a week, rather than the three days that she worked previously. She collaborated with colleagues to prove it, and used her own, unpaid time to make sure it happened. Despite her valiant efforts, she did not convince management and had to resign. Lou's story contains her own concerns about racism, and how her company treated her differently to her White colleagues.

Chapter 5: Results: Participants' retold stories

5.1 The retold story of Ann

Ann and I met both online and in person.

Ann fits in well with her wider management team and feels supported. She has been at her company for six years and is very happy with her role and the company in general. She has a manager that she likes and respects. Her company has been very accommodating. It is a very family-friendly company, with sociable hours based around people being able to get home at an early hour. The company has very good family-leave policies, is very positive about families and her CEO personally wrote her a letter when she was about to go on maternity leave. She could not fault how her company handled her maternity leave saying that they were “brilliantly supportive”. She describes the attitude of her company as being that “your job is secondary to your family life. It really is fantastic, the best place I've worked, the message really is there”.

Among the study participants, Ann's case stands out as being the most positive of experiences, with an employer enabling a good maternity leave, including the use of Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days. It would be difficult to imagine a better set of policies and company environment for a working mother. When Ann thinks of the choices that she has made in becoming a mother, she feels that she was “decisive” in making that change, although knowing that it could affect her career.

Since the pandemic, she has been able to reduce her time in the office and so now commutes twice a week; the remaining two days, of her agreed four-day week, she works from home. Working from home is a great saving for her in terms of time, as it takes her an hour and a half each way to and from work. She alternates days at home with her husband and she also has her mother living close to her.

Ann took nine months off for her maternity leave (plus two weeks' holiday), during which she took five of the ten KIT Days to which she was entitled. They were offered to her; she did not have to ask for them. As soon as she said she was going on maternity leave, she was told about them. Before she went on maternity leave, she discussed with her manager what she would be doing with those

Days; end-of-year projects or business planning in which she still wanted to be involved, because those two inputs would have an effect when she came back from maternity leave. So, she made sure that she was available for those KIT Days. When Ann read her story out loud, she described her company as supportive and felt “cared for” like it was a second family.

Her husband stayed at home for those KIT Days to help her and they were all conducted remotely because of the pandemic. Ann believed that she had chosen less than her one-year maternity leave, partly down to a financial element, as her and her husband had recently bought a new house and put her choice down to a worry that too long away could lead to her not wanting to return at all. Ann felt “proud” of her achievements and knew it was because of her hard work and sacrifices that she had made along the way.

I was struck by the relative comfort of her situation, in that Ann had a particularly supportive company and manager, total flexibility to arrange her KIT Days as she wished and good childcare coverage from her husband. Freedom to choose when to take them, freedom to even choose the topics to be covered. Freedom to not be disturbed during the Days because her husband was covering the childcare. When asked about the practicalities of using the KIT Days, Ann said she would rate that aspect at eight out of ten marks.

Psychologically, however, Ann rated her experience as five out of ten. I was left surprised at that point in our dialogue, as the circumstances seemed to be ideal; working at home, childcare not an issue, and topics agreed upon in advance. What was causing the missing five marks out of ten? I asked her to tell me her ‘Keeping in Touch Days’ story’ starting at whatever point she wished and however she wished to tell it. Already, I understood that optimal KIT Days could be difficult to achieve.

Ann started with her worries about taking maternity leave at all, because of the potential impact on her career. She worried that she might not have a career to return to. In addition, she anticipated the pull of being separated from her child even at that stage of pregnancy. Interestingly, at this point of her story, she explained her reasoning; she expressed her desire, for her daughter, to “set an

example for her of what it can look like in the workplace and how important a career can be in your life”.

At the time, that resonated with me. As I rewrote her story, however, I thought about how the stated justification to return to work had been for her daughter’s benefit. It reminded me that I often felt I needed a justification when asked about work during my children’s early lives. When Ann and I met in person we spoke about this societal need to explain away one’s decision to return. For me, at the time, it was because I was a single mother for a while, but I do remember almost being grateful that I now had a reason that I could tell people, as if I had no choice.

There had been discussions before taking maternity leave. Ann had supportive women colleagues who helped her decide how long to take off, and who were quite open about talking about their challenges when they returned. There was psychological preparation too, in these women sharing how it felt to be working mothers, and Ann noted at this point how she felt “all the guilt that, sort of, goes with that, so... that side of it, I guess I did feel quite well prepared”.

I was interested that guilt was seen as inevitable. When I thought about all the women that I have known in the same situation, all have expressed guilt I realised, although I feel that for some it was a relief to restore some normality and structure to their lives, but it feels that it is expected by society that you will express guilt regardless of the upside benefits of working.

Ann felt that she really benefitted from the “open conversation” as she would term it:

People I really look up to and senior management who were really open with their stories, it was really, really lovely. It really helped me going back to know that there were other working mums, and they understood the challenges as well. So, as I say, I was really determined to make it work.
(Ann)

Guilt raised its head again with Ann’s team member, who would be helping cover some of Ann’s work in her absence. The team member had only been in post for nearly a year and had been quite panicked when Ann told her that she was

expecting. It was interesting at this stage that Ann went back to the fact that the pregnancy had been of an IVF origin, and said:

I suppose I hadn't actually thought I would probably ever get pregnant, so, that part of it, I guess, was when I was already into my career, and not to say it was not brilliant, the best possible scenario but, it meant I had to re-adjust my own expectations of my career as well. (Ann)

Ann noted at this stage that people were excited for her and that made her "happy" and "encouraged". She linked the fact that she had been surprised about getting pregnant to the fact it made the timing difficult for a team member, one with less than a year's experience. Again, a sense of guilt. The way that Ann dealt with the situation to recruit a replacement for part of her role. Ann was "anxious" about making sure she left the company in a good position. Her team member took part of her role, and a new coverage position was allocated another element of her role. However, it was not a perfect fit. The recruit ended up being "the best of a bad bunch", Ann recalled.

Ann's daughter was born in the summer of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, so Ann was back in the City around March 2021. When planning the Keeping in Touch Days, Ann was working from home at the end of her pregnancy. She enjoyed this arrangement, adding that she "did not have to do the commute or the extra hours that go with that". She did an online handover and recruited her temporary cover remotely. Both felt a little strange to her. Ann kept in touch with her manager from the start of her maternity leave and used the word "obviously" regarding that contact. However, my other conversations with mothers have shown that it is not obvious, seemingly, to most women on maternity leave. When Ann spoke of her (male) manager she said:

We got on very well professionally. He's not, kind of, a person who likes to socialise much. He's quite 'matter of fact' ... it was like, "I've had a baby", he was "great" ... (laughs) ... typical, typical male response, I think. Yeah, he was very, kind of 'supportive' I suppose. Mostly kept in touch, kind of, socially. (Ann)

When challenged a little more on her manager's general maternity leave and KIT Day involvement, Ann said:

Well, I think a bit more would have been nice. Especially as I had the replacement. As I say, I think if he'd been a bit more "where are you at?" ... but he is always happy for me to lead things and that's just his management approach, so part of it is that I know he's always going to be like that. But I think he didn't want to put pressure on me. And he said, at the time, "just feel free to use them to have a catch up", and that I wasn't expected to do any work on those Days, erm ... and he saw them just, literally, as 'keep in touch', just to say 'hi'. And on those Days when we got to lunch, he would say that I didn't have to do a full day. As long as I had caught up with my people ... he'd ask who I caught up with and suggest a couple of people ...if there were projects going on that I'd quite like to know about, he'd say speak to this person or that person, so that was useful, but in terms of planning it, that was up to me. I didn't have much other contact. HR made sure I was OK and emails from my team member asking how the baby was, for photos, that kind of thing, but nothing work-wise, which is fantastic. (Ann)

Ann also expressed that she "felt bad" about saying anything negative about her manager at this point in her story; that she would think of herself as "unappreciative" and "bad for saying it".

Ann started business planning for the following year in December 2020 when everyone was out of the office, so that entailed simply logging on from home. Ann said of that time that:

The biggest challenge was, I suppose, the practical side of things, more than anything. I was still breastfeeding at that time, so it was the first time I had spent that much time away from the baby, erm ..., and again, with the lockdown pandemic I hadn't done anything away from her, she'd been with me the entire time, and therefore I'd never had to express milk, and I was working the whole day. She went to Mum's those Days, so I was able to pop round at lunchtime as she doesn't live very far away, so it was a few hours each side. I think that was the biggest challenge, I just hadn't really prepared. With hindsight, I should have practiced expressing, but I hadn't needed to and so, I think, that psychological side of things was more difficult than actually going back to work and seeing people, which

was absolutely fine. Erm... I did have some concerns around my replacement ... if he had found a load of issues, maybe stuff I hadn't done properly, there's always the risk if someone is looking at your work that they say, "oh this is just terrible!". (Ann)

Ann had a few months before she had a KIT Day, but certainly by that time she was somewhat resistant to having to do it, whereas she would have expected before maternity leave that she would really be looking forward to doing it. It was really this quite unexpected dramatic shift. Going from loving the job to just thinking "I've got to do it" was something that she had not expected. On her first KIT Day, Ann had a lot of worries including how her team member was going to be, and if she would be going back to "loads of issues", but found the day to be "sociable, it was interesting and that was all fine, and saw the baby at lunch time and, as I finished work, I felt that all went very well".

Her subsequent KIT Days followed a similar pattern. She did not learn her lesson fully about expressing milk and found that funny in hindsight. Some anxiety raised its head each time, but the work side was found to be "always fine". Her manager, already described by Ann as not being particularly into the "social side of things" forgot, a couple of times, that Ann was doing KIT Days so, when she logged on it was obvious that he had forgotten that she would be there. She played that down by saying that was "just him" however I was left with a sense that more care could have been taken in welcoming her back on those Days.

What Ann recognised, on the psychological support side, is that:

It's ok to feel that it's ok not to be with them [her child], especially having spent so long with them, I sort of felt bad for feeling that ... I didn't expect it to be that difficult being away from her for that length of time. I was very focused on what I was going to be doing, workwise, and I suspect that hits most mums because they're there all the time and suddenly not there. (Ann)

Ann's thoughts were that it is not having a baby that is incompatible with work, but just that adjusting to it can be psychologically challenging. She suggested that something that HR could provide some words of comfort on is "when they're

talking to you about what your entitlement is, it could be, you know, just to let you know, it will be difficult”.

For her, on those KIT Days she was at home and had gaps in the day so was able to express during that time, so she did not have to deal as much with engorgement, once she had experienced it the first time, as she acknowledged that can be a bit of a challenge, but she thought that, had she been going into the office, that might not have been as easy, and added:

I think that’s an important thing for companies to be aware of you know, they’ve been quite good when you go back that they’ll provide a room, let you know your rights, but not so much when you are just popping in for a day... it’s not so set up, you’re not so prepared. So, it’s not something I thought of as having to do throughout the Day, having not spent that much time away from her [her child], but it is something to think of for Keeping in Touch Days because I did pack in meetings, so I did not really allow myself the time to get up and do that. I think it’s something that they should be aware of, if someone is planning a Day, that’s partly for the company, partly for you, that they should be aware, and some comfort around that, that you might need to do that, would be good, and a room to accommodate it. (Ann)

Ann’s keenness to get as many meetings into a KIT Day as she could, was familiar as a feeling. I remember over-compensating for being away by trying to be back with a bang but then collapsing with exhaustion behind the scenes. I also thought about Ann’s scoring of five out of ten, psychologically. Although she was at home and had gaps in her day, it still was quite a shock to deal with the engorgement issue. I thought of how difficult it would have been for her male manager to have tackled the issue and realised that some of those practical aspects, it might be worth a company outsourcing for the most empathetic experience that they could use.

The first KIT Day is likely the most impactful, due to the sometimes all-then-nothing time with a mother’s baby. One thing that might have helped Ann was someone suggesting no more than one meeting in the morning and the same in the afternoon. Ann had reverted to her previous work ethic, and I understood

that. Ann was more aware than I was, at my time of returning to work, of over-exhaustion. Noted was how she was careful to attend to her own tiredness from her baby not sleeping through the night.

During the KIT Days themselves, however, Ann was extremely tired, and so did not offer to do more or to get involved more at that stage, but not much was asked of her anyway. She stopped short of taking her full entitlement (in fact only took half of it) because did not want to be considered “so arrogant” (in her words) to think that they could not cope without her. She said:

At the time I thought I was going to have somebody covering some of my role ... erm ... I think, if I was to do it again now, I would possibly take more, but I think at the time I didn't want the person I recruited into that role to think that I was checking up on them, or to think that I wouldn't just trust them to get on with his job, and, as it happens, I probably shouldn't have just trusted him to get on with the job, but... erm ... so, having appointed this person, I didn't want to be “oh, I'll be here every other week”, so ... yeah ... I think part of me wanted to leave him to just get on with it, and not be so arrogant to think they could not cope without me, but ... had I taken off the full 12 months that I was entitled to ... I wanted to get back into it, and I guess I wanted to show a bit more ... commitment, I suppose. (Ann)

What Ann did not know at this time was that not everything was being done. Later Ann would learn that her temporary cover had not been doing some of the things that he had been told to do. There was quite a lot that still needed to be done when she returned. Ann felt that, on her KIT Days, she had been told that everything was fine. Everything was not fine. People did not tell her. Her team member had taken on a lot of extra work without telling Ann. Her “not very hands-on manager” was not really aware that her replacement had not been doing as much as he should, being duped by the replacement being good at “talking the talk”.

When Ann got back and started looking into it, she had to deal with that catch-up. On reflection however, there was almost a relief in doing so, because it both proved that she was adding value and it had the benefit of rapidly helping her run

through work that she had missed. Seemingly no-one had wanted to burden Ann while she was away and it worked out well in her case, however it could have been more damaging in other such cases. As a manager of people, myself, over a thirty-year period, I know the difficulties of knowing exactly what is acceptable in terms of contact with an employee away from work, be it through maternity leave or long-term sickness. It was still a surprise, though, to hear how detrimentally it had affected Ann.

Ann praised her HR department who did everything well; making sure she knew about any extra Days, making sure Ann knew what she was getting paid for, and she said, “they were great about the extra money, which was also quite nice, during that time”.

HR then started increasing their contact, approaching Ann, making sure she was fine. Ann then took a couple of extra weeks off, as accrued holiday which meant that she was getting paid again a little bit quicker. When questioned about whether HR could have done more, Ann thought HR could provide some words of comfort on expectations, especially when talking to the expectant mother about her entitlement, they could say, “just to let you know, it will be difficult”.

Her manager was someone who could come across as indifferent, but Ann thought that was because he did not want to push her to come back before she was ready. She thinks there is a lot of thought about returning to work, that you do not really get when preparing for a one-off Day. Accelerating the use of holiday was the reason therefore that she did not have any more KIT Days from that point. In the last month Ann. Ann did not take any KIT Days. She did not feel that she had missed out, because she was going back soon anyway. Interestingly because of the pandemic, Ann did not think she had missed out on much anyway, because:

Nobody was really doing anything, there were no big projects being started, people were just, kind of, maintaining what they had been doing beforehand, so it almost felt like I hadn't had any time off. Which is nice in a way because I think I had that kind of worry that things would have changed in the office and I didn't have that kind of worry, so I was kind of fortunate. (Ann)

There had not been much change, in her absence, and because of the pandemic there was a sense that everybody had been very much detached from it all. So, Ann “wasn’t the only one facing something strange and different”. Ann described the feeling as “surreal” when she read back her story and found “comfort” in the fact that she was not the only one experiencing an unusual sense of detachment. During her one-week handback from her temporary cover, she found out that things had been incomplete in her absence. Then the bigger projects she might have got involved in, did get busy when she got back, and she reflected on her previous worries and realised that a worry such as “what if they prefer the person?” had been misplaced. She said:

It wasn’t a problem. So then, going back, I just, kind of, got stuck back into it, I still had challenges around lunch, expressing milk, but I’d got into a better routine with it by then, and she started weaning anyway, she was on meals throughout the day, so I managed that better at ten months, than it had been at six months when I started, so that was much better. (Ann)

Ann reflected that had she gone back to work earlier, breastfeeding could have been a challenge, but the timing worked for her, because her daughter was on three meals a day and she was just breastfeeding at night. Her and her husband faced the challenge that her daughter did not sleep through the night until she was nearly eighteen-months old, and Ann noted that going back to work so tired was “interesting”. When she went back, she felt that not a lot was asked of her except to do the catch-up work of her replacement cover and she felt that it helped a lot that she was remote, and it was quite a long time before she went back physically into the office.

Ann had only taken half of her available KIT Days and I wondered why. She reasoned that she wanted to make the most of her maternity leave. She got the involvement she wanted, ready for her return (the budget, the business planning and some catchups) so she did not feel like she needed to do any more. It made me think that KIT Days are a double-edged sword. If instead of eating into a mother’s maternity leave, the leave was extended by the same time, a mother would not have the dilemma that Ann had of taking time out of her leave with her daughter.

In hindsight, she would ideally have taken more KIT Days, especially as her replacement did not cover what he was meant to do. Ann had spoken to some of the women who had taken time off saying that after that time they found it very difficult to want to come back, and then they felt forced into it. Ann shared that she had been worried that “I would feel so out of touch, and not want to come back at all, but it was long enough to see the baby grow and develop, and actually get some quality time”.

Ann had many thoughts about going back. Concerns about her replacement and whether work would prefer him, then she returned and she had not been replaced, and her interim replacement had been sub-standard in fact, leaving work undone. It took Ann quite a long time to get back into her work, however, to get motivated.

In reading back her story, Ann described her feelings as “guilty about not feeling more guilty” about her real feelings regarding commitment. She was torn between wanting to be with her child and be back as her old self at work. She felt a high sense of “responsibility”. She said that it would have been “scary” to give up the life and income that they had enjoyed before. Whatever her feelings, she did demonstrate a deep sense of commitment to work, however. Ann also felt “frustrated” at herself for not doing more checking up on the coverage of the work while she was away. She did recognise though that there was somewhat a sense of relief that her replacement had not reached her standards, thus alleviated some anxiety and left her with a “sense of relief”.

At the beginning of her return, when Ann didn’t feel she was really delivering, other mothers sharing their stories was important. She said:

I think if I hadn’t had those ... as I said, my manager is a man and I get on really well with him... but his wife didn’t work when they had their children ... so I think he was quite surprised when I was going through it all, because he had not had to do that, and a lot of the other senior management are men and think in very similar positions. It didn’t really occur to them that its very different for a woman going back. Naturally when the baby is so young, and you’re breastfeeding you’re going have to do that around your work. So, I don’t think any of that had impacted

them. They couldn't really get their heads around it and how it could affect my work. So as much as I wanted to get on with it, I just physically couldn't. (Ann)

Senior Heads came up to her and asked how she was getting on. She could have answered "just great", but they said "actually ... how [emphasising] are you getting on". She was grateful and explained:

They talked about their struggles with leaving their children, or getting to sleep, all of that, they really gave me the opportunity to share if I was finding it really difficult, and there was some of that ... "oh they're doing it because I'm not doing very well", but really, I think it's because they recognised that it's difficult and now that I've seen that kind of support, I know I will be keen to help other people who have come back from maternity leave since I have, to make sure I talk to them about it and how they feel. I think it's really important that they get that support. (Ann)

Ann's experience led me to think of the therapeutic interventions that would arise from this research. I recognised that the senior leaders were demonstrating the empathetic qualities that one would hope to receive in a therapeutic relationship, and it appeared to make a positive difference to Ann's experience. Ann has a mentoring programme within her company for people who want to develop their careers but suggested that maybe something like that for women on maternity leaves could be useful. She found the support to be very useful and would be delighted to help other people. She believes that others would happily contribute if asked, for KIT Days, "will you talk with this person?".

The benefits would be that a mother would be going back with a good understanding, believing that no-one is going to judge her, and that they will "have your back" if you have any issues, Ann suggested. Ann saw those aspects as very important. Especially if a mother was going back to a team where no-one has done that recently, or men who have had different experiences, a more formal structure could make sure you have, a 'return to work buddy'.

Ann remembered the first couple of months spending a lot of time looking at photos of the baby, but then got back into the work. That was something she did not expect beforehand. She expected to go back and just pick it up again, but

she felt quite differently when she got back. Although it took some time to get back in the swing of it, she now describes it as “great” and said, “I have a great company to work for and a job I enjoy, but I do it for different reasons now”.

Looking back, Ann would describe her KIT Day period as “anxious”, a level of “anxiety” throughout for her, but also “support from the company” and she would say she was definitely “positive” in that she wanted to go back, knowing that she had that level of support from the company. On reflection it was “not as scary as you build it up in your head”.

In reading back her story, Ann reflects that she was a bit “naïve” about the feelings that she would encounter, being a senior person at work and a mother. She wished, in hindsight, that she had done some more planning around her maternity leave and KIT Days, but because her baby had been conceived via IVF, it was more a pleasant surprise that she was pregnant. She described that aspect as feeling like “kicking herself”. As someone very much in control of her day-to-day life, she thinks that a manager that was “more-cuddly”, that is, more emotionally available, would have improved matters, however she recognised that her workplace was very advanced in terms of maternity treatment.

Ann concluded that her KIT Days worked well, despite having an emotionally unavailable manager, because she was proactive, however, others might want someone to tell them what to do. She believes herself to be “lucky”, in a position in which she can manage her own time and plan the rest of the department around what she wants to do. Her position helped and it is something to recognise for women who do not have that luxury. However, reflecting upon my own time as a manager, and having studied management at post-graduate level, luck is not really a factor in this situation. Ann is an experienced manager herself, and managed her own time and resources well, even in the absence of her own manager being more engaged. It is hoped that this research can help ensure that mothers do not have to make their own luck but instead have a reliable and quality input from their managers in the future.

Ann concluded, after reading her story, by adding a useful insight. KIT Days are odd in that they are often irregular days taken in the last few months of maternity leave. Given that, a mother is not going to adjust her life to what it will be once

she is back fully (for example, taking up a nursery place). As a result, the KIT Days can “bleed into your life” as Ann described it and may not provide a good representation of how life will be once the mother has returned.

Ann remembered her sense of imposter syndrome and self-doubt that returned to her as she read her story and remembered that she worried if the KIT Days would switch on the stress that work brings, so had worried in advance about that. Luckily, she was able to switch-off again, but wonders if her HR Department might have provided more about what to expect and not to expect on the KIT Days. Ann also remarked upon how KIT Days are taken often when a mother is going through major sleep deprivation, that can impact on the way in which they are experienced.

Looking back Ann recognises that she had a “fear of not being valued” and the KIT Days did allow her to experience being “cared for” again. In retrospect she was glad she did not take more KIT Days as she might have found out earlier that her replacement was not covering the work and it would have brought her much more back into having to sort it out, which would have impacted the remainder of her maternity leave.

5.2 The retold story of Daisy

Daisy is a married, white, able-bodied, heterosexual forty-one-year-old senior employee in education. She has a son of two and a half. She works full-time, five days a week, the majority of which are from home. When she needs to commute, the journey takes approximately one and a half hours each way. Her son attends a nursery nearby to her home. She took all ten of her KIT Day allocations, part of a general policy at her company.

Daisy went on maternity leave and gave birth to her son approximately three weeks after leaving work. Daisy recalls that, when waiting to give birth, she had feelings of missing out, saying:

The days you are waiting to give birth, you've got this whole 'fear of missing out' but too tired to care about it ... then it's like 'bang! What just happened?' for a week and then you, kind of, go into "Oooo, not sure I like this", and then you start getting the feedback and then you're like ... yes, this actually is really nice ... could do this all the time and you, kind of, keep getting this little 'fear of missing out' and in particular with social media, with the LinkedIn stuff, thinking "all these people are doing amazing stuff and I'm just stuck at home" not like promoting my career or doing anything, kind of, from that perspective. So you, kind of, get this turmoil, I suppose, of like, "what's the new me? how do I kind of rebrand? think about me and who I am? (Daisy)

She says that she let her work know of his birth, describing that as "custom and practice". His birth coincided with a busy time at work, and so Daisy says that she was thinking about work a little bit, at that time but then didn't get in touch again with her workplace until the following year. Her boss had said:

I'm going to keep you posted with things, like structural things that might be of interest, but it is very much if you want to get in touch with me, I'm not, kind of, going to bother you too much when you are away. (Daisy's manager's words, as reported by Daisy)

That was an approach that suited Daisy, but then, as the new year arrived, she thought to herself "come January time you've got a new year, so I might get in touch".

Daisy did not opt for ten continuous KIT Days, she just decided at year end what she thought she could do, which was to be flexible. So, she just arranged a “ballpark” around when people would expect the information back, and worked her time around it, which she found to suit her well. When she spoke with her boss, there was a piece of work he wanted her view on. He was keen to look at the quality assurance of a particular kind of portfolio, and he wanted a really ‘deep dive’ report, using Daisy’s expertise and relationships. It was an attractive piece of work for her, and she thought “that really seems great”.

It would seem to be rare that someone gets such a substantial piece of work to be done in their KIT Days. When questioned, Daisy recognised that it’s partly down to her character, explaining that:

It’s a bit by design of who I am. I don’t want to be coming in ... like, “give me something to do” ...and then I can get my teeth into it, and it met a need of that time. I do feel like ... because I was outside the politics of the organisation, I was a bit naïve in taking it on, I hadn’t got that bit of my head ‘tuned in’ and it also felt a bit like I was being used to just score a few political points, but that’s just a bit of how the culture was at the time. Just, “that’s what it is”. So, I definitely felt like that, because having managed people on Mat Leave before, it’s been a bit like “you can’t do the job” so it has to be meaningful, like you need to have a purpose in what you’re doing, otherwise what is the point? It just feels a little bit you haven’t got quite a clear goal in mind and haven’t achieved anything. (Daisy)

When Daisy re-read her story, she was “amused” at herself for taking on the work, however, she could see that it was part of her character to step up. Saying it out loud made her feel a bit mean about criticising her boss and noted that she felt sensitive at the time, feeling so tired from a lack of sleep.

I noted my discomfort at this stage in the story, thinking of the nature of the KIT Days in the light of ambition, but also in a time period of substantial change in a mother’s life. Research, such as that of Daminger (2019), has shown that women internalise problems and responsibilities, in this case, Daisy taking on a project that, objectively, I can see carries immense personal career risk, that a manager

should not allocate without immense consideration of the downside implications. Yet, Daisy felt “mean”, indicating that she had taken at least partial responsibility for this project allocation.

Social and cultural scripts, driven by social norms, such as how to behave at work and how to interact with senior management can be exhibited in routinised, scripted behaviours (Eickers, 2023). For Daisy, a first-time mother, those social norms within a KIT Day, during a maternity leave, will be unknown, unless she has been versed in them beforehand. “Does one need to be saved from oneself on occasions?” and “should that not be a manager’s job?” crossed my mind, understanding more of the usual social norms. On reflection, Daisy realises that it was a hard choice, being so political in nature. She also relates it to her need to feel that she is adding value saying that:

It also gives you the sense that ‘I’ve earned my money; I’m adding that value. But I think it’s quite hard to work out a project or something else for someone to do? Which is probably why it wasn’t the best ... project (laughs) ... I don’t suppose, but how do you jump into it, because, for that one particularly, you have to be politically in-tune with what was going on in the organisation. (Daisy)

Daisy had some background about the report from before her maternity leave and thought that her objectivity would have even improved, with the “bit of space” she had from being away from the company on maternity leave. She arranged for her in-laws to contribute the odd occasional day when they could look after her son, allowing her to go out, go away from home, hold some meeting conversations, and do some work. Her family also would do the same, and they split it between the two sets of grandparents.

She got in touch with people in her company to almost interview them about where they had got to in their thoughts, regarding the way that the policies and processes were operating. Daisy sighed as she recalled writing up the draft report. In hindsight it was clearer why her boss had commissioned the report from her. He felt that he was being “fobbed off” by others in the company and had trusted Daisy to get to the truth. He wanted to know the facts. So, Daisy felt like she delivered a report that did that. The problem for Daisy was that there was some difficult reading for a few individuals in the company because it showed

that spending was well over-budget, and it had not been forecast. People were flagging that point to Daisy as an issue. People who were responsible for delivering the service, had all been worried about the situation, but they were being told not to worry about it by their seniors.

At this stage in the story, Daisy could feel herself “wince” as she remembered how the exercise was “blown out of all proportion” and a feeling of sadness how relationships soured afterwards. So, Daisy delivered that report, then she had a couple of really “horrible conversations” with people more senior than her in the organisation, who were saying “how dare you write this kind of report” and Daisy replied, “this is what I was asked to do, I was just giving you the facts”.

People were trying to convince Daisy that things should look different in the report than they were. Daisy stood her ground saying:

Well, by all means present a counterargument, but this is where it is and that’s, that’s my job (voice lifts), like that’s my job anyway, to make sure I look through the massaging of anything and make sure there’s the truth... how can the business move on, unless you understand the truth of the matter. (Daisy)

So that was “a bit uncomfortable” for her, she related. Someone who phoned was someone with whom Daisy had previously had a very good relationship. Daisy thought that relationship was built upon an understanding that she, Daisy, has a huge amount of integrity. However, the other party felt that the report was a bit of a slight on her. The reality was that people in that person’s team felt a bit relieved to get it off their chests and share how they were feeling.

Daisy’s boss used it as a kind of a ‘stick’ to beat the senior leadership team with whom he was involved. Daisy paused as she spoke and explained that she had felt uncomfortable, especially because she was still on maternity leave and not back in the organisation. As a result, she did spend some time worrying about it, thinking to herself “I’ve really upset people and I didn’t mean to, like I’ve been asked to do a job, I’ve delivered on it, and now I’ve, kind of, backed away”.

And then, in April 2020, the COVID-19 lockdown happened in the UK. Daisy knew her colleagues were going to be in (she emphasised) massive dire straits, and there were going to be some difficult discussions. Prompted by these

thoughts, Daisy reached out to her boss again and said “look, knowing all the people involved in the industry, let me know if you need any support”, and he said, “just be there in the background, there if we need” to which she replied, “I know it’s going to be hard and I’m not intending to do very full days, but I can be there as a bit of a sounding board”.

So, Daisy reached out to a colleague of hers, part of her team, just to give her a bit of guidance, on the vocational side of the business, but apart from that interaction, Daisy said with a nervous laugh, “I wasn’t really needed”.

I felt that nervous laughter was because Daisy was saying what I believe so many women fear when on maternity leave, that they will be displaced, that someone will discover they are not really needed after all. Whatever the confidence level the situation of being removed from the environment will tend to have an asymmetric, downward effect on confidence. When returning, Daisy recalls having to go through that ‘little separation thing’, saying:

You’re attached to that little person, twenty-four hours a day and just, kind of those ... I think it’s so healthy to then have that, kind of, moment, but it also gives you an insight into the logistics of the challenge... you have to find someone to have to come and look after them for a little while to be able to do that. Not everyone has that, kind of, capacity to do that. So that’s an ... an aspect to it. Also, you just have to change the gear in your brain, don’t you, when you get into work-mode. Like having conversations with people at work who are actually going a hundred miles an hour when you are having a chat with them, you’re just not there. You’re slower ... you speak slower ... you still have ‘brain fog’ ... you’re trying to have a conversation with them, and I found that people are more interested in talking about babies with you, when you’re “I want to talk about work!”. So, finding that connection point, was quite interesting ‘cos when you come back, it, kind of, helps you a bit that people are interested in you and your work and your life and how the little one’s coming on, and you have to get comfortable talking about that a little bit as well, with people who are work colleagues. I had, very much, a separation of home and work, and suddenly it starts to blend, but then I did find that suddenly you become part of a ‘club’ you didn’t know about. Particularly because of the

pandemic, people are having their kids on their Zoom, and whatnot, you just felt that, like, you were suddenly part of this 'club' that people were like "yeah, yeah, I'm just going down to the nursery". It did open that up, so the Keeping in Touch Days helped to start, kind of, to form in my mind that was part of my conversation a little bit at work. (Daisy)

Daisy describes so well that transition to being seen as a working mother and the start of the phase of being back at work. Feeling like others are speaking at "a hundred miles an hour", and realising that people are also speaking to you differently. Daisy noted that the KIT Days were the first introduction to how the new mother might be treated at work, and that a change in treatment could be unexpected. That there could be an opportunity to explicitly warn a new mother about it during the KIT Days, is what was crossing my mind at this stage in the story.

Daisy phased back into work. When she returned in May 2020, she was without nursery cover due to the lockdown. That delayed Daisy getting back full-time which she did in July 2020. Daisy recalled when telling her story, that she was "stressed out" about going back to work and that she felt that she had "really upset people". By the second to third week, she was asking herself "do I really want to be here?". She felt "attached" to her baby and "tearful". In hindsight she wishes that "she wasn't too busy to rush back". It was quite an awakening. Daisy described it, with some laughter, as:

I'd, kind of, walked back into an organisation where I felt like everyone had 'lost the plot' a little bit. It wasn't just the working from home, it was that we were having to redesign a whole system, under a huge amount of pressure and external scrutiny. So, my boss had not got the bandwidth to understand, you know, to unpick decisions that were being made and I, actually I, kind of, knew what was going to happen in 2020 would happen, erm ... because I knew the people that were involved in the conversation, but it wasn't the right place then to, kind of, just start undoing discussions that I hadn't been part of, so I just had to work out what my role therefore should be in all of this, and alongside this ... Nigel, the individual who called me up, ... I'd lost her trust, 'cos I'd, in her mind, kind of, gone against her. (Daisy)

The person, Nigel, had turned a little bit “nuts” at that point, being really antagonistic and defensive, but also passive aggressive in a lot of the conversations. For Daisy, she had suddenly gone back into this culture that she questioned, thinking “what’s my role in this?”.

Again, I felt that fear creeping out that many new mothers have voiced. Being edged out by, often, well-meaning people who think they are doing the mother a favour by covering their work while they are away; often oblivious to the fear that really good coverage can create in the maternity-leave mother.

Daisy said that she had clearly upset people, but then they had moved on, so she had not quite made the connection as to why she had upset people. Daisy found it quite difficult going back. She laughed when she recalled how was asked to do “bits of stuff”, that she had no idea about. She could sit and defend that work, but equally there were many problems to solve, and everyone was at a real pressure point so people were saying “be kind to yourself, take your time”. However, and ironically, those same people were not taking the time to just explain how things were. It was so fast paced.

On one particular key day in August 2020, Daisy had to explain a situation to stakeholders without her having been party to any of the discussions and decisions. It was just a really difficult time for her to come back into the work. She reflected on the KIT Days, thinking that, if only she had not had to do that piece of work, maybe the relationships would have been a bit different ... as a situation, it took her quite a while, probably, six to eight months to really be able to say, “if that’s the way people want to behave and how the culture’s become, I’m just going to work my way through this”.

Daisy recalls that during her KIT Days, she was getting glimpses into what that her return and future could be like. They helped her to reorientate relative to her “new identity” and she was thinking:

Ok, the more exposure I get, the more, kind of, reference points I have to who I am, particularly for my experience with that whole strange, horrendous journey... “is this the culture I want to be working in, is that how it's become does, is that who I want to be” or “I didn’t like it before I

left, these are the aspects I did like, or didn't like, is the journey I want to be on?" (Daisy)

It was dissatisfactory to Daisy because, on maternity leave, she had been doing lots of "soul-searching" of what I wanted her future career to look like, and suddenly, the people that would have been the agents, allowing her to progress had, in Daisy's words, "slammed it all down".

It took her quite a while to recover, not just from a confidence perspective, but more "whoa, I thought I was on this one direction of travel and now I'm going to have to really dramatically rethink but, equally, I know I don't want to do the job that I'm doing". Daisy explained more "because it's the kind of job that you'd 'die in' basically". She was wondering "OK, so what does that [future] look like?"

She was having to do some real thinking and it is only, now with a couple of years' grace, and some good mentorship and challenge, that she is emerging from the ordeal. The brilliant woman (with whom Daisy thought she had ruined their relationship) challenged her in the right ways allowing Daisy to "close that loop". In the last six months, Daisy has started to grow her confidence again. She is doing the kind of work she is interested in. She has a real secure footing on who she is and what she's about and feels that she has had to go through that kind of journey, to get to where she is today.

I got a sense of a dip in confidence upon Daisy's return, the root of which seems to be best placed squarely at the decision to do the political project on KIT Days. Because of whom Daisy is, as a person, she has had the resilience to "weather that storm" but it might have seriously derailed some mothers' careers. This story stands out amongst the mothers, therefore, as being a situation in which the mother was particularly over-burdened by the task and given a wholly inappropriate task for a series of KIT Days. It turned out fine on this occasion, but her story is a wake-up call for managers in how to structure and design KIT Days.

In retelling her story, Daisy thinks that the KIT Days were very task-oriented and was no discussion around her feelings. Although she did not have a pre-conception that feelings would be on the agenda, in hindsight, she sees the imbalance of pure, mechanical talk of work deliverables versus an interest in how

she was adjusting to her return. Mother-to-mother discussions were Daisy's idea of improving that balance, and the use of mentoring groups that matched mothers together. Daisy reflected that the project was a "catastrophic move" and asked herself "why didn't I expect more? Why didn't I ask?". What she would tell herself now is "be kind to yourself". She would also advocate some "external validation". For example, being part of external bodies that help you to not "put all your eggs in one basket".

In hindsight, Daisy would see her KIT Day content choice, as hard as it was, as adding something to her career, saying:

It just makes you tougher, doesn't it? In that realm. I don't think I would have coped as well, if they said, "just put it on your timesheet". I think I might have gone "yeah, that's brilliant, just getting money for doing nothing, but I enjoyed testing out leaving BB with someone else. If I hadn't had that, I would have found him going to nursery even much harder. So, putting me in a position ... it reminded me of myself. I remember feeling at the time, going through it, just the physical aspect of leaving, going down, having a sandwich, you know, it reminded me of who I am, and I found the first few months of, post-birth, just really boring (laughs). Because I'm a bit of a 'doer'. So I felt that, having a little sense of, there are some other things other than just sitting (sighs), and doing baby-sensory classes (laughs), just really ... it was a good reminder, but it was enough in a day that, to manage. So that's why it was important to me. (Daisy)

In terms of finding herself as part of a 'new club' of working parents, Daisy has enjoyed that part, saying:

It was brilliant and you, kind of, have an instant connection then with people. I do find that it took us quite a while to get to the point of having BB so there was this real sense of ... like ... there were definitely people in the company that don't have kids, and people who have kids, are in the ranges of 40 or 50 now, so I am very aware of how that could take-over the conversation, when they're not in that place and they may have wanted to have kids, but haven't had the opportunity, some people just

don't want them, so not being part of that 'club' starts to ... it really used to really grate on me. But it's a different one, a different way, a support network. (Daisy)

Daisy spoke of "scaffolding", approaches that gave her a bit of structure, a "framework". It provided boundaries and she described it as "a safe space". Infrastructure around her such that she would know who to go to, or who to go to give her emotional support. So, that scaffolding was not about work. She would say of her boss, who has no children, that he found emotional situations difficult, saying:

I always say my boss has got a very lack of emotional intelligence ... he's not typically brilliant at, like, the emotional kind of stuff, (laughs) and I mean, maternity stuff, so emotionally (laughs) and particularly the hormone kind of stuff... understanding that and the emotions you're going to go through, you, kind of, need that 'emotional scaffolding'. And then there's the kind of (pause) actual logistics structure. I'm very much an individual that's really comfortable in ambiguity like I'll make it up as I go along, I'll work it out, and that's fine, but I know that I've got people I work with very closely who have to know 'on this day, this is going to happen' and, without it, they start going into a bit of a spin, tailspin. And probably both is really important to be able to know that, like, how you're going to get that money in the bank, at that point in time. That actually, I kind of trust that it's going to happen, but it's useful to know that those kind of, like, 'Maslow stuff' is there in the background, and for some people that's more of a priority than for others. For me, the emotional stuff at work, is hugely important. And that kind of 'logistic stuff' isn't but that probably tips the balance in different ways for different people. (Daisy)

Daisy would see herself as a type who could cope regardless of the boss that she had at the time. She noted that how she handled the difficult political project during KIT Days might not be possible for all returning mothers. I think that is exactly where the psychotherapeutic products from this research will help. What Daisy has done for herself might not be available naturally to all, depending on personality type and circumstances, but the right psychotherapeutic training and

awareness could make that resilience more available. In discussing this potential with Daisy she said:

We do this at work, we've done this. I can't remember what it's called. But where you, kind of, understand a bit more about you and your personality and raising your self-awareness, of how you react and therefore matched to that. You get a kind of, "well, actually, how am I going to react to that situation?" And it's, kind of, instinctive some people are just brilliant anyway, they just flex their styles and they kind of go "okay, I can see well, that's really important to you. So I'm going to make sure that you get this satisfied" and actually as an individual, you can take a little bit more ownership of that if you're just a bit more self-aware of that. You can be a bit more demanding of people, you can say "actually, these are my Keeping in Touch Days, and this is what I want from them". (Daisy)

Daisy added:

If you're not aware, as a manager, of that individual, the kind of personality you've got, going on maternity leave, and you can see that these things are probably the most important things that you want to think about. And this is how we can work together on it. It provides a good kind of structure. So, what is what is possible? Because equally you could turn around and say, "I don't want to use any of it". I'm going to turn up on 'day dot'. And then you're going to still go through all of those emotions. Yes. It's all just (laughs) going to be coming at you! (Daisy)

It seems like Daisy had a dip in confidence from which she has recovered and gone beyond, higher in confidence than before due to knowing her ability to thrive at work and at home. When asked why that occurred, she said:

I wonder if it's just the 'scaffolding' around me or whether everyone has that kind of 'new you' moment or whether it's just a bit of who I am, bit of the experiences I have been exposed to, you know, I don't know. (Daisy)

She remarked upon the impact of two senior women upon her, saying:

I definitely found ... there's two senior women who have children, they're probably 10 to 15 so they've gone through it, they're that further ahead and with their wisdom they're able to just challenge my thinking and I

found, because they're authentic leaders as well, they're not just these 'powerhouses' ... erm ... they challenged my thinking. I guess it's ok to be thinking differently in how you are, and whatnot. I definitely think that's had a massive impact in my confidence, my ability to think like I am now. (Daisy)

The impact on Daisy of the input of senior people, and these women, is striking in building her confidence. Also too has been the expansion of her external contacts and the validation they bring, Daisy said:

Through the work that I have been doing in the past year, I've been working ... I've had opportunities to do external ... like actual work, not just mentoring so, where I was having maybe some of the experiences internally that was, kind of, leaving me to question my leadership in my role and how I was being, I've had validation externally that just a 'moment in time' ... like, it's for the person I'm working with, it's not a reflection on me and I can start to put that into perspective. So, that external validation, almost, of who you are and what you're doing, gives you a sense of ... it's stepping outside of the internal way of mindset and 'group think' to a way of being and you've got someone to say (voice rises) "you're fine, you're good, yeah, keep going, crack on, ignore them, they don't know what they're talking about", that kind of stuff. It's the kind of stuff your friends would do but you're just bad to yourself, you're, kind of, dragging yourself down. (Daisy)

Now that Daisy is in her early forties, one of her experienced colleagues and a friend who does not have kids, and is in talent management said to Daisy:

You know, by the time you're 45, that's when you really rocket in your career or you start to, kind of, plateau and so how you use these years is really important ... be strategic about that because you can make a massive difference in life or not, depending on what you want. (Daisy)

That made Daisy consider her future career. She describes her emotions as almost "grieving" for the career she had, and then, not dwelling too much on that, to start to, at a point after returning to work out what her career can now be, and what the opportunities could be. She concluded by saying:

Actually, I'm not the same person I was, I'm a different person but actually improved. I think that takes a long time actually. I would say it probably takes a year to two years afterwards before we really settle down but it's not just you ... and I had this good conversation with a lady at work, who has a couple of kids, she's in a really senior position, and she was mentoring me in the thing I was most interested in. And I said, about my boss, "I'm just not the person I was when I left ... he can't see it ... he just can't see that I'm not that person there's bits of me ... but there's also bits of me that are gone and changed for the better" (laughs). I think. I care less about politics at work that I did when I was there, because I don't have the time. Got more important things, better priorities, so, yeah, I do think that there is that kind of "you're grieving who you were", you're working out how to live with how you've now grown and then you, kind of, then you come back, and you hit another ... it, kind of, feels like you're knocked back again. You, kind of, go back into work thinking "Oh, I've got this mastered", this is how it is going to be, a little bit of sunshine for a couple of weeks and then "whoa, this is actually hard work" and not only logistics, do you have to make it work but then it's almost, like, you come out and think ... but I think I've definitely, over the past six months got to the point where "this is the new me. I understand myself and this is where I am going now and it's a totally new form of confidence that I don't think I would have had before maternity leave, no matter what experience I'd had. (Daisy)

As Daisy reread her story out loud, she noted an article that she had recently read, about maternity leave. She described it as a "warts and all" account that "resonated" with her. After reading it, she said that she "didn't feel bad, just normal". It reminded me that normalisation plays a large part in psychotherapeutic processes, and there might be useful insights from Daisy's account in that regard. As Daisy reflected on her KIT Days, she said that she still rather "liked the boss's approach" however felt "a bit sad" that the political issues were going on, knew it not to be malicious however felt "exposed" by her boss's project for her, and "a bit betrayed" in a way. She recognised, in retelling her

story that she was “right to feel a bit low” and has turned any “anger” that she had into “proving them wrong” instead.

In conclusion, I would describe Daisy’s experience of KIT Days as her experiencing an overbearing, overdemanding and clearly inappropriate and disproportionate use of KIT Days. She was given a difficult and political project. It would have been hard even if she had been back in the organisation, but to have to publish it and then step back into maternity leave was a difficult way in which to experience KIT Days, without the ability to be around in the organisation to deal with the aftermath of the report.

It has worked out fine in the end for Daisy, but that has been helped by strong support by senior women and particularly by Daisy’s mental resilience. It could have been a different outcome without her personality strength. I am struck by the freedom of the KIT Days allowing a manager to devise whatever work they wish to for those Days. This method, for Daisy, of using them is at the upper end of difficulty and risk. Although Daisy did not want something totally without challenge, the appropriateness of the project allocated did not seem to truly fit with an optimal use of KIT Days, given that Daisy had to recover from being the driver of the report emanating from the project. Daisy’s story has left me wondering if women might feel the need to say ‘yes’ to whatever is proposed for KIT Days, feeling that they need to prove their value. While I feel that Daisy would have been able to turn down the project, she recognised in hindsight that it was a tough request of her. She sees her recovery from it as having made her stronger, however, so a positive message on which to end the story.

As Daisy concluded the retelling of her story, she reflected that she felt now like “a more rounded person”. The experience had “softened me” she said. Although somewhat “grieving” at one time for her career as was, she now felt that she had “a lot of strings to my bow”.

5.3 The retold story of Dr Mama

Dr Mama is a 37-year-old academic. She is cohabiting with a partner and has two children of seventeen months and seven years. She works for two and a half days a week and can work from home all except one of those days when she is teaching. However, she often goes to the campus more often, just because she works better in her work environment. It takes her about one hour to commute. When she is working, her son goes to a child minder, and her daughter is in school. Outside of that, she has the support of her partner's parents who will step in and babysit.

Dr Mama found out that she was pregnant around the time of the first COVID-19 lockdown. The guidance published was to stay at home if you were pregnant, and that was when Dr Mama was twelve weeks' pregnant, and so she emailed her manager to tell him. She noted "yes, so this guidance has come out saying if you're pregnant, don't go to work and by the way, I'm pregnant, so I can't come to work".

As a result, she did not actually see any of her colleagues from the point that she was twelve weeks' pregnant. Consequently, most of her colleagues didn't even realize she was pregnant because they were not seeing her physically. They were in regular contact with her, but it was not like she was bumping into people, and they could see her "growing bump". So it was an odd time for her, because, as she noted, "nobody really knew that I was pregnant because nobody saw me".

In retelling her story, Dr Mama recalled that it was a "weird time" emotionally for her. She did not enjoy the feeling of being pregnant, but it was especially hard because no-one could celebrate her being pregnant. It became just "something that was happening". She described the COVID-19 time as a "sad time to become pregnant". Her morning sickness she described in the retelling of her story as "gross" and so working from home became very useful during that time. Before she went on maternity leave, Dr Mama felt "anxious" and "stressed out". She took control of initiating conversations about KIT Days and how to claim them, her natural pro-activity coming to the fore.

Dr Mama took five or six KIT Days, she cannot remember exactly, and that is in part, I believe, because of how the KIT Days became really an "accounting

mechanism” rather than defined KIT Days. Dr Mama knew of the availability of KIT Days through her maternity leave documentation. No one, including her manager, had raised them to her attention or suggested that she should use them. The number taken by Dr Mama fell short of the full quota of ten KIT Days. When questioned why she did not take them all, it revealed a difference in working in academia versus a company job. Dr Mama said:

I guess mostly because I think in academia KIT Days work differently (laughs). I mean in other organisations KIT Days are, kind of, branded as these opportunities to, you know, keep in touch with colleagues, to keep up to date with any kind of organizational change, that kind of thing. Whereas as an academic, or at least in my experience, as an academic my KIT Days were basically for just doing work that needed to be done whilst I was on maternity leave (laughs). And so they weren't necessarily for attending a staff meeting, or for catching up with colleagues. They were for going and presenting at a conference or getting a paper written that needed to be written. Those kinds of things. So, yeah, and the way that we claim them so we just have like a sheet to fill in that would just get sent off to HR whenever we added something to it. So it's not like I needed approval from my manager to actually take my KIT Days. It was just, kind, of like claiming them whenever and as a result of that I kind of felt a bit bad (laughs). It would be like, “oh, yeah, so I looked at my emails for an hour today. So, I'm just going to claim a full day's KIT Day”, which you ordinarily might not do if working for a different organization, but I checked my emails on a daily basis throughout my maternity leave, because certain things have to be ... kept on top of. And so yeah, so I think only claimed for five or six of them. (Dr Mama)

That was a very different approach to stories I had been hearing within companies. I had a sense of Dr Mama never actually disengaging from work fully to be on maternity leave, and the KIT Days being an administrative way of getting some recompense for never actually switching off from the role and constantly checking emails plus other work. This mother stayed almost fully engaged throughout the maternity leave in terms of accountability. Dr Mama said:

It's not the kind of job (laughs) where, when you go off on maternity leave, or you go off on sick leave, somebody takes over for you, and everything stops for a while. Everything carries on and I guess there's stuff that you don't pick up while you're on maternity leave, that's just waiting for you, when you get back. It's just sort of an extra pile up of more to deal with. And also, a lot of the tasks that I did whilst I was on maternity leave, those are the career building tasks. So the kinds of things that you need to keep going to make sure that your career progresses. So the only thing really that's covered, or at least for me that was properly covered whilst I was on maternity leave was my teaching, because obviously, I couldn't be in the university during my teaching. But all my research related activity kind of carried on so, you know, organizations that I was working with, were aware of the fact that I was on maternity leave. And obviously, I had certain colleagues who sort of took over the lead role for that. But in the background, there was always something for me to just keep up to date with, just to make sure that my projects were going ahead smoothly. And in addition to that, I've got a number of PhD students, several of whom were in the process of writing up their thesis and getting ready to finish. And again, you know, I can't, it's important for them to finish in a timely basis, they can't wait for me to finish my maternity leave to finish doing their PhD. And whilst there were other staff members there to support them, where I was the lead supervisor in the PhD, it's important that that contact continued. (Dr Mama)

In retelling her story, Dr Mama regrets not taking all of her KIT Days as she worked far more than the allowance. She describes her "frustration" that her job is a career, not something one can put down and therefore she was engaged all through her maternity leave, so a full allowance was really the least that she should have claimed. She termed it "the beast that cannot be shut away" and contrasted that aspect with the fact that she wants to "be present" with her children. Dr Mama spoke of her guilty feelings at that pull between the two competing parts of her world.

If we examine Dr Mama's "bits of KIT Days" they would involve, in Dr Mama's words:

Checking emails on a... usually around a daily basis, just to make sure if anything did crop up that I attended to it, you know, I still held fairly regular meetings with my PhD students or may not have attended every one of the meetings that they have with their supervisory team, but I, you know, tried to attend as many as possible. And, and in terms of, you know, publications and conferences, I carried on with my writing, I ... you know, where I was invited to talk at international conferences, I kept up with those, as well. And obviously, it was COVID-19, so I was able to do them online, I didn't have to go travelling anywhere. So, you know, there was always an element of my work carrying on in the background whilst I was on maternity leave, and there weren't specific Days where I was like, "right today is going to be a KIT Day and I'm going to do some work today". It was just sort of like, very ad hoc as I went through. And so I would just claim, like, where I felt that I'd done a sufficient amount of work I'd, sort of, claim for a day even if that work had been spread out over a week. So yes, so I guess my KIT Days didn't really function in the same way that a usual KIT Day would be, which is where you find childcare and you go to work for the day, and you sit in the staff meeting and check some emails and then go home. There's just sort of this bubbling in the background or work that needs to be done whilst you're on maternity leave that you do, and then you just sort of put in a claim for your KIT Days, so you get a bit of extra money for it (laughs). While you're not being paid to actually do the work. (Dr Mama)

Even when talking of her previous KIT Day experience with her older child, and at a different university, the theme of it being left solely to her to handle, was the same for Dr Mama:

I have to say that, you know, when I went on maternity leave both times I kind of just felt a bit ...'left to it', to be honest. With my most recent maternity leave, my manager, despite signing off on that paperwork, sort of month or so before I went on maternity leave, I had a meeting with him in relation to an unrelated matter, it wasn't to do with my maternity leave. And I said to him, "oh, well, you know, because I'm going on maternity leave next month. Anyway, it makes sense for this member of staff to take

over what I'm doing in this role". And he was like, "you're going on maternity leave?" (laughs). And I was, like "yes, you did sign off my paperwork? (laughs). And then he was all very flustered, like, "oh, well, you know, there's just so many so many people going on with maternity leave at the moment". And he was, yeah, he tried to sort of backtrack a bit. (Dr Mama)

I was struck by how KIT Days have become for Dr Mama a way to budget time and money. They are not to do with reintroducing her to the workplace at all because psychologically one could say that she has never left. In retelling her story, Dr Mama noted that she was a "bit annoyed" that options were not made apparent to her.

Because Dr Mama and her manager did not have a lot of day-to-day contact, she noted that her manager "just lets us get on with what we're doing. And as long as we're doing our jobs, and he's quite happy, there's no need for us to have day-to-day interaction with him".

I was struck by the lack of managerial attention to detail and lack of oversight in Dr Mama's case but was reminded why there was that managerial latitude. As the academic mother is driving forward her own career, the manager's role becomes more administrative. Dr Mama explained:

I guess, being an academic, you're... it's, in many ways, a bit of a lonely existence, because a lot of the work that you do is very self-directed. And it's, you know, other than your teaching, which is sort of driven by other means, the rest of your career is directed by what you're doing and what you want to do. And, you know, the funding that you're able to generate, and so on. And so you work, you work with other colleagues in doing all that stuff, but it is very much about you [emphasised]. (Dr Mama)

In terms of the range of self-reliance, I noted that this was possibly one of the most extreme cases of KIT Day content. Dr Mama compared her experience with what she thought happened in other organisations, saying:

I'm sure in other organizations, they're used in a much more structured manner where you're actually keeping in touch with colleagues or whatever it might be; for me, it was just literally doing work that had to be

done. Couldn't leave it, because other people relied on me to do that work so that they could do whatever they needed to do. And so, yeah, I don't know if it might function differently for others, but at least in my experience, in my role you don't really go on off on maternity leave. You go on teaching leave. (Dr Mama)

When Dr Mama was on maternity leave, she wanted to get approval of her first KIT Day, and she was not too sure on the process. So, she emailed her HR person. She did not email her manager, because he likely would have just directed her to the HR person anyway. The email was of the nature "I want to claim for KIT Day. How do I go about doing that?" The response was "whenever you want to claim a KIT Day, fill in this form and send it to me".

In terms of sign-off by her manager, Dr Mama was told:

Well, as long as you're doing, you know, whatever you're doing is in line with what you would reasonably be expected to do workwise, then, you know, he obviously signs everything off in the end, but you don't need to email them every time. (Dr Mama, retelling her manager's words)

So, Dr Mama would conclude that it was all rather informal or unstructured. In many ways, Dr Mama would have preferred there to have been more of a process to it. She felt:

Left to my own devices and, as a result of that, I wasn't sure what, or how much, work warranted claiming a KIT Day. So you know, "do I claim a KIT Day if I'm spending an hour checking emails?" Or "do I only claim a KIT Day because I, you know, put time aside to meet with a PhD student in, you know, a more formal manner"? And so I think a bit more clarity on like, what I could claim KIT Days for would have definitely helped. And maybe just more contact from the... sort of, senior management, I guess, while I was on maternity leave potentially inviting me to staff meetings, or whatever it might be, may have been useful. But on the most part, I was just kind of left to it. Like, even on my return to work, I was the one who, sort of, initiated those conversations with, you know, with management and with colleagues, like "also, I'm returning next month, so it'd be really

helpful to know what teaching I'm going to be doing" or that kind of thing. It felt very driven by me, as opposed to driven by management. (Dr Mama)

I was struck at this point with just how lacking in employer guidance Dr Mama's situation has been. She has asked for so little in terms of help but even the basics are missing for her. Dr Mama considered how preparing for her return, including the use of KIT Days, might have been improved. She suggested:

Some kind of, like, reintegration mentorship scheme [would have helped]. Obviously, you know, I was on maternity leave through a pandemic, and as a result of that, there were a lot of changes in terms of how things ran at the university. And if ... if I didn't pre-emptively ask, "what courses there were to attend", to bring myself up to speed with online learning, for example, or, you know, seek out people to answer the questions I had with regards to how things had changed. I don't think anybody would have ever told me (laughs). And so, yeah, like, I think if that if there were some, kind of, was some kind of reintegration mentorship scheme for, you know, mums returning to work after maternity leave in any organization, I think ... I think that will be of benefit because things do change, you know, over the course of a year or, you know, however many months you're away on maternity leave, and the staff changeover and your policies change and shift. And sometimes, at least for me, it kind of feels like when ... when you return from maternity leave, like there's been all this forward momentum, but you stayed back where you were when you went on maternity leave. And so it's really difficult to try and adjust your thinking because not only have you had a year off actually thinking about work properly, but you've also had a year of all this change and momentum and stuff happening that you've just not been a party to. And you're almost expected to just fit back in as if you've been doing it for the last year (laughs). I mean, in academia, not a lot does change but during the pandemic, a lot did change. And I think some sort of forward planning in relation to that. I just felt a bit adrift, I guess. And I guess, you know, I probably felt quite similar after my first and we didn't have a global pandemic. And I think part of the issue really is in academia, people's workloads are absolutely crazy. And nobody has time to think about a

colleague returning from maternity leave, because they've got all their own stuff to be dealing with. And it's like an additional job that I guess, unless you're prompted to think about, just wouldn't even ... it wouldn't even come to mind. (Dr Mama)

When returning to work, Dr Mama does not recall feeling “super elated” at going back to work. She describes her return as:

I kind of returned with trepidation. I was really anxious about it, in part because in the year before I went on maternity leave, my work was so incredibly stressful, that the thought of returning to that was just like I just, ... I just didn't want to go back to be honest. Which prompted my decision to reduce my hours to two and a half days because the thought of ... so I mean, I was part time anyway, before that I was four days a week, but in academia, working four days a week is basically working full time and maybe get a day at the weekend. (Dr Mama)

Dr Mama reduced her hours to two and a half days. She noted her motivation as being:

In part, I mean, obviously, I want to spend time with my son. But in part also, because I was feeling so anxious about the thought of going back into my job. And so erm ... I mean, obviously it was it was really nice to be able to see and catch up with colleagues and stuff. And it's, you know, it feels nice to be using my brain again for things other than maths homework and things to do with a toddler. (Dr Mama)

In retelling her story, Dr Mama spoke of her fear at being considered a “rubbish academic” because, although she wants to progress, she feels the pull of imposter syndrome and worries that someone will realise that she feels the need to keep a separate life with her children. She described the need to be “steely” in keeping her role and having tried a shorter working week, is now returning to the four-day week that she had before. Dr Mama was anxious about the return and felt that she was being drawn away from her children:

I think my... my main feeling surrounding my return to work was just anxiety, I just felt really, really anxious about it. And I have massive ups and downs now. I mean, obviously I feel a general sense of loss, I would

love to be able to spend all of my time with my son. And I don't know, I might be fairly unusual in that regard. And a lot of the mums I talk to you, they can't wait to get away from their kids. Whereas I genuinely, genuinely love spending time with my children. And it sort of breaks my heart a little that half of the week. Somebody else, you know, is looking after him. (quietly) And I feel like that's kind of my job. (Dr Mama)

Dr Mama can see the upside of being back at work too. However, the anxiety persists:

I'm definitely relishing the challenge and I'm you know, enjoying the... you know, getting back to doing my research and thinking about things like that. But generally speaking, my feelings around work are those of, like, feeling a bit anxious and a bit stressed out. Even though I'm part time now my big anxiety is the fact that I've still got all this work to do, but I've given myself half the amount of time to do it (laughs). (Dr Mama)

It is nigh on impossible to do half a job in academia and so Dr Mama has set herself a task potentially that will cause anxiety on an ongoing basis. She carried anxiety into her maternity leave saying:

I built up quite a lot in my mind and part of the reason why I was so stressed out before I went on maternity leave is because I had a big research project which that the organization, that was funding it, was just very, very demanding. So that definitely contributed to my stress levels. (Dr Mama)

Returning to work relieved her anxiety to a degree. She said:

I probably don't feel as anxious about work now compared to how I felt just before I returned, after my maternity leave. And I yeah, I think I built it up a lot in my mind that I was going to go back and feel the same way that I did before I went on maternity leave. (Dr Mama)

When she speaks of how she is coping now, she says:

I have my sort of ups and downs. I guess anybody in a job does where you know, you have periods of pressure where you feel a bit stressed out and then other times, where like, it, sort of, mellows out a bit. (Dr Mama)

When I enquired about any recommendations that Dr Mama has for KIT Days, she shared:

I guess, making clear what the expectations are for the return to work. And I mean, that's still one of my big issues. So, I've got my performance review coming up next month, and obviously, I'm ... you know, I work two and a half days, and I don't know whether I'm still measured on the same criteria as somebody who works full time, because that's not made clear to me as a part time worker. And so I don't know if I should be achieving the same, you know, level of output as somebody who works five days a week when I'm only working two and a half days a week. And, like I said, that's just not ... that's not made clear. So it's really difficult to manage your own and other's expectations when you don't know what those expectations or where you should be pitching yourself. (Dr Mama)

Dr Mama thinks that expectation management is key, saying:

I expected to go back to work and still be, you know, applying for massive funding rounds, which are going to take up the majority of my time, but then in addition to that carry on teaching all of the stuff that I'm teaching and doing all the marking on top of that, and how am I going to fit all of this in? As well as having (laughs), you know, time to spend with my children? So yeah, I think, you know, some kind of expectation management would be really useful in knowing what it is that you're going back to, I think. (Dr Mama)

Expectation management goes beyond the role though. A new mother might require her expectations managing for life in general. Dr Mama noted:

I think one of the biggest struggles for women who are working, working parents, is juggling, work life balance, you know, finding the time to fit in, getting the food shopping, or, you know, making healthy nutritious meals for your children, and, you know, planning, fun things to do with them on top of, you know, doing your actual job, and, you know, the additional demands that come with that, and general life admin, you know, budgeting and so on, because obviously, having children is an additional expense, it's quite expensive. I think there's, you know, there's, there's an awful lot

that, you know, shouldn't necessarily come as a surprise, because I think when you have kids, you sort of prepare yourself for those kinds of things, but actually, how difficult it can sometimes be to do all that, because you're essentially going from, you know, a full time worker in an organization to a full time parent and a full time worker in an organization, and, you know, a life administrator, and your child's personal assistant, and, you know, social director, you take on all of these multitude of roles. And I think, you know, a lot of organizations may be taken as a given that it's pretty easy, because everybody has kids, and they've always had children, but actually, it is very demanding, it is very, very challenging to try and do all of that. (Dr Mama)

Dr Mama sees those life challenges as being an extra layer of stress for a parent and particularly mums. She said in what she described as her "little rant":

Because I think mums take on the majority of the burden, in relation to childcare. And I know, you know, if I look at myself and my partner, you know, I... I do basically, all of the childcare, you know, I make sure that ... so for example, this afternoon, I'm finishing work early, so that I can take my daughter swimming. And then I've also got to somehow between finishing work and picking her up and taking her swimming, also do the food shop, whereas my partner is just doing his usual working day. And so all of these things happen that he doesn't realize happen because I have to make sacrifices. And I don't think we're in an unusual situation. I think that's fairly commonplace where the woman does all of this stuff in the background that doesn't really get noticed. You know, the 'magic food fairy' puts the food in the fridge (laughs) and cooks the dinner. And, you know, the child's sort of 'social fairy' makes sure that all the playdates are dealt with the, you know, the classes are paid for, and so on. And, you know, if I asked my partner, he probably couldn't even tell you what days my child has certain activities, because he didn't deal with any of that. And like I said, I don't, I don't think that's unusual. And so I don't know, maybe ...maybe part of that preparation isn't just for organizations, but also for partners to, you know, recognize how challenging is, you know, they see mums on maternity leave "oh well, you get year off work" and I don't get

that". And it's not a year off work. It's a year of raising a small child, which (laughs) is really, really hard. And then the... you know, you go back to work, and it's not just going back to work as normal, it's going back to work with these additional jobs. But you have to keep, sort of, ongoing whilst you're doing your actual job to make sure that you can pay the bills. (Dr Mama)

When asked about possible splitting of parental leave, Dr Mama noted:

You can do you can do sort of split maternity leave when you do, sort of, half and then your partner takes over and you go back to work early. And they do half. And we've ... we've never done that, in part because (laughs) I don't think it's very fair. "I've grown the baby. I'm breastfeeding the baby. You can't do any of that stuff. Okay, off you go to work. And I will take my break" (laughs). (Dr Mama)

I wondered whether the ability to work from home for KIT Days was an advantage. Dr Mama used a good example:

I think there were a couple of instances where we had meetings, they weren't on campus, but we went to, like, we met outside in a park or whatever, for like an informal lunch. And I just took the children with me. My kids, they come everywhere with me. My daughter came to work to the office with me last week, because she was on half-term, and we didn't have childcare. (Dr Mama)

Dr Mama's testimony as to her KIT Day usage was a real eye-opener. It was an alternative that I had not envisaged. So free to be used that they were not actually reintroduction to work type KIT Days but, instead, aggregation accounting points to ensure that the mother received some pay. Despite having total freedom around them, and certainly working more than ten KIT Days in her maternity leave, I was curious why Dr Mama had not claimed all that she was due. She explained her strategy that had not quite worked:

I did think about it from a fairly strategic point of view, knowing that, you know, I was going to be doing work throughout and it's better to just claim for that work. Later on down the line when I'm not getting any money anyway. (Dr Mama)

She added:

From the start, I had, like, a strategy about my KIT Days, I was. like, “okay, so I get paid this much for these many months and then it goes down to the minimum, my statutory maternity pay was a pittance and so I use a couple there, and then I'll save the rest for when I'm not getting any pay at all for the last three months, of my maternity leave, and that's where I'll put in the bulk of my KIT Days”. I guess like the time just went by really fast. And then it got to a point where I was like, “oh, well, I'm back to work next week and I've still got these Days to claim” and so it wasn't that I intentionally didn't claim them. It's just that my strategy faltered a little bit (laughs). (Dr Mama)

In conclusion, Dr Mama had shown me a different example of KIT Day usage, one in which she had to find her own way, through lack of information, fitting work into a semblance of what her manager might think constituted a KIT Day. She had been the driver of the KIT Days throughout that experience, from finding out about them, to finding out how to claim them, to devising a method for aggregating hours towards them. She had not been managed in how to use them and that was in line with academia and its need for self-reliance. Although she did appreciate that she did not have to go and seek approval from anybody to claim them, Dr Mama would have welcomed some more structure saying:

A bit more clarity in terms of the process of the KIT Days, you would have been useful. It was quite nice to, sort of, to be like, “okay, so I've done, you know, this many hours work responding to, you know, students or reading draft theses or whatever and also, you know, it's a really tight month so if I just put in a couple of KIT Days, just going to really bolster our finances this month. (Dr Mama)

In retelling her story, Dr Mama's conclusion was that she had experienced her return after having children went against her feminist principles. It felt more “like a trap” and “annoying” because of retaining the duties as if you were a “stay-at-home mother of the 1950s” but with the need to fulfil your career.

5.4 The retold story of Mary

Mary is a 42-year-old, married, white, able-bodied, heterosexual psychologist with two children of eight and five years old. Mary would be considered as working in a professional capacity with a lower level of family income at the time of her maternity leave but at a higher level since. She has a mixture of a permanent job for three and a half days a week and works privately. So, it averages five days a week or more. Typically, she must attend work in person for three days a week, but it can be more. She has recently moved to a new role, meaning that she has a reduced commute, now of half an hour.

When Mary took her KIT Days, she was working full time but was achieving that in four days (by compressing her work). Mary noted that she had the flexibility around KIT Days, in part, because of the higher income that she had, relative to some other mothers. Her mother helps her out with childcare too. Although Mary thinks she took all of her KIT Days with her first child, with her second she recalls that she took far fewer; probably three or four she recalls, noting:

I think because it depends, doesn't it, on how much you earn. So luckily, we don't have that, so everyone gets so, obviously, at the time that my children were young, I went for KIT Days, I think we got 15 hours free [childcare]. (Mary)

When Mary reflected, she compared the impact of having her first child with her second and concluded:

I'm wondering whether my memories of my first, my first child, were, kind of, stronger because it was, kind of, the first time I was doing this and actually, I think I think I was off about a year with maternity leave, leave and things like that combined. And I was definitely ready to go back to work. I didn't feel like I didn't want to go back to work. But I think it was it was new territory for me. And I think having been off in a (voice rises) completely different mindset, it's just such a different world. It's, it's just as exhausting, but a different way (laughs). But I think I wasn't, I was quite an anxious mum, new mum. So, I think I was just absorbed in all of the anxiety of having a newborn, you know, "is she cold, is she too hot, is she bored?", all those things. So, I think my memories for KIT Days were

actually positive for a few reasons. Number one financially, because obviously, by the end of that, kind of, year, my husband was working and, kind of covering everything, and actually, you know, there was a newborn, you know, all the bills go up, from heating, to food to everything. So, I think financially, it was definitely helpful in being able to just have a little bit of income at that point. (Mary)

This comment highlighted that KIT Days relative to a first child (the subject of my pilot research) and a second, or subsequent, child was likely to raise different issues for a mother and would be something that my survey stage would explore more. The financial impact was another issue that was going to be more important to certain families than for others. Mary said that she:

Got really rubbish maternity pay, it was something like, oh, I can't remember something like three months full pay, and then it was just like 'statutory', it was just rubbish. So, I don't remember it ... erm, being, kind of, a massive deal but you know, I think that having those KIT Days, and being able to have something in my salary was really helpful. (Mary)

Using KIT Days, though, was more than financially incentivized. Mary wanted to go back to work. She might not have gone so far as to say that she was looking forward to it, but certainly it wasn't a negative experience for her. As Mary retold her story, she recalled the "tinge of guilt" that she felt in retrospect when re-reading her words but then reminded herself that children bring with them "less disposable income and increases in the price of everything". She looked back with some "melancholy" and felt that since she has had "so many balls to juggle" that she felt "exhausted".

She considered the KIT Days as useful to try and help get her mindset back in the world of work. As a psychologist, she works with "all sorts" of people. Mary would describe it as "quite a stressful job, because it's certainly something you can't just go in and just, kind of, not be, not be 100%".

Nothing was really pushed towards Mary for planning her KIT Days. Her manager said, "if you want to take these you can". At one later point, Mary remembers that the manager said "oh, you know, it'd be helpful, we're doing a training day... it would be helpful if you want to come. Do you want to do as a KIT Day?"

Mary recalled, when rereading her story, that put her into a “positive mood” and found it “refreshing” to be treated “as a person” again. She also remembered the feeling that things were still “so crazy” at the time and her “boobs were still so sore”. But Mary did not feel any pressure to use the KIT Days or not to use them, for either of her children but, she thinks that might have been because she had worked there in total about seventeen years, at the same place, and so had a very established role there. She had both of her children whilst working there. Mary genuinely felt that if she did have a problem, she could have raised it and generally felt like her needs were being catered for, without having to ask for anything. During the KIT Days she did not see any patients, which was helpful, she believes. She saw the KIT Days as a useful way just to have the type of conversations, that Mary described as “silly” but obviously ones that she found useful, in which she might be conversing with people, saying things like “Hi, yeah, baby’s good”. Mary described them, almost apologetically, as conversations to “get them out of the way.” Explaining that further she said:

That sounds horrible, but my work’s always busy, so you don’t get a lot of times to, kind of, reconnect with people. So, I also saw it as an opportunity to do that, you know, to get all of that kind of erm ... ‘reconnection’, I suppose, that was what I would probably say, reconnecting with, kind of, colleagues and seeing how things were. (Mary)

When she first told her story about the KIT Days, she described them as “pretty non-descript”. However, when she re-read her story out loud, she felt “angry” at having to do the “dry-runs” and “tearful” having to listen to her son cry at the nursery. She felt a “constant guilt” in the pit of her stomach. She felt like “the worst Mum in the world” and thought “I can’t do this”. She recognised, looking back, that she put pressure on herself, and some of it was to prove “that I can”.

She noted that she might be doing her manager a disservice, but she does not really remember it being clear, the remit of the KIT Days. She believes that her manager, tried to think about useful things that I could do that would benefit her and benefit the department. On one of the KIT Days, she went to a training session on a form of therapy and thought that was good. The KIT Days were about “reconnecting” and “getting your head back in the mindset of work”. Mary saw that as preferable to “going straight in on the Monday and doing a full week”.

She would consider the KIT Days to be a 'transition'. Twice Mary noted that "what you do with those Days is really important".

A benefit of KIT Days that Mary would state is that:

Because of things like that, because you're in a different mindset, you're not absorbed by the three thousand things you need to do, and what happened yesterday, what's going to happen tomorrow, actually, my mind was quite clear in that respect if that makes sense. (Mary)

For Mary, using KIT Days was about preparation. She likened it to how children prepare at school saying:

I felt it was almost just kind of getting prepared almost a bit like, you know, when kids start with first reception and short week or shorter days, a bit like that kind of getting back into that routine. I think also just for me, kind of knowing that I could leave my daughter and feel okay about it, 'cos you're never quite sure how you're going to feel. I think also you have an extra dynamic, don't you when you're going back to work after having a child because it's no longer just you that you need to worry about. It's all of the childcare arrangements and how it's going to work. Can I get out the house at that certain time as well as dropping her off? So, it was all those kinds of things. So, I, kind of, saw it as a bit of a dry run. (Mary)

Mary did some work as her KIT Days at around the "eight months' point". She didn't go back to "work-work" (as she would describe it) until ten months, but she describes her earlier involvement as that she:

Dipped my toe in about eight months. Actually. I went and did some training in [country named] (laughs). Of all things. Yeah, looking back now that was like, "wow, that was bold of me!" Yeah. But again, I think again, it's kind of dipping your toe in and working out, like, how life is going to be now that you've got one or two children and all the logistics around that I think that's often a (voice rises) huge stress. I think your routine changes (voice rises) massively, doesn't it? And I think, you know, no longer is it just kind of grab your phone and keys, it seems like, you know, have you got this sorted, that sorted, have they got a changing bag, you know, all of that. And I think it's, for me, kind of, those Days, were always testing

out those things as well, like, a dry run, in terms of kind of getting that ready. (Mary)

I noted the use of the phrase “dry run” twice at this stage and realised that there might have been prior anxiety that a “dry run” was helping alleviate, and hence an unsung practical benefit, potentially, of KIT Days.

Although Mary cannot remember a time when she simply just thought “That’s it, I don’t want to work anymore”, during her maternity leave she felt “I’m going to have to go back later. I’m just going to have to wait. Just have to have no money (laughs) and I’m just going to have longer”.

Once Mary was preparing to return to full time work, at about ten months, she had a more stressful time. She had arranged for her son’s initiation at nursery and then was going to start around the following week. She remembers:

I do have very vivid memories of when we did that initiation at nursery, and him just crying and me just starting crying, it was “oh” ... it still makes my heart pound now. And I remember sat there thinking, “I can’t go back to work. I’m just going to have to, just going to have to delay it”. And it was, like, it just was, yeah, kind of stress. And obviously, he was (voice rises) fine. It just took time, but I remember that being particularly difficult, and me just going “Right. That’s it. I just have to change”. So yeah, I remember that being quite difficult. But I think it was definitely once, once, once he settled in nursery and I felt happy about you know (laughs), that he wasn’t crying, and that’s awful, then I think that can really impact your experience. Because, if you’re going into a KIT Day and you’ve just had to drop off your baby screaming, you know, at nursery, that’s going to completely change, isn’t it, in terms of how you experience that? (Mary)

When Mary did return, she realised that she would have benefited from a little bit more thought about what she did coming back. On one of her first days fully back, she got given a caseload. The allocation felt like an order to her, “right, you guys, ... these people”. Mary remembers thinking “I’ve been given one patient who had this horrific history of abuse”. Worst still, that patient’s abuse started when he was the age that her daughter was at the time. Mary had just dropped her child off at nursery and she felt “I can’t do this”.

Mary recognises that working with people who have trauma histories is difficult, where they've been (she sighs at this point) neglected, or not had their needs met when they were a child. They are also potentially offenders, themselves, against children.

Mary has reflected on the fact that both of her returns to work, required her to “hit the ground running” and she now sees that might have been to her detriment. She wonders if the fact that her boss does not have children might be a factor, although counters herself with suggesting that very question might be “insensitive”. She hesitantly continues with her thought though by suggesting “I wonder whether ... when you have children, then you're more able to understand what that might mean. How you might be feeling. I don't know if that's unfair to say ... I'm not ... I don't know”.

When Mary reflects on her two maternity leaves, she can see a difference:

I think definitely I, in my first pregnancy, maternity leave, felt potentially a lot more disengaged. I felt it like ... the initial stages, kind of, getting it out of my head, but I did, I literally felt like I was no longer at work. Almost. Does that make sense? Not in a critical way. And I remember one friend ringing me up, he was still working and trying to tell me about something, and it was a bit like, it just I couldn't quite compute it. It was a different world. I think with my second. I think because I've been through the process before, I think I dipped my toe in a little bit earlier with work. And I was still connected to people at work, I probably didn't have as much of a ‘clear cut’, if that makes sense? Yeah, I think probably that's fair to say. I think definitely the first one I just completely and I'm somebody who always, you know, reads about work, I read every night. I'm quite committed. And I think during my first pregnancy, I, you know, I stopped reading about work, I stopped. You don't have time, really, do you? But it definitely was more of a disconnect than with my second? (Mary)

In concluding on her KIT Day experience, Mary would state that “it wasn't brilliant, it wasn't terrible”. A neutral outcome. I wondered if Mary had any thoughts on what might have improved the experience and she said:

I wonder if, you know, managers could be guided into some things they maybe need to think about. And, again, this is going to be different, for different people in different areas of work, but it may be, you know... I don't know ... yeah, maybe thinking about erm ...them having a bit of thought about the kinds of things that someone could do on a KIT Day and shouldn't do on a KIT Day allowing ...I think also allowing consideration of reconnections for relationships at work. So, it may not just be coming and do some 'work-work', and how we purely look at it, but maybe just, you know, coming in and saying "hi" to people and coming to your desk or whatever, I think yeah, maybe just some prompts as a manager to think about. I think it might be ... if I was a manager, it would be helpful, just to be pointed, and maybe some directions to consider? (Mary)

She continued:

Or even, I was thinking, even just maybe connections to maybe HR or whatever service within the organization could support somebody and thinking about ... I suppose the aim is, well the aim I'm assuming of KIT Days, is to help people transition back to work smoothly, so they don't feel erm... but I was thinking there were so many variables that would impact on that aren't there. Everything from whether your baby's sleeping or not (laughs)? You know, you come back, sleep deprived. And I suppose having those conversations within the remit of whatever work organization you do, with the person, and maybe even just, yeah, open ended questions, you know, how do you view these days? What are your expectations? What are some things we may need to know that are impacting on you coming back to work? Yeah. I think it's a wider discussion, isn't it? (Mary)

The fear factor, the anxiety-inducing aspect of the return could be an area in which a well-constructed KIT Day could help, I ventured. Mary reflected and said:

It just changes your world, doesn't it? And I was just thinking, as you said that, my gut reaction was, it could be a host of fears. Fear of "are you being a bad mother by coming back to work?" Number one, you know, "are you being a bad mother in ...", God, I still have them you know, this

kind of “what you think a mother should be, the expectations of society”. The expectations of your family. I mean, some people have a choice whether they want to go back to work or not, some people have to, no matter what, and I think recognizing somebody's erm ... values around that. I've always wanted ... I value work. And I've always wanted to be a working mum, and I'm okay with that. But I still have guilt pangs, you know, gosh, I've just, you know, left my baby with strangers at nursery (laughs), well not ‘strangers’, you know, and also fear that you ... can't do your job in the same way that you did before, because your priorities are completely different. Feeling you've also, I think ... I didn't necessarily feel this, but I can imagine it would be a fact for some people. You just missed out a huge chunk of time. (Mary)

I reflected on Mary's words at the time and since and felt that she vocalized what I felt as a working mother and I know others have too. The fear of being a bad mother by coming back to work, and what society and family expect you to be. Hearing someone be able to voice that they simply “value work” and, surely that is enough was a real eye-opener. Mary continued, sharing her fears of never quite “hitting the mark” again, using a mother she knew as an example:

I remember going back ... where people go, “oh do you remember this?”. That happened a few months ago. I'm like, “no”. So, all those kinds of fears of not being ... and I suppose again, this will depend on, just depends, I've got a friend whose wife is a lawyer. And she literally went back after something like six weeks. Because if she hadn't had done, she would have lost clients. And you think “Oh, my God”. I mean, she had night nannies, day nannies, they were very, very affluent, the lawyer, but can you think actually, if I worked in that world, my experience would be completely different. So ... and I think that, also things like breastfeeding. If you're still expressing, you know, can I? Is there somewhere to do that? You know, you hear awful stories about people who did it in a loo, you know, and also your relationship, your manager and your workplace, if you feel you're valued by them, I imagine your fears about communicating your needs are going to be less than if actually you don't feel valued, and you

feel potentially your job will be on the line if you don't hit the ground running when you get back. So, I think there's just so many [fears]... yeah. (Mary)

I got a sense of the coping strategies that Mary has employed when she speaks of her reaction to some of her fears:

I remember. Oh, my gosh, "I just can't do this is, it's just too much to remember", like, the night before, getting everything, literally getting ... I would put cereals in bowls and put clingfilm over it like just because it'll save me a few seconds in the morning, and again, I suppose it's different ... different people's personalities but I'm somebody who likes to be in control and likes to have 'all my boxes', you know, in line. So, for me having a baby and having children who don't follow 'the line' (laughs) it's really ... I remember just being like "Oh my God, I can't do this. I can't get BB to that place in time with me then to get to work" and I think I probably overcompensated by just being more controlling. So again, I have everything done the night before, literally everything, my knickers out ready to do. And it will be like a military operation. And then I think you, kind of, and I think this has happened a lot, even going back to work. But even like, any different stage in life, whether it's children starting school, you're going to get used to that routine, it becomes less effortful, and it becomes easier, and you also know what you can achieve in the morning or you can achieve in whatever time you're given. I think that it changes you know, when they hit toddlerhood and start going, "I don't want to put my coat on". But yeah, so I think definitely, kind of, that, like, 'panic'. Thinking about what I can do, maybe going a little bit too much into a kind of military operation, and then it'd be like, "okay, it's okay, I can do this". (Mary)

It was interesting to me, hearing how much Mary wanted to be in control, how little control she had over her KIT Days. She replied:

I think I did more for my first one. I did remember saying. I timed them quite well, so I timed them financially. It would have been helpful, so I did yeah, I did. I do tend to plan most things. I'm not a spontaneous person. I think again, I had a relationship with my boss where I could say "actually

it'd be helpful for me to come in on this day, because you've also got to arrange so much around it, haven't you? So, I think I pretty much had it, I can't quite remember the details, but I would have had it down to a tee. If I went back to my diaries. I would have it in there. (Mary)

When Mary went back with her first child, she then changed her working day. She had been working five days a week and doing five days in four days. So, she could have a day off with her daughter and had free childcare as a result of her work agreement. But Mary remembers it as just being exhausting. She said:

I don't think you quite anticipate the tiredness because you're not just going home and having a relaxing evening. And actually, I do remember, you'd hear people say, "I feel tired". And it's awful. But I felt like, but I didn't, just punching them in the face (laughs) "You don't know what tired is!" Yeah, I do remember that. And I do remember, you know, feeling it being overwhelming at times. I don't remember a specific dip. I think it just being ... "gosh", you know, "I've now got to fit in work and a little person and all of her needs". Again, I know I overcompensated by planning. So, I had the nursery was planned, leave was planned. You know, my husband, my Mum, it was all, kind of, yes, a military operation. That's just my comfort zone if you like. (Mary)

Mary went on to say:

I think there's so many things that you're outside your control when you have a baby. So, I think where I could take control, I did. I think also, as well, I was really lucky that there was actually a nursery at the end of the drive of my work. So, she was there, so she was close to me. I knew, because I've worked there a long time, I knew that if suddenly she became ill, I could just leave. And also, I think probably important to say is that at the same time my husband works at the same place. So, I had lots of buffering support if you like. I know that I often think, if I worked in London, for example, and I got a phone call that she was unwell, I'd have had to, you know, traipse back on the train and that would have been really stressful. So, things like that, I think also make a difference. (Mary)

When I asked for Mary's ideas in what would have improved her KIT Day experience she shared:

I think, just having a bit more clarity, from their point of view about maybe their expectations, but also more of a ... I suppose it's really difficult, isn't it, because you can't do that before you go off on maternity, because then it might completely change ... I suppose maybe even just having ... either a conversation or, you know, or some sort of contact by the manager saying, "right...", you know, because some people don't want to take KIT Days, do they? It's optional, you don't have to do it. So maybe some sort of, you know, "these are on offer to you if you want them" and I suppose maybe just, basically it needs to be completely tailored to the person, doesn't it? (Mary)

The pressure on Mary continues even now, an example being:

There were times when I was, like, "oh my gosh, I'm so tired, I could cry". I think also as well. I do remember, it's the pressure, isn't it? So, I'd get an email from the nursery saying "oh", you know, "this week it's 'bring bear home' this weekend" or whatever. And it's, like ' "Arghh" (laughs) and certainly now my children are at school ... the emails ... oh my gosh ... but I do remember that because, again, you don't quite anticipate that, or it's, you know, World Book Day, please send your child dressed up as their favourite book, and you think "oh my gosh!". So, stuff like that, but I think you can't anticipate that would stress me out. Yeah, I would then Amazon it, whatever I need to do, do it. So do that and then I feel better. But I think I definitely had moments of, like, "Oooo", you know, oh, another thing to pull out". (Mary)

As if to alleviate pressure on such working parents, the school will say "oh, you don't have to buy stuff...go make it". We both laughed incredulously at that helpful suggestion to a hard-pressed working mum of "go make it!".

In retelling her story, Mary believes that society does not recognise a mother's needs. She concluded that a mother needs to take the initiative; "you have to bring it up" and that is an insight for KIT Days. She believes that as a manager, one should provide an "open space" to have the conversations that a mother

needs, because there are things that “only someone with children would know”. For her, in hindsight it felt like “walking through mud”. She described her time as “tough” and “uphill, mountaineering all the time”. She remembered though that there were some strong women in the facility who helped her and that seemed like a key intervention at the time.

In conclusion, Mary found it interesting to talk about the KIT Days, because she hadn't really thought about the subject. She noted how going back to work is “such an important thing” and that she probably did not consider how important at the time. She is proud of what she does, saying:

I'm really proud of work, I've always wanted to go back to work, which I think made it much easier for me. There were some friends of mine that were a bit, like, “do I want to go back? Re-evaluate? Do I want to go back part time? Do I want to stop working entirely?” So, I think I probably had an easier time, in fact that that was really set in my mind. But it's huge, isn't it? And I don't think as a society, we probably do enough to support women. Not that I've had a particularly difficult time. But yeah, I just, I suppose it's just really interesting. It's made me think. (Mary)

Mary made me think of how she also widened the issue, looking at a “knock-on effect” on the children involved also, with the example:

I remember, probably my second, I didn't for my first child ... I remember listening with my second child and this person saying, “Happy Mum, Happy Baby”. And it's so true, isn't it? Because if you're stressed, and being a psychologist, you know, think about this, those early years where the brain is just, everything is so important. You know, if you've got a stressed-out mum who's trying to get to work and trying to manage everything, that impacts on her child. So actually, you know, that's, even more important, isn't it? (Mary)

Mary also raised the diversity of the mothers to whom KIT Days applied, including all forms of diversity, including socio-economic. Full diversity is an issue that I will be covering in the survey part of my research but as much as possible in the interviews also. I concurred with Mary as she said, “you're more likely to, I suppose, be less pressed if you've got more money and you can afford

childcare". And also, added "whether actually as a White woman, my experience of maternity and KIT Days would be different from a non-White woman. I don't know". I aim to find out.

5.5 The retold story of Christine

Christine is a Mediterranean, other-abled, heterosexual, widowed, forty-two-year-old mother of one daughter, aged four years old. Christine describes herself as an 'only parent', differentiating herself from a 'single parent' and representing the fact that she was widowed two years ago, leaving her as the sole parent of her daughter. Christine works in financial services in which she has a senior, middle-management role. Currently she is working two days a week, one day in the office and one day at home, and under the guidance of Occupational Health is slowly getting back into the workplace. She has the intention of building up to three days when she can but is not going to go beyond three days for the foreseeable future.

Before Christine's maternity leave her employer provided, to mothers about to go on maternity leave, a course about how to prepare themselves for maternity. Some of it was practical, and in the organization's own interest, such as how to start doing a handover to someone very early on, because the mother cannot be sure if her maternity leave might start prematurely. Seemingly, however, there was little about the emotional preparation for the leave and the return. Luckily, when Christine was preparing to go on maternity leave, she was working for a manager who already had children and who personally prepared Christine well for maternity leave. From a practical perspective, Christine found herself in a relatively better position than some of the other mothers-to-be who didn't even know to whom they were handing over the work. For her return, however, Christine said, "there wasn't any comparable support for the return".

In starting to recount her story, out loud, Christine was upset. It reminded her how difficult it had been for her, how isolated she had felt on those KIT Days in the office. The reading of it had hit home that she had very little support and "that they really didn't know what to do with me".

Christine's maternity leave lasted ten months, although she had originally planned to do eight months. During that time, Christine took three of her ten KIT Days. It took Christine a while to start enjoying maternity leave, so at three and a half months into her leave, she decided to extend it. It had been very hard on

her. She was tired, saying, “oh my god, I really didn't sleep at night, just didn't sleep”.

Looking after her daughter was “full on”, so intense. But between three and four months in, Christine decided that maternity leave was enjoyable and thought “right, I'll extend it to ten months”. Her husband was supportive of the extension and its implications such as the reduction in salary, or no salary at all for one month. Her company was generous with maternity with six months full pay, three months statutory, and then another three months on top, unpaid.

When it came to thinking about KIT Days, Christine shared honestly that she had no idea what to do with them. They were there, but she thought, “so what?”. Everyone said to her, “oh, they're, you know, they're great. And there's a financial element, and you can get paid for them”. She would reply “well, you know, my husband and I discussed this. And we've already made the decision that we'll be comfortable with me dropping my pay for a month”. They were comfortable with that decision, and so there was no need to do the KIT Days just to get the money. The financial benefit was not an incentive for Christine.

In speaking with Christine, I noted how the financial element had been the paramount feature of KIT Days to people around Christine and that had influenced her view of their non-financial value. I saw the irony of having decided to do without a salary to extend maternity leave and then other people thinking that she could be enticed by money to take those days with her daughter away again. If KIT Days were purely financial in value to the mother, then it is somewhat perverse to stress that element when she could just return earlier if that was her pressing need. There had to be non-financial incentives that were apparent to her.

When Christine started her maternity leave, she was in a senior position within her team, and felt comfortable with what she was doing at the time and felt comfortable with what she was going back to. So, there was no real pressing need at the time that she left to consider what to do with the KIT Days. The one thing she decided that she wanted to get out of her KIT Days initially was just to try the commute, try to get back to work and see how that worked from a practical perspective, with her daughter. The chosen nursery was next to the office, So,

when she started looking into her choice of nursery, she thought “right, I’ll do a KIT Day”.

The idea was to take her daughter in, leave her at nursery, and then see what the commute was like. Christine was only really thinking about it from a practical perspective at that stage with no other objective from her KIT Days, saying:

How do I commute to [place of work], with BB in a buggy on a [mode of transport in the], rush hour? You know, just thinking about it from that practical perspective. I also see whether my clothes still fit or not. Realizing ... not! (laughs). (Christine)

Also, she did not want to ignore the offer of KIT Days completely. She wanted to be seen to be making the most of using something that was offered to her. As a secondary thought therefore, she decided to use her KIT Days to catch up on “mounds and mounds” of mandatory training that would have been piling up during her leave.

For Christine, the value of the KIT Days is apparent. It “clears the decks” for a mother’s return however it quite an isolating experience, as typically all such training is online. It also means that 100% of her time and energy might be expected from Day 1 of her return. I contrast that with a new starter, a completely new person in a new job. They might build up more slowly, given leeway to train in their first couple of weeks, and have days in which they are expected to contribute little at that point.

While Christine was deciding when to use her KIT Days and how to use them, there were changes in her team. Her manager, at the time, moved on to a different role, which meant another manager came along. So, Christine was going to come back to the team under a new manager. Therefore, her design for her first KIT Day was to include an introduction to the new manager, thinking “well, it could be useful to come in and meet this new manager, her name, is Carla, and just introduce myself to her”.

Christine expected that that would be the end of it. Christine did her first KIT Day not long before she was due to return. She took her daughter into nursery, then went and met her new manager, and immediately got a really “bad vibe” from her. Christine went from knowing what she was going to come back to, instead

to thinking “I don't really know what my place in the team is going to be”. Christine concluded that the new manager was not the sort of person that she would be happy to continue working with.

The new manager restructured the whole team and flattened the hierarchy in a way that the original pyramid structure was overturned, and Christine was left with no direct reports, having previously had several people reporting to her. Christine did not understand the new scope of her work. Whereas she had assumed that she would come back and slot back into her old role, with her old team, she found that those individuals would no longer be reporting into her or so she assumed. She was left unsure. After that first meeting with her manager, Christine just started to doubt what her position would be. She felt quite uncomfortable about how there was just no clarity about her role and about her scope of responsibility. Information that was relevant was not being shared with her, such as people transferring out of the department. It was difficult for Christine being on maternity leave when such change was underway.

Christine then went back for a second KIT Day, to start speaking to other people about other contacts, other people in her network who might have a job for her. Something else to come back to. So, her second and third KIT Days were really for that purpose, to find some other role. It seemed at first that her strategy was successful. She found a new position in a new team, under the manager that she was reporting into before her maternity leave. Seemingly the sign off was in place and it was just a matter of officially recognizing it on the HR system, to conclude the matter.

However, as Christine got closer to her return-to-work date, she had not heard anything about the role being approved. She tried to get in touch with that new manager, but the manager was moving house, so she did not reply. So, Christine went into the office herself in the week before her return date and had the ‘bombshell’ dropped that the manager could not get funding to sign off on the role. To add insult to injury, Christine was told “don't worry, because Carla knows about it and she's aware that you're going back to her team”.

Christine was left in a position that made her unhappy, but she did not have enough notice to do anything to change it. So, she ended up returning to her

senior role full-time initially, working for someone she was not happy to work with, without any clear roles and responsibilities towards what she was going to come back to.

Christine therefore had a rather traumatic use of the KIT Days, meeting a new manager with whom she did not want to work and looking for other roles, and says “had it not been for the change in management, I probably would have only just done the one I because I didn't know what to do with them”.

I was struck by this very stressful use of KIT Days. Far from the possible catch up on online training, now it felt like a ‘battle for survival’. Could Christine find a role in time to avoid a horrible return to work? What might have happened without KIT Days? A better or worse experience?

Christine worked for four months in Carla’s team. She struggled to really find her feet and wasn't getting any support from Carla. Fortuitously Christine started working with another senior person who had recently joined the organization. She became his unofficial right-hand person although it was not officially documented that way on paper. Her reporting line was still officially into Carla. The new senior person started asking things of Christine that did not quite fit into her responsibility, but she squared it away with Carla.

Christine remembers having a conversation with her previous manager (the one who had wanted to hire her, via that KIT Day meeting, but did not get the funding). Christine had been back for two months. She remembers just saying to him how difficult it felt. First, trying to adjust to a new job, one that she did not particularly enjoy very much. But also, just the intensity of it. She noted:

Your morning starts earlier than before. You don't get any time to yourself. I felt like I was being torn in two different directions. I just said to him, this is ... this is really hard. And he said, “well, do you want to go? You're going to drop your days; do you want to do part time?” I replied “no, I want to continue”. (Christine)

Her intention at the time was that she would have a second child and therefore was not going to leave if she could avoid doing so. She did not want to affect her entitlement for maternity leave afterwards. But her attitude was “let's just crack

on and have that second child because I don't know how much I can put up with this”.

Christine did not really experience any ‘honeymoon period’ via KIT Days in getting back into work, that other women may refer to, and it could have been because she was coming back to a new team, with a new manager, and had no idea what was going on with her role. She did not even know how she fitted into it. She was working with a team that she did not recognize, with a lot of new people. Things remained very unclear for a long period of time. Christine suffered the experience of having her hours worked questioned by people newer into the team than herself, and more junior, newer to the organization, and even some temps.

Christine reflected:

You know, I never thought I'd have people questioning my hours, or why am I not, you know, doing a meeting at seven o'clock in the evening? And it was astounding. It was ... it was ... it was quite a shocking position to find myself in. (Christine)

Christine made a point to Carla saying “I need to leave at five, I need to leave dead on five. I'll come in as early as I can”. For Christine this meant arriving at work at about half past eight. She stressed that she needed to leave “dead on five” for nursery pickup. There were certain meetings that needed to take place and she was always asking people to schedule them for the following day. Those people would say things like “oh, why can't you do them after? After you get home?” Christine would reply “well, I've still got to pick up you know, pick up my daughter at nursery. I still need to get her to sleep I need to... like there's stuff to do”.

People would not take no for an answer replying, “what about after she's gone to sleep?”. That relentless badgering would cause Christine to think:

Why are you questioning me, why? I feel why, why, why? Why are these people here, that are more junior than me and new to the organization and don't even know what I'm doing, question whether I'm doing this right or not? (Christine)

Part of the problem was the culture created by Carla; a very driven, career-orientated, successful fellow-employee without children who had made her career into her life. Christine found that she was working for a team and for people who had no empathy for what she was doing. This made it very hard for Christine to try and get the balance that her organization would claim she had been given. Christine had to justify her hours to her team. She explained:

It was ...it was very strange. It wasn't... it wasn't a supportive environment whatsoever; it was actually quite toxic. Because I was referring to just the way that Carla was. And it's fine. Like everyone's got a personal choice to make. But Carla has made the choice that for her, her career was really important. And she dedicated a lot of time to it. And for her, it was normal to work on a Saturday or Sunday and to work late into the night and the newer members of the team who looked up to Carla, and they were in awe of Carla, and thought this is the way that people should work. And, you know, in team meetings, people will start talking about meetings that are happening at weekends. And I'm like, "why? Why are we suddenly started doing like meetings on a Saturday and meetings in the evening?" And that's what it's suddenly like, through Carla. You know, I wasn't, I didn't, I wouldn't necessarily say that this is what she said people should do. But for doing it herself, she became a role model for others to do the same. And I had no intention of doing the same. And I couldn't do the same, but it wasn't really it wasn't understood within the team. So no, that period, there was no honeymoon period whatsoever. I think I just came back, not looking forward to it, because I knew I was going back to a team I didn't want to work in and, and I just found that the reality to be really hard. And I spoke to a couple of others, more senior than me, who had previously been on maternity leave, and they kind of put my mind at rest a little they said, "look, you know, give yourself a chance to get back into it". They said, even if you're coming back to a team, and a job that you knew, it would take you three to four months to get used to being a working mum. And it did. It did that that those conversations helped me. (Christine)

Christine had been back for four months when her resettling was abruptly ended with a diagnosis of cancer for Christine's husband. She said "the day he got

diagnosed, I stopped working. I stopped working for two and a half years". Christine was away for twenty-seven months in total. After that time away, Christine effectively had to return a second time after her maternity leave. This time she had to do it without the support of her husband and without friends or family living close to her. She continues to experience the effects of bereavement on her child and the fact that her daughter has, understandably, become significantly "clingier" with her, as a result. So, any offers of help must be declined as her daughter will not accept anyone else if Christine is around. Even if family come over and stay for the weekend, Christine is still the one who has to deal with her daughter in the morning, give her breakfast, give her a meal, etc. She is very attached to Christine. When she speaks of making the distinction of being the "only parent", Christine says:

I think when you say, 'single parent', there's normally an assumption that you share your co-parenting with someone else. But that's not the case, obviously, because I'm doing this on my own. So, I refer to myself as an 'only parent' because I don't have anyone to share, I'm on my own. It's not the same situation as someone who's divorced and will have the child for half the time and then someone else picks up the child at a different time.
(Christine)

She is tired by her getting-to-work routine. By the time that she gets to the office she says:

I feel like I'm, you know, halfway through my day because I've woken up at six o'clock to get myself showered and ready. And then with my daughter up, get her ready for school, take her to school. Her school is not close to my house. It's half an hour walk to 40-minute walk with her in the morning. And then after I've dropped her off, I then have to commute to work, which is another 40 minutes on top. So, by the time I get to the office, I'm like, there nine, quarter past nine, twenty past nine. And I feel like I'm ready for my lunch! (Christine)

When Christine reflects on KIT Days now, she says:

I think giving me some ideas of structure, how to use a KIT Day would have definitely been helpful, you know, like, 'giving me flexibility' is

something that I didn't know I needed or didn't know how I needed. It doesn't really help I had these ten days to use and all I could think of was "oh, well, they're there as a financial incentive", but you really made a decision that we can do without it. Yeah, so I didn't know what I was going to get out of them. (Christine)

How much one can prepare for an event such as maternity and a return from maternity leave, Christine is not sure. She added:

For me, it doesn't matter how people tell you about, you know, labour, childbirth and childcare. Yes, you don't really know what it's like until you go through it. And you don't know what you're going to need until you go through it. And people are there to offer help. And you don't know what help you need. Because you just don't know to what it's going to be like. I have had these days to use, but I didn't know what I needed them for. I didn't really use them. (Christine)

What Christine does conclude is that a therapeutic element sounds useful. She suggested that it would have been useful if there was a way that she could have been put in touch with other people in the organization who have been through it, so that she could talk to them about their experience like peer-to-peer talks or peer support. Essentially, she found that for herself. After she came back to work, she sought out those individuals that she knew had returned from maternity leave recently. She spoke to them because she felt like she was at a loss. Explaining more on why Christine thought that peer-to-peer support was a worthwhile idea for KIT Days she added "to be able to speak to someone who knows you, or at least knows the organization". For Christine she shared "that was, I think, that was ... that was very valuable. That was more valuable than the KIT Days you're given".

Even putting aside being in a new team, Christine suggests that there is a change of identity, coming back as a working mother. Christine did not like that, because she did not want people to suddenly perceive that just because she was a mother that she did not care about her career. She certainly did. Christine was never one of those people who would bring their child to work. She wanted to keep her personal life exactly that, "personal". Christine did not bring her daughter into

work to meet others, because she did not want to blur the lines between how she is perceived at work with motherhood. They were very different environments. She even dressed differently. She might have breast milk down her top when she was at home, but that was not how she wanted to be perceived at work.

Christine felt that once a mother returns, there is “this whole identity change”. That took her a long time to get her head round and to be able to find the balance of being both, not one or the other, but both. She feels that it took her a long time to get that to that point. Christine suggests that practical examples that a returning mother could look at would help, something that said, “this is how other people have found the KIT Days useful”.

Christine suggested that it would be useful to have guidance, structure, on how to use KIT Days, or what other people found useful. She suggested more practical examples of how KIT Days may be used describing the current set-up as a “free for all”. She discussed possible counselling sessions. That counselling, beforehand, would be useful. But also, to have access to counselling after a mother’s return, maybe a month after return. Explaining why, Christine said that:

Sometimes you don't know, you might have fears and you realize that you were just worried about nothing once you do start, but then when you do start, you might find that you're coming across other problems that you hadn't anticipated. (Christine)

Christine was careful to whom she chose to speak and did not go too much into her feelings with them. Christine was fully aware that Carla was a senior person in the department, and she could not know how she was perceived by everybody. Christine kept it to the facts and spoke about what her struggles were, saying:

At the end of the day, my struggles were mine. They're not, you know, they're not... they're just my struggles. I was open. I was honest about them. But I was able to choose people that I could be honest with. (Christine)

When Christine did return the second time, she did so with the support of a very helpful Occupational Health doctor. This relationship has been so valuable to Christine and there may be parallels for people returning after an absence for any reason. Christine says:

I meet her every four or six weeks, and I explain what's going on with life. And she's the one that says "right, I don't think ... I don't think you're ready to increase your hours yet". She validates how I'm feeling sometimes.
(Christine)

Christine went back into a role with the manager she had before Carla, called Charlotte. Charlotte had been supportive during the time off for Christine supporting her husband up to and beyond his death. Charlotte's involvement with the family was a help in some ways, such as being able to navigate the organization's benefits' system, however I got a sense of some claustrophobia in the way she might drop in on the family. That meant there was no real separation of work and home for Christine. Although this second leave was for the purpose of caring for her husband rather than for maternity leave, of course Christine was doing both types of caring at once. The parallels with pure maternity leave are there, therefore, and one can think about whether someone visiting your home from work during such a time would be welcome or not.

Christine recognizes that she has gone back full circle working for Charlotte again but concludes that it is "better the devil you know". Christine knows Charlotte's style. And says "I know what she's about. I know how to deal with her".

One of the things that Christine saw being useful, was that she was introduced to the family network at her work. However, she just felt that it wasn't anything that she could relate to, or that she could find any benefit from at the time. The family network covers families of children of all ages. So as part of that network, they provide access to speakers and events to talk about things like problems that you might have in communicating with a teenage child, but not subjects that Christine found relevant at that point in time at all. In fact, she felt that it was a bit of a "tick box exercise".

Christine asked HR whether they were aware if there was a group for single parents or anyone who are doing this on their own, just so she could find it. She describes it:

You know, it's a very lonely place to be and you don't know many, I don't know anyone else who's in the same situation as me. And as helpful, as my friends are, no one is living this reality. And I wanted to speak to others

who might have a similar or a shared experience and HR didn't have anything. And again, I would have thought, given the number of networks or organizations we have at work.... and they were like, "oh, this could be something that you could think of setting up". But I'm like, "I feel like I'm treading water with life at the moment. I can't think of ...maybe in the future I could set it up. But that's not something I'm not able to do either emotionally or even have the time for it. (Christine)

In recounting her story out loud, Christine recalled how "excluded" she had felt at the team changes. She felt that atmosphere of lack of clarity and potential dishonesty that left her feeling "really upset". It was an "awful time" she said and began to feel "really angry" at the lack of support from the rest of the team. She found the queries from the younger members of the team and even contractors, to be "disrespectful". She felt that she "did not belong" and that she "had to justify" all of her actions to everyone. Although she remained calm externally, she was "seething inside" and was unhappy with herself for feeling she needed to justify her actions to others. There had been a manager in a senior role whom Christine found to be "warm" and would "touch your shoulder", little gestures like that. That senior woman was able to normalise some of the emotions that Christine was going through and told her to "go easy" on herself. That intervention had a big effect and left Christine feeling "warm and fuzzy".

Since taking KIT Days, Christine believes that support is needed not just before a mother returns, but in the immediate aftermath also. She says:

I definitely feel there should be something once you come back. Because you don't always know what you need until you're back. Again, like I said, with childcare, you don't know what you need, until you have the children, until you give birth you don't know what help you need. And I think, similar to this, you don't know what support you're going to need to get back to work until you get back, especially if it's your first. Especially if it's after your first maternity leave. (Christine)

Christine made me think about the potential for a three-step support pattern. Before maternity leave, during (using KIT Days) and post a mother's return. Putting that to Christine, she went through her company's prior day (although it

sounded more geared to protecting the company from omissions in coverage). In thinking about timing of information that could be part of a KIT Day, Christine would not want to think greatly about her return before leaving, saying:

You don't want to be thinking about going back to work when you're just about to take off (laughs). I mean, I wouldn't have thought of using them until closer to my return. But no, I think maybe if I'd known how to use them better. I could have planned ahead. And maybe used more. Psychological preparation is huge. It's huge and I think you underestimate how much of an impact it has on you. (Christine)

In conclusion, Christine's story of her KIT Days is one of extremes. From originally only wanting to take a solitary KIT Day to use as a rehearsal for travel and nursery logistics, to finding them a necessity in an attempt to secure her future employment. For Christine, her memories of those Days are stressful, and she calls for more structure in how companies prepare a mother for her return.

5.6 The retold story of Lou

Lou is a 36-year-old Black, single mother of three, co-parenting with her ex-partner. She is currently looking to start her own working-from-home business. She has relocated away from her mother and extended family, so that she can co-parent. At the time of the Keeping in Touch Days in 2018, she was employed as a co-ordinator and had been at her company for ten years, so was very established. Most of those ten years, she was in a very small minority of Black employees at the company. Lou ended up being the one of the oldest people in her team. Everybody had either moved, or they were made redundant. The person that Lou had alongside her she was very comfortable with and confident about her work. Lou said “we had people that came and went (laughs) because they (quieter and quicker) weren’t so great. But she was good at her job so I could just leave her to it and then I could refocus what I was doing”.

Seemingly a good position to be in when going on maternity leave, that Lou could trust her colleague. Similarly, her boss trusted Lou. Although they were opposites, according to a course they both did (he was quite introverted, and Lou was quite extroverted) she liked how they worked together saying:

[He] doesn’t really tell you much, he’s like “what do you want to do?”, this kind of thing, and I would go in the meeting room, and he would mostly agree with the things and would just do what he can to make life easier for me. So, I got along with my boss, and because the other people, the other co-ordinators, who were in the team were less experienced, because, obviously, I’d been in the team longer, erm ... he gave me a lot more responsibility, and trusted that I could... so, I could be involved in the decision-making. (Lou)

The flexibility shown by the company was good at the time. When Lou spoke of the time before she took her second maternity leave, she said:

It was quite relaxed because we, kind of, already made a transition into the flexible working hours. When my mum was ill, we made a transition into flexible working hours so three days I’m in the office, two days I work from home. (Lou)

While the company seemed like a good role for Lou, she felt that race issues were present and unspoken. For example, whenever a contentious issue needed to be discussed, her manager at the time (she had eleven on the course of her ten years at the company) would take her to a nearby coffee shop or pub. Regular meetings, that were non-contentious, would take place in the office environment. This differentiation did not seem to happen to the White employees. Lou described how it worked as:

Then when it was the managers who I wasn't so comfortable with, erm ... they were in that group as well. But the choice of where they took me was different. So, when it was a manager and (voice rises) and it's not that I'm getting in trouble for anything, well I, kind of, am but I'm not, because I wouldn't do anything really bad or anything erm ... but I could be quite stubborn so, I guess that sometimes was my issue. I'm stubborn and I will challenge you. So if you have something to say, I would challenge you, but I wouldn't do it in a way ... because, again, this is what we're taught even before we go into the working world, like there's keywords that that will be said towards us which is "you're being very aggressive" or whatever. So, I knew when I'm approaching something and I'm uncomfortable we would have... I would have to mirror how they're being towards me. So, I was always conscious of that but still... I guess maybe it still seemed like I wasn't mirroring them (laughs) so yeah, I would be like I was in court. I would challenge them and erm... (long pause), I would write. That was it. I think that's what would make them nervous. I would have a book and a pen because I'll say "so you think that this is an issue? OK" and I'll write down. I don't know whether that made them nervous, but I want to keep notes just in case I need to go back to the conversation or whatever. (Lou)

When recounting her story, Lou noted that in no situation did she feel "intimidated or attacked" by her treatment. She did contrast it however with some of her Asian friends, as they would "go through the proper channels, would get some input". So she recognised that there can be different approach but remained "happy" in the way that she handled things. She noted that "you have to look after your mental health" and that "prevention is better than cure". She recalled that she

was “standing up for herself” and in doing so would experience “less of an emotional impact” and that she was “keeping herself safe”. In more than one way, Lou said that she had “no regrets”. Lou said that she would rather be treated as “special” than as “dirt”, when considering the way in which she would get invited to meet in a pub or coffee shop.

I reflected on the impact that being assumed to be aggressive, when being given bad or contentious information and how that might impact on a mother during her maternity leave. Lou provided more:

[Regarding the need for] personal affirmation and things like that ... for us, for a Black person that's not the case. We don't need words of affirmation. We just want to keep the job (laughs) and keep it going. So I think that's why that style suits me because it lets me know, you know what, the fact that you're not contacting me, I feel that I'm safe. Whereas, when the boss contacts us we just think (voice lowers) “oh, are they watching us? Do they want to get me out of the job?” or “is there somebody else that's come along and they're trying to micromanage us because they're looking for an excuse to get rid of us?”. So, it gives us comfort we're not being contacted as much, if you know what I mean? (Lou)

This comment was contrary to my previous thinking, as a manager of thirty years, that managerial contact would always be a benefit to a mother, and hence a new insight for the research. Lou further explained where she thought those beliefs originated, saying:

When we're growing up and we're going into the working world, we're, kind of, taught you 'get on with it', because you are the minority. So, you don't have as much opportunity to, kind of, show a weakness, 'cos somebody will think “you're not good at the job” and get rid of you. I know it might be a bit ignorant, but we do, as a Black community, feel that ... less ... we have to prove ourselves more. We have to prove ourselves more. Especially, in a working industry, in the corporate environment, like that. So, honestly, you get on with it and you 'suck it up'. You don't show that you need help and even if you do need help, you know, you're more

likely to go and speak to your relative at home on how to do something or deal with something. (Lou)

When I thought about mothers on maternity leave, my instinctive thought was that they might suffer from being forgotten about and that KIT Days might be somewhat of an antidote to that. Instead, I realised that too much contact during that period could be perceived as threatening and, hence, counterproductive. Lou explained more of how she operated in the workplace:

I've even had my sister help me with a load of work sometimes when it's like "oh my God there's so much to get through", not in that job, so I think it's a nature that you're 'supposed to get on with it' and not so ... it's like being incompetent and so, yeah whereas for example [ex-partner], he likes to get on with it but now he's not feeling so confident, because stuff going on in his business, he wants to ... he wants the manager to give him reassurance like, he is doing OK, otherwise a personal affirmation, he needs personal affirmation and things like that .. for us, for a Black person that's not the case. We don't need words of affirmation. We just want to keep the job (laughs) and keep it going. So I think that's why that style suits me because it lets me know, you know what, the fact that you're not contacting me, I feel that I'm safe. Whereas, when boss contacts us we just think (voice lowers) "oh, are they watching us? Do they want to get me out of the job?" or "is there somebody else that's come along and they're trying to micromanage us because they're looking for an excuse to get rid of us?". So, it gives us comfort we're not being contacted as much if you know what I mean? (Lou)

Lou took her maternity leave. Whilst away from work, her manager was rarely the one to initiate contact, unless it was for an HR issue. Instead, her team-mate, the other co-ordinator, would be in touch. How Lou had KIT Days raised to her was as follows as Lou explains:

She will text me say "hi Lou, how's things going?", "was wondering when you're planning on coming back", kind of thing, so we would have our little discussions and then I think she would, kind of, pass it on to my manager so he probably didn't feel ... cause he says, "oh I spoke to YY and she

said... “.A, B and C”, you know, and he was quite relaxed, unless HR was pressing him, he didn't really reach out. It was just “these are your Keeping in Touch Days”. (Lou)

This ‘hands-off’ management approach left me, as a former manager of people, somewhat aghast. However, Lou added her insights that involved race. Lou explained that, in her culture, it was a matter of ‘getting on with it’. Too much ‘intrusion’ from a manager would be unnerving, exactly the opposite of what is desirable in employee support. Lou explained:

For me it's different and this is going to ... and I don't mean to go off and this is where I do think race can play a part... because when we ... and [ex-partner]'s experiencing this now and he's Caucasian, so ... when a Black person ... when we're growing up and we're going into the working world, we're, kind of, taught you ‘get on with it’, because you are the minority. So, you don't have as much opportunity to, kind of, show a weakness, ‘cos somebody will think “you're not good at the job” and get rid of you. I know it might be a bit ignorant, but we do, as a Black community, feel that ... less ... we have to prove ourselves more. We have to prove ourselves more. Especially, in a working industry, in the corporate environment, like that. So, honestly, you get on with it and you ‘suck it up’. You don't show that you need help and even if you do need help, you know, you're more likely to go and speak to your relative at home on how to do something or deal with something. (Lou)

This was an important insight for the research because I was considering the manager's role as being pivotal in the KIT Day experience but not seeing it previously through a sufficiently diverse lens. Lou already had difficulties with her value being recognised as well as with a colleague:

I'm taking on more and I'm still not being paid and recognised for what I do, and I've got a new manager who knows absolutely nothing about the team but I'm gonna be their ‘little project’ so they're gonna start off with me and then they're gonna takeover the whole team”. So, I guess they thought I was going to be upset about that erm... so they took me to Wetherspoon's, and they were, like, (parodying) “do you want a glass of

wine?” (laughs) “do you want ...” (laughs loudly) but then the managers who I haven't seen eye to eye with, their thing was in a coffee shop. You know “let's go to a coffee shop” just next door, literally next door to the building, and then again, like, when I've needed to be taken out of there ... that was to do with another team. I wasn't working well with another team member, and I had an issue, and I was not backing down. So, they wanted to speak to me about it and they took me out of the office. (Lou)

KIT Days for Lou became a cut-down version of her previous working life. The two days that she was previously working from home were turned into KIT Days from home and the other three days were unworked. Hence, KIT Days for Lou were real work, not anything different and she could not have flexed them or decided to turn some down, as she was relied upon to work with a colleague, covering each other on those days. Lou even worked unpaid on those evenings, to make the work fit into the short week (Monday and Tuesday).

Lou had her baby at home with her while she worked and coped by using a roll-forward function on the telephone if the baby needed attention, so her colleague would help cover. They made it work so that all the client contact was attended to. Lou explained:

The only time where it might have been an issue, on occasions is when she was away, but we'd always say when we're going to lunch each day. If anything came in, I had to be around but, I was ... I was quite comfortable with the set-up. It was fine because it was online and just ...the only thing is you feel more committed to completing your work because you're working only the two days so, in the evenings, I would play catch up with certain things that had to get done and I was in a more senior role than her. So, with the big clients, they would come directly to me and so, it's usually with the big clients you've (laughs) a lot to do with them. I would always look after those accounts. So, in the evenings, I would work but I was fine, I didn't have an issue with it. (Lou)

Even though Lou was in the KIT Days' period and still on maternity leave, she would go out to team events. She would use it as an opportunity to catch up with everybody and to maintain her relationships. She still would go to lunch and meet

up as a team if there was occasion such as somebody in the studio or a team leaving. She enjoyed those relationships and valued not being micromanaged. She certainly did not want her manager's reassurance. In recounting her experience, Lou remembered the team events. She said, "I am a people person". Team events to her were important and a time out from being a mum and the kids. If a mum does not have time out, she is a "constant slave to the child". In describing her manager, Lou said:

So, he's quite introverted, and I'm quite extroverted (laughs). So, he doesn't really tell you much, he's like "what do you want to do?", this kind of thing, and I would go in the meeting room, and he would mostly agree with the things and would just do what he can to make life easier for me. So, I got along with my boss, and because the other people, the other coordinators, who were in the team were less experienced, because, obviously, I'd been in the team longer, erm ... he gave me a lot more responsibility, and trusted that I could... so, I could be involved in the decision-making when we moved onto a new platform to load our webinars on and with the developers and everything so, yes, I would say we had a very good relationship really. (Lou)

It came as quite a shock and disappointment when her manager started to become evasive. Lou had requested that she be able to stay on a two-day week, having proved, she felt, that it could be done. When Lou eventually had a phone call with her manager, she got the "bad news":

When I first put it out there to him, he took a bit of a while, which he's not usually ... and I did have to chase him actually. That was the first time I had to, kind of, chase him 'cos he's really efficient and punctual, prompt with getting things back to you and erm ... then I spoke to him on the phone and, erm ... he tried to explain why it wouldn't work erm... because, and he said he can't justify me going to two days what the company will do is basically say "well if her job only ... if she only needs to do two days a week then why have we got two coordinators? We may as well just have one and they should be able to manage it, on their own. (Lou)

In recounting her story, I could see the dilemma around her manager. Lou had thought that she and he had a good relationship and she liked him. However, she had to admit to herself that he was 'a bit of a wet flannel'. For not speaking up for her, and her two-day week. She had seen him being assertive before but was sad that he did not speak up for her in the same way.

Her manager's conversation was illuminating. He left Lou waiting and then explained to her that he was worried that, if the job could be done in a period of two days that he was worried it might target his area for redundancy. Lou relates it as:

He says he's worried that's gonna prompt those kind of conversations and while there were redundancies happening in the company, that was his worry, but it took him a long time to, kind of, have that conversation 'cos I had to keep chasing because it was getting closer and closer for me to return back to work full time and I was beginning to feel a bit anxious.
(Lou)

I do not think any company could be proud of how Lou was treated, being left to stew until she chased to get a decision and then being given such a weak argument against her plan. With the two-day week rejected, Lou decided to leave and handed in her notice. The date of when she left is imprinted on her mind.

It's a shame I had to leave, but... I had to because they couldn't continue with the set-up as it was. I wanted to cut down my days even further, to the two days a week, because I saw with the keeping in touch days, I was still able to do my job. In fact, I was doing a lot more than two days, because I was doing all this work in the evenings. (Lou)

I was struck by how Lou was already proving that she could handle the work well, in a two-day pattern. Of course, only by devoting her own time, free, to the company's work. Very short-sighted it would seem, of the company, as they were about to have someone on a forty percent salary with ten years' experience in the firm, voluntarily giving her evenings to the company free of charge. Usually having only one person in a role is seen as high-risk but with Lou's proposal they had the chance to have her provide contingency cover at a much lower price.

In conclusion, I was left feeling aggrieved for the fact that Lou felt that she had to leave a job that she had enjoyed, even though she had proved the validity and practicality of a two-day week to her company. The KIT Days had been her way to prove that it was achievable but, for other political reasons, that was not judged as evidence for her case to reduce her hours.

As Lou recounted her story, she reflected that when she was at the company, she felt a range of emotions. They included regret as she remembered how she “had it good” and had since had to “restart her life again”. She also recalled how she was “not challenged” and “was bored” while there, however. She asked herself “did I pass up an opportunity to stay afloat?”, recognising how her income had been hit hard since she had to resign. These things, Lou said you had to “take in your stride” and she “would do the same again”.

Lou explained as well, in the re-reading of her story that there was more to do with requesting a two-day week than she had told originally, to do with the welfare of her daughter, who she had taken out of nursery at short notice. She had not wanted to share the story at work and hence a vital piece of her motivational logic was missing in the negotiations with her manager, as she reflected on how things had played out. In concluding on the events Lou noted that “it’s the people” that she missed. Quickly switching to the positive, however, Lou then spoke of her move towards her next career options.

Chapter 6: Analysis

6.1 Narrative Inquiry method

The Narrative Inquiry method employed in this research followed a narrative analysis method of 'broadening', 'burrowing' and 're-storying' as described in Clandinin and Connelly's work (2000) followed by an "analysis of narratives" as discussed in Kim's (2016) description of Polkinghorne's (2007) narrative reasoning of "events, actions, and happenings" (p.197). Keeping the stories in mind, as whole stories, was key at this stage, to understand that one mother's use of a given word was not necessarily synonymous with another mother's usage. By having got to know each mother's story intimately first, that discernment in the subsequent analysis of narratives was made possible. Hence this ordering of the narrative analysis of individual stories followed by an analysis across the stories was congruent with the research aims. A summary flow is shown in Appendix 10 and described below.

First, each story was thoroughly narratively analysed (Appendices 1 and 2), to elicit possible emerging themes. 'Broadening' (Appendix 1) was employed as in Clandinin and Connelly's work (2000), a technique that was also employed earlier, (as 'expansion') by Mishler (1986), and, later, as a research analytical tool involving a "broader context of a story" (Kim, 2016, p.207). This technique was used by considering every sentence of the six stories, to add notes that provide a "broader cultural framework" (Kim, 2016, p.207).

'Burrowing' was then employed, which went through each sentence chronologically, examining "feelings, understandings and dilemmas" (Kim, 2016, p.207), and considered them using a three-dimensional space of "place (situation)", a temporal aspect of "past, present and future" and the relational aspect of "personal and social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.50). An example is in Appendix 2. J. A. Smith (2015, p.95) noted that "the process of narrative analysis is not a passive process" and that "the researcher brings to the text certain ideas but does not impose them on it", and this stage of the analysis brought in potential relevant "interpersonal and societal contexts and how they are connected" (J. A. Smith, 2015, p.97).

'Re-storying' was then employed to rewrite the six stories "so that the significance of the lived experience of the participant comes to the fore" (Kim, 2016, p.207). The method also accords with Polkinghorne's 1988 narrative mode of analysis in which "we reorder (reconstruct) a storyline from the telling(s)" (Kim, 2016, p.203). The method ensured that each participant received a copy of their story and was able to comment on whether they recognised their lived experience or required changes. Only one small change in all six stories was requested (and related to one misheard word on the recording). An example is in Appendix 3.

All the re-storied accounts were analysed first individually and then collectively. The positive and negative feelings in their stories were all considered, re-reading each transcript and story several times. This allowed for a consideration of the emotional content across the stories. Similarities and differences across the participants' stories were considered (Etherington, 2020). It was important first to become immersed in the mothers' telling of their own stories. The transcribing stage had been key to this immersion with the mothers' voices, as it was done personally and laboriously over an intensive three-month period. No software was used. Instead, it was simply a technique of listening, typing and re-listening. As a result, the research technique included hearing the mothers tell their stories in the order of fifty times each. Although there are quicker ways to achieve the same goal, such as the use of transcribing services, the resultant immersion was a key aspect of the research. The research was taken forward by capturing the emotions and grouping them into clusters of similarities and differences.

As Finlay (2002) noted, researchers engaged in qualitative research tend to be aware of their knowledge in their co-constructive role. There was a consciousness in this research that any similarity and difference observations had the potential of researcher subjectivity, with the researcher acting as a co-creator using a layering method, in which each mother's narrative was interwoven with the researcher's notes, experiences, and observations.

There was a surprising degree of difference in only six stories, in terms of the content and the experience of the days themselves. However, the similarities emerged also as themes. There were four main emergent themes of Emotions, Support, Change and Self-identity. The themes were considered in the light of the mothers' complete stories to consider the degree of similarity and difference

in a further analysis. All six stories were considered together in an analysis of narratives in which “themes that were common” were collected across the stories (Kim, 2016, p.196), looking for the “patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes either within or across an individual’s experience and in the social setting” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.132). The analysis revealed four major areas that arose for all the mothers, each with their unique circumstances related to that theme, but sharing a commonality. It should be noted that all the mothers took either their full maternity leave available or close to it. Consequently, there was no attempt to discern differences arising due to maternity leave duration in this research study.

Finlay (2002) also noted that researchers should heed any critical issues at stake, allowing space to explore their role in the production of imperfect and incomplete knowledge. In the case of this research, such imperfections potentially arising in the co-creation of the stories, were mitigated to a degree through the sharing of those co-created stories so that the participants could reflect upon them.

In terms of thinking across the stories, Etherington and Don (2007) considered a view of the self and identity to be plural and constantly reconstructed to the extent that they refer to selves and identities, for each of their participants. Etherington and Don (2007) considered how their participants used their language and metaphors as they described their experiences and reflected on the influences that shaped their experiences.

In the following sections of this chapter, the threads across the stories are woven into the similarities that the mothers’ stories shared and the differences between them. A summary of those thematic similarities is shown in Table 9.

	Emotions (examples)	Support (examples)	Change (examples)	Self-identity (examples)
Ann	Guilt, anxiety, 'imposter syndrome', relief	Self-sufficient, Forgetful manager, Over-reaching agenda	Unprepared because of worry vs. arrogance perception	Still a 'career woman'?
Daisy	Grief, fear of missing out, purposeful, value-adding	Needing a goal, Manager not applying reason, Over-reaching	Project (not regular) work	Still progressing as a 'career woman'?
Dr Mama	Frustrated, disappointed, annoyed	Self-sufficient, Forgetful manager (even pregnancy)	Part-time direction, 'maternal thinking' load	Can I be a part-time academic?
Mary	Guilt, refreshed, angry, reconnected	'Easy work', inadequate grounding for actual return	KIT Days were not a real reintroduction	Can I cope?
Christine	Shocked, isolated, practical	Good preparation before maternity leave, shocking KIT Day	An organization change shock for the returning mother	Shocked by the experience
Lou	Disappointed at the outcome, relaxed, supported (by her colleague)	Self-sufficient at the time, upset at the Manager's ultimate level of support	Coped well, and contributed socially, but the Manager's attitude changed	Over-confident?

Table 9: Four 'similarity' themes

6.2 Self-identity: career and motherhood

A recurrent narrative that surfaces in the thinking across the stories stage of the research, concerns the dual role of being a career woman and a mother and its impact on self-identity. To understand the participants' KIT Day experiences, appreciating the mothers' relationships to their work before maternity leave was a helpful context for developing an understanding of their whole maternity experience. Most of the mothers felt that they had been in a favourable position regarding their workplace and career at the time of the KIT Days. However, none seemed to feel sufficiently safe that they were completely at ease with the KIT Day experience.

Ann was in a good position at work, was well-respected, highly supported and had open communication with her manager during her maternity leave. It would be difficult to envisage a better workplace support system than the one that she described. When Ann rated her KIT Days' experience emotionally, as "five out of ten", it was a surprise as her circumstances seemed to be ideal; working at home, childcare not an issue, and topics agreed in advance.

Despite that favourable backdrop, Ann worried about taking maternity leave at all, because of the potential impact on her career. She worried that she might not

have a career to which to return and was anxious before taking her first KIT Day, given that her role was being temporarily filled and she had to step back into that situation. In terms of her previous self-identity as a career woman, she was concerned that an aspect of her self-identity was at risk and had not, at that point, adopted the new part of her self-identity, that of being a working mother. Ladge et al., (2012) researched how early the transitional changes to a mother's self-identity can arise, and for Ann, it even preceded her maternity leave.

Like Ann, Daisy went through a range of emotions even before her first KIT Day. Both Ann and Daisy had a very clear previous view of their self-identity as career women. Daisy also felt, early in her maternity leave, an impact on her self-identity as a career woman, fearing that she was missing out on progression. She felt turmoil, thinking that everyone else at her workplace was having a wonderful time without her and verbalised her concerns that she was no longer sure of her self-identity.

Both Ann and Daisy had to adapt to incorporate their new, dual role. Daisy's otherwise effervescent personality was audibly 'squashed' when speaking of the transition. These mothers, on their maternity leave, were transitioning and experiencing a state of liminality in which their new self-identities were not yet formed (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

In contrast to Daisy and Ann, Dr Mama seemingly avoided an emotional time before her first KIT Day, by never having disconnected from her work in the first place. However, such a situation of continual engagement would not be appropriate in most workplaces; academia being one type of employment in which such continuous work during maternity leave was possible. Certainly, Dr Mama had an emotional time, potentially caused or exacerbated by her maternity leave taking place in a time of COVID-19. Dr Mama managed to retain her self-identity as a career woman during her maternity leave but at the cost of never truly disengaging.

An ability to totally disconnect with work features in academia because of the ongoing research for such mothers in that environment. Bowyer et al. (2022) in researching the auto-ethnographical narratives of female academics in Australian universities, noted that their self-identities would transition from *female*

academic to academic mother. Certainly, Dr Mama displayed evidence of the 'academic' part of her being the pervasive thread running through her story. Evans and Grant (2008), in examining mothers' careers noted that, for female academics, the degree of tenure (permanency of role with its associated job security) had not increased in a generation. In terms of anxiety, potentially linked to a lack of security, these factors could hurt academics like Dr Mama.

Compared to the anxiety of the first-time mothers, Ann and Daisy, Mary was a second-time mother and had been at her workplace for many years. Mary recalled, when rereading her story, that the KIT Days had put her into a positive mood and found it refreshing to be treated as a person again. She recalled the benefits of reconnecting as an opportunity. In terms of self-identity, the second-time mothers had the advantage of having had their major transition to becoming working mothers, with the arrival of their first child. Their anxieties were less about self-identity as a result.

Although, like Anna and Daisy, Christine was also a first-time mother, she had less anxiety and expressed fewer concerns about her change in self-identity than other first-time mothers. A difference between these three mothers' preparations to go on maternity leave, was that Christine was working for a manager who already had children herself, and who had personally prepared Christine well for maternity leave. From a practical perspective, Christine found herself in a relatively better position than some of the other mothers-to-be at her workplace, who had the anxiety of not even knowing to whom they were handing over their work.

As another of the second-time mothers, Lou was relatively relaxed compared to the first-time mothers. For her, the flexibility shown by the company felt good at the time of her KIT Days. Lou also had the benefit of working as a part-time employee and so had a clear idea of her self-identity as a working mother who also spent days at home with her one child at the time.

In terms of their self-identities as women whose careers had potential to progress, both Ann and Daisy saw their maternity leave as simply a break in an, otherwise, positive career trajectory. For Dr Mama, it was not even a break. Her career trajectory was linked with her research interests, and she continued to

pursue them even when on maternity leave. The difficult psychological content of Mary's role, and her client-facing role, meant that she had to leave the work behind while on maternity leave. She had fewer concerns about whether her career would continue its trajectory than Ann or Daisy, feeling confident that her previous advancement would continue. Lou was the least concerned with her career progression in that she felt very accepted and comfortable with her role and simply wished to maintain it. She had confidence in her self-identity as a working mother because she had already shown that she could find the balance she wanted and had the advantage of being one of the most experienced in her field. From being the least concerned, however, she became the one to abandon her career when her return-to-work plans were thwarted.

In summary, there were transitions of self-identity for the mothers and it was particularly evident in those of the first-time mothers, Ann and Daisy. Christine seemed far more at ease with the transition, even planning her second child while on maternity leave with the firstborn. However, she had the advantage of a good grounding from her manager before her leave and her real transition was ahead of her, once she returned to work. For the second-time mothers, the change to self-identity was not as obvious, having already been working mothers. The impact of good expectation setting by Christine's manager would appear to have made the difference in helping her adjust her self-identity as a working mother with a career, before the KIT Days, and offers future potential to extend the same help to other first-time mothers, via managerial training.

6.3 Support: employee-manager relationship

When Ann read her own story aloud, it was apparent that she struggled with saying anything that would reflect badly on her manager. Yet, he was not perfect. He was not skilled in thinking about the practical breastfeeding aspects for example, and it was somewhat wounding to Ann on the occasion that he failed to remember that she was working a KIT Day. His own wife did not work and there had been no senior person before Ann took maternity leave in his team. Unless a manager has someone explicitly training them in all the nuances of maternity leave and KIT Days, and if not experiencing it via a partner either, the presence of an empathetic gap is almost inevitable.

Ann came across as very protective of her manager, brushing that forgetfulness off as it being “just him” but she looked pained and sad as she mentioned it. As with Ann, Daisy felt mean criticising her boss, even when, in hindsight, the project allocated by him to her was overly ambitious for a mother using KIT Days. She described her sadness at the reaction to her subsequent report. Her KIT Days had been used in a way that worried her and the fact that she was not back yet full-time in her job meant that she was not positioned to rebuild any affected relationships. Daisy felt that she had upset people by delivering what she had been asked to do by her manager.

Whereas Ann and Daisy did have some helpful managerial conversations, Dr Mama had very little regular contact with her manager in her normal work and described her KIT Day experience as “frustrating”. Crucially, the person who she felt might have alleviated that feeling, her manager, was not engaged. It was illuminating that Dr Mama had learned to live with her disappointment, and her demeanour came across as resigned to the lack of true managerial interest in the academic world. She would describe herself as “a bit annoyed”, for example, at not even being told of her KIT Day availability, yet was only mildly surprised that her manager forgot that she was even pregnant. That forgetfulness level, compared with Ann’s manager forgetting she had a KIT Day, suggested a different level of managerial disengagement.

Just as with Ann and Daisy, Mary had a reluctance to overtly criticise her manager, but there was a reference to how she had, for both of her returns to work, been required to ‘hit the ground running’. She had felt that it might have been to her detriment. The only person who could have created a gentler, more empathic return would have been her manager and so, by implication, some more consideration from him would have been beneficial. Mary had wondered if the fact that her boss did not have children might be a factor, although she countered herself by suggesting that the very question might be insensitive. She questioned and then wondered if it was unfair to question, whether, when a manager has children himself or herself, there should be more of an inherent understanding of a mother’s feelings.

Christine had gone on maternity leave under the management of a woman, the only one of the participants not to have a male manager. Her manager supported

her well. Christine had not experienced any great anxiety during her maternity leave, until her first KIT Day. It is worth noting that this early preparation, by her original manager, was very well-received by Christine, made a difference during her maternity leave for this first-time mother and accords with the Buzzanell and Liu (2007) research findings on the positive benefits, to mothers during maternity leave, that managerial encouragement can have.

For Ann, Daisy, Dr Mama, Mary and Lou there was, at least, continuity in their management structure while on maternity leave and through the KIT Days. For Christine, when deciding how many KIT Days to take and how to use them, she had to deal with a new manager. Christine therefore had an extra dimension of KIT Day stress, going from thinking she knew what she was returning to, and instead ended up worrying about what her place would be in the company, having had her team taken away from her.

Considering the variable experiences of the participants with their managers, other sources of support were compared across the stories. Sometimes a good Human Resources (HR) department can be a resource to a mother, especially if her manager is poor at communication. Whilst away from work, Lou's manager was rarely the one to initiate contact, unless it was for an HR issue. Instead, her team-mate would contact her. Lou's manager would only be in touch if HR asked him to be involved, with Lou remembering that her manager did not initiate contact, unless HR was pressing him. Lou's input was key to the research product of training for managers, as she spoke of how, in her culture, not hearing from your manager was more comforting than being contacted. Her story suggested that this management contact aspect requires handling in a tailored way, depending on the wishes of the mother. It can be difficult for managers to deal with such variation in desired approach and hence use of the mother's input, through the research product survey arising from this research study, and the appropriate manager training, will help a mother with this transition, and pre-empt subsequent issues.

It was interesting that none of the participants mentioned HR support much at all in their stories, and so this key department seemed not to be acting as an alternative to manager support. In Lou's case, HR was at least a prompt for her manager to be in touch but even some basic and usual HR tasks, such as

providing details of company KIT Day policies were missing, as in the case of Dr Mama. Similarly, the support of colleagues was mentioned, but far less present in the stories than the importance of the manager to the mother. The subsequent survey also concurred with this observation in terms of ranking the managerial relationship to be the most important. As with HR, partners hardly featured as a source of support also, in the mothers' narratives. This was a surprising result, relative to some research on the importance of partners, such as that of Hodgson et al. (2023) but perhaps less partner support is required when one considers the situational position of the KIT Day sitting firmly in a work context.

In summary, in terms of the experiences of these six mothers, their interactions with their managers did accord with the research conclusions of Rouse et al. (2021) in that the quality of their manager was pivotal to how they would feel their situation had been handled. Lou was happier with a hands-off approach as she would have interpreted more contact as a negative intervention, one that would worry her that her role was under threat. Ann, Daisy and Christine working in office-based roles, suggested that more managerial contact was preferable to them. Dr Mama and Mary, working in more academic and professional capacities, seemed to have less need and a lower expectation of contact, but still, both would have welcomed more managerial input than they received.

The research of Leslie et al. (2012) concluded that the ability of a woman to show dedication and commitment to her job was linked with career success. If manager and colleague training can help those individuals to understand that a woman can be both committed at work and a contented mother, then it could help address any unconscious assumptions to the contrary. Certainly, manager training appears to be advisable for companies, to help create a better context in which a mother can make a successful return.

6.4 Similarities of self-identity and emotions

Being a mother and a professional career woman can affect self-identity as described above. In addition, the dual role invokes other conflicts also, beyond a sense of self. It includes conflicts that impact her life more broadly. For example, Ann anticipated the pull of being separated from her child even at an early stage of pregnancy. Interestingly, Ann explained her reasoning for returning to her

career, not in terms of her career aspirations or even financial goals as drivers. Instead, Ann expressed her desire to set an example for her daughter, regarding how important a career can be to a woman.

That resonated with the researcher's own maternal experiences, which helped spur this research, that of having to justify working as a mother. During the process of rewriting Ann's story, Ann's stated justification to return to work seemed to be very well-rehearsed. The spirit of the statement was that her return was for her daughter's later benefit, not for herself. Justifying wanting to work as being for the benefit of others, rather than for oneself was of interest to the research, indicating a societal norm to explain away one's decision to return and to not be considered as a 'bad mother' for that decision. The unspoken word in the background for Anne was 'guilt'.

Ann also expressed guilt a great deal during our interviews. Guilt towards her baby, her colleagues, her replacement and her manager. Although she felt somewhat psychologically prepared, because of talking with senior colleagues, her words were telling, in that she expected that she should feel guilty. Not that it was a by-product of being a working mother but assumed to be inevitable.

Ann's thoughts were that it is not having a baby that is incompatible with work, but just that adjusting to it can be psychologically challenging. She suggested that something that HR could provide some words of comfort on is helping a woman leaving for maternity leave to know that it will be difficult. Although that might appear to be a negative stance to take with a departing mother, Ann certainly felt that it was better than the alternative of a mother being caught unprepared.

For Daisy, the conflict of also being a mother, as well as a career woman, was not as explicit as it was for Ann. Instead, Daisy spoke of her grief for her career, suggesting that it had been usurped by her baby's arrival, rather than existing alongside it. In contrast, Dr Mama had quite a jaded sense of the conflict between the two roles, having had a second child, and her already-practiced approach to maintaining both the role of mother and of an academic. She saw the conflict as logistical to a large extent but also had already experienced the expected societal norm of the mother absorbing the extra duties of parenthood. Her story explicitly

mentioned the maternal thinking that she had to do on behalf of the family, such as ensuring the shopping and laundry were done. Her story resonated with the findings of O'Reilly (2010), in that these backstage planning burdens fall to the mother to achieve. Dr Mama felt that burden heavily, referring to it as a "sacrifice". For Mary, also a second-time mother, the positive emotions around KIT Days stemmed, at least in part, from the financial benefit of them. It is important to remember that KIT Days are typically taken at a time when the mother's income has ceased and there is an extra baby, for whom to provide. Mary looked back on her KIT Days with some melancholy and "a tinge of guilt" as she would describe it, when recognising the sacrifice, she had to make to add that income to the family.

Uniquely for Christine, there was her explicit suggestion that her roles as a mother and career woman should easily run in parallel, to the extent that she was already planning a second baby at the time of taking her KIT Days. In many ways, that goal helped her navigate her difficult return to work, a motivating factor to overcome the difficulties with her job and manager. However, Christine still acknowledged the difficulty of her joint role, sharing that she felt very conflicted, and torn in two different directions.

Lou was the most outwardly confident of the participants in this specific aspect of holding both roles simultaneously and with ease, as a second-time mother. She assumed that she could continue in her part-time role, even cutting it back by another day per week. She already had a plan as to how to deal with the conflict of the mother role and the employee role and, as she already had another child, felt that she knew how to make it work. That lack of explicit conflict in her story could have been helped by the fact that she had her baby at home with her, anyway, so did not have any childcare decisions to make. However, her plans went a step too far for her manager. Her conflict eventually surfaced and was resolved by resigning from her company.

In summary, the participants described the feelings around the conflict they experienced differently. For Ann and Mary, it was guilt, for Daisy it was grief, for Dr Mama it was a sacrifice, and Christine described it as feeling torn. Lou was the only one not to talk of any conflict between her roles and yet became the one

who did not manage to reconcile the roles sufficiently to stay in her job. Considering the implications of these results relative to potential psychotherapeutic products arising from this research suggests that it is important to tailor the approach relative to the individual. Each mother taking up the offer of a KIT Day is facing her own, unique set of emotions, even if they carry similarities. Even the degree to which managerial contact is employed can be tailored to the mother. As learned via Lou's story, unexpected contact can be unnerving for some mothers, and welcomed by others, such as Ann. It could be easy to get the contact level and content of that engagement wrong. Instead, maternity leave managerial intervention should be handled with sensitivity to the mother's background and culture. The use of a brief survey to elicit her needs more accurately, and tailor a solution for her, could be beneficial. Products from this research include the first iteration of such a survey for that purpose and a series of modules that can be offered depending on her stated needs.

6.5 Similarities of change: the need for structure, guidance and certainty

How the United Kingdom Government describes KIT Days has been vague since their inception and remains so (United Kingdom Government, 2023). The advice simply refers to agreeing on the type of work and the pay before the employee attends work for KIT Days. The implicit assumption that flexibility is helpful in how a KIT Day is used, has prevailed for almost twenty years. The mothers' stories told a different tale, however, that the uncertainty that comes with a lack of structure was detrimental to the mothers' experiences of their KIT Days.

Interestingly, although minimal, the United Kingdom Government's expectations are simply that the type of work and the pay will be agreed upon, none of the managers in the six stories confirmed both aspects in any formal way. Generally, the content of the KIT Days, if discussed, was just before, or on, the KIT Day itself. All participants were paid at their regular rate of pay, so there was no discussion needed around that aspect.

What the research study showed was that all six women had very different experiences in how they used their KIT Days. Those experiences ranged from Dr Mama never having properly switched off from work and therefore maternity

leave was almost like business as usual, to a surprise need for a job search for Christine. In between, the mothers experienced doing excessive or more difficult work than usual, such as for Lou and Daisy respectively, especially given the fact that they were still on maternity leave. The need for structure was one of the study's surprising findings. One might have pre-supposed that, having had the responsibility of a baby's demands for several months, the option of flexible KIT Days without an agenda, responsibility and requirements might appeal. However, the results suggested the opposite.

As an example, Ann had the most structure planned into her KIT Days and agreed before she left for maternity leave. However, as it was her first baby and her first maternity leave, she made those plans in a vacuum of actual knowledge of how she would feel. Before she went on maternity leave, she discussed with her manager what she would be doing with those Days, determining that the end-of-year projects and business planning would be most appropriate. She still wanted to be involved in those aspects, because they would have an effect when she came back from maternity leave. So, she made sure that she selected her timing wisely. For Ann, therefore, it all felt very logical and contained.

However, how the KIT Days played out for Ann were not as controlled as she might have planned. Her husband stayed at home for those days to help her and they were all conducted remotely because of the pandemic. Ann had not taken account of the fact that she was breastfeeding and would be producing milk all through the KIT Day. For many mothers, like Ann, the initial KIT Day will be the first time that they have been away for so long from their baby. It affected Ann physically as well as psychologically. She remarked on the KIT Day being the longest time away from her baby since birth and that it was the first time that she had expressed breastmilk. When one considers that, when the use of a KIT Day is also a first time for a mother, too many other 'firsts' could be stressful for her. Her first KIT Day was over-structured but in an uninformed way as she, a first-time mother, had designed it with no input from others who could have advised differently.

Considering this important aspect of breastfeeding for working mothers, when Ann had gaps in the day on her subsequent KIT Days at home, she was able to express breastmilk during that time. Thus, she did not have to deal with

engorgement on those KIT Days but, had she been going into the office, that avoidance would not have been as easy. As a manager herself, Ann considered that breastfeeding and the expressing of milk is an important structural aspect of KIT Days. One thing that might have helped Ann, she shared, was someone suggesting no more than one meeting in the morning and the same in the afternoon. Ann had reverted to her previous hard work ethic, and that was understandable, but too onerous for a KIT Day.

For Daisy, the structure of her KIT Days was discussed in her story and the Days' potential role in alleviating anxiety. Daisy termed it "scaffolding", an approach that gave her some structure. She welcomed boundaries and she described that scaffolding as a safe space. She wanted infrastructure around her such that she would know who to go to for tasks, and who approach for emotional support. She believed that many mothers would want structure, even though she considered herself to be tolerant of ambiguity. She had people in her team for whom working with ambiguity would be negative and counter-productive for them. However, in speaking of structure, Daisy re-emphasised her own need for meaningful goals and content. Another type of structure. She needed a goal and deliverable to achieve, and a simple, social KIT Day to re-engage with people would have not been as suitable for her as a target that was important to her company. It was clear that Daisy needed something tangible.

In contrast, although Dr Mama lacked structure in her KIT Days, she was familiar with being fully self-reliant, dictating her use of time and did not find it to be an issue. Dr Mama compared her experience with what she thought happened in other organisations, believing that her role had a natural structure, a to-do list of real deliverables of which she had control and on which others relied. In addition to the previous suggestions for more structure within the KIT Days, from Ann and Daisy, Dr Mama added that the related topic of expectation management was an important factor for a KIT Day, to help a mother know what she is returning to, in her company or organisation.

Expectation management goes further than just the role though. A new mother might require her expectations managing, for life in general. Dr Mama noted that, while KIT Days are taking place, the mother is juggling all the other aspects of

not only her life but that of the family too, such as making healthy nutritious meals and planning fun things with her children, in addition to her job.

Dr Mama would conclude that KIT Days were rather informal and unstructured, and, like Ann and Daisy, Dr Mama would have preferred there to be more structure to them. She felt that she was unmanaged throughout, and all the choices were hers to make. That situation left her concerned if she was doing enough or too much work to claim a KIT Day payment.

Whereas the structural focus for Ann, Daisy and Dr Mama had been on the work content of the KIT Day, for Mary, using KIT Days was more about seeing how everything would work in terms of childcare in conjunction with her work. She also mentioned the issue that the mother is carrying the family burden of all the planning, explicit and invisible, that falls typically to a mother to do, such as childcare and the logistics of getting children to where they need to be to receive that care, as well as the mother also getting to work on time.

Christine was like Mary in that she felt the need to have a rehearsal of all of that logistical planning and had only planned to do one KIT Day, so keen was she to maximise her maternity leave. The phrase 'dry run' was used by both Mary and Christine and suggested that prior logistical planning anxiety might be alleviated via the structure of a 'dry run', a practical benefit of KIT Days. How much one can prepare emotionally for a major life event such as maternity, KIT Days and the eventual return from maternity leave, Christine was not sure. She suggested that it is also important to have a response to what is needed at the time as well as structure beforehand. Therefore, when Christine reflected on KIT Days, she felt that more structure would have been preferable.

What Christine also concluded was that the structure could include a therapeutic element to the KIT Days. She suggested that it would have been useful to have been put in touch with other people in the organization who have been through KIT Days, to talk to them about their experience, such as via peer-to-peer talks. Essentially, she found that help for herself instead. After she came back to work, she sought out those individuals who she knew had returned from maternity leave recently. She spoke to them because she felt like she was at a loss. To Christine, the person with whom you spoke needed to know you well. In terms of

psychotherapeutic products from this research, a mother's therapist, their manager, colleague and partner all would have that advantage and should be briefed in a mother's KIT Day needs, as a valuable aid to her return to work.

Unlike the other participants, Lou had a structure ready-made for her KIT Days because she was doing her complete, normal job. Any additional structure she needed, such as childcare and managing three days' work within the two days, was known only to her and not to her manager. She did not have any flexibility to structure a KIT Day any differently, as she was relied upon to work with a colleague, covering each other on those days. Lou had her baby at home with her while she worked and coped by using a roll-forward function on the telephone if the baby needed attention, so her colleague would help cover. They made it work so that all the client contact was handled. Lou was comfortable with the set-up and felt committed to completing her work each day. As she was legitimately only working two days a week, she felt no guilt and she restructured her KIT Days to work also in the evenings, unpaid and without her manager's knowledge. It was another example in which more of a structure would have helped Lou to avoid that untenable situation.

Even though Lou was still on maternity leave, she would go out to team events and would not count the time towards her KIT Day quota. In contrast, the other participants restrained their contact to work content only, and not the extra social events. Lou would use it as an opportunity to catch up with everybody and to maintain her relationships. Of all the participants, Lou used the most unpaid time, outside of KIT Days, to prepare for her return, and yet, unfortunately, was the one who ended up without a job to which to return.

In summary, whatever the content of their KIT Days, which was in part driven by their role, the mothers explicitly wanted structure, to some extent, in their schedule, that would help with expectation management. For Mary and Christine, it was to help increase their belief that the logistics would work come the actual return. For Ann and Daisy, it helped them to feel that they were giving all they could in terms of showing their commitment to be back, and for Dr Mama, it was also about showing there was equity in what she gave in terms of work and received in terms of pay. Lou, who had devised her structure for the KIT Days would have benefited from a greater challenge and intervention from her

manager, an interchange that could have exposed the long-term impracticality of what she had envisaged and might have helped her redesign and keep her role. For all the women, therefore, a structure to the KIT Day would have helped them achieve either more helpful emotions or helped to devise a better plan for their return to work.

6.6 Similarities of support needs and emotions: anxiety and stress

A recurring similarity across the stories is the mother feeling some degree of anxiety and stress during her maternity leave, before, and during the KIT Days. The mother might have had limited or no contact with work before the Days. Sometimes it was worded differently, such as “worried”, but with a similar meaning. All the mothers noted their tiredness also, timed as KIT Days are in a period of a newborn not sleeping through the night. Important is to consider the source of the anxiety and stress if any alleviation is to be found, psychotherapeutically and practically. Although the mothers differed somewhat in their sources of anxiety and stress, these types of negative emotions were present throughout all the stories.

For some mothers, the anxiety preceded the KIT Days and for some, it arose as a result of the KIT Days. For Ann, the stress arose before she had her first KIT Day. For her, the stress was about “being found out” while on maternity leave, a variation of an ‘imposter syndrome’ concern (Ling, Zhang, & Tay, 2020). She knew she had the requisite skills for her role and her return, but the time away from work had eroded her confidence in them. Even though she had been an exemplary employee before maternity leave, somehow that was forgotten.

The concept of an ‘imposter syndrome’ for female managers was researched in the Ling et al.’s (2020) research with both male and female managers in Singapore. Their research found that the female managers rated themselves lower than their male counterparts on productivity, the impact of their work, and their knowledge. Ann was suffering doubts about her performance in a similar vein. The KIT Days, therefore, were loaded with anxiety for her. Unfounded worries, of course, as objectively she did acknowledge that she was, and remained, a high performer, however, that objectivity was absent as she approached the time to take her first KIT Day. Ann put herself in a no-win situation

in terms of alleviating her anxiety, because she found reasons not to be in touch with work while worrying about it at the same time. She did not want the person recruited to think she was checking on them, a right she held, and she did not want to be thought of as arrogant. She assumed that if she kept in touch with work then people would think she had an inflated sense of self-importance.

Similarly, for Dr Mama, some stress also arose before the KIT Days, as an extrapolation of stress she had felt before going on maternity leave. It resurrected negative feelings that she had been able to bury previously. For Mary, however, the source of stress arose both before and during the KIT Days. The pre-KIT Day stress came from being a new mother and some related financial pressures. However, she had a major stressor heaped upon her existing anxiety when she took her first KIT Day and reacted to how her son balked at attending nursery. She seriously considered delaying her return to work.

Daisy paused when she spoke of her anxiety. She explained that she had felt uncomfortable as a result of her KIT Days, especially because, the nature of KIT Days falling when they do, she was still on maternity leave and not back in the organisation. As a result, she did spend some time worrying about it, thinking to herself that she had upset people, not meaning to, and then had to withdraw from work until her actual return to work date came around.

Daisy recalled when telling her story, that her version of a negative emotion was that she was “stressed out” about going back to work, following her KIT Days. Her story was an example of KIT Day usage being both detrimental to the company and to her, and exactly what this research and its subsequent products are aiming to address. The KIT Day experience also extended into her time after her return when she was questioning herself as to whether she wanted to be at the company anymore. The pull of her baby was taking an effect and it was making her tearful. Had her emotions been better handled via the KIT Day experience, that aftershock when back at work might have been avoided.

Although Daisy had some nervousness before the KIT Days, made worse by her experience of them, in contrast, Christine and Lou had not been overly anxious before the KIT Days. However, like Daisy, they too became stressed by the experience of the KIT Days themselves.

Dr Mama returned with trepidation because she had left to go on maternity leave at a time when her work was very stressful. Like Daisy and Christine, she expressed her reservations about returning. Dr Mama subsequently reduced her hours to two and a half days per week. She noted her motivation, in part, as being to alleviate the anxiety about her return. It was not only work providing Dr Mama with stress and she appreciated that part-time work would not be the whole solution. This accords with the research of Warren (2004), in which part-time work was found not the solution to raising a mother's life satisfaction perceptions. Instead, Dr Mama related the other life challenges that she was facing outside of work and described them as being an extra layer of stress for a parent and particularly for mothers. She described the maternity thinking noted in O'Reilly's (2010) research in that she was having to leave work early to cover all of the children's needs and activities and compared that to her partner simply doing his usual working day without such pressures.

When Mary reflected upon her KIT Days, she compared the impact of having her first child with her second and realised that she was far more anxious with her firstborn. She found that the experience of her first baby was all-absorbing, with anxieties about everything associated with the child such as feeding, changing, and keeping her baby safe. With her second child, she did not feel that same anxiety, suggesting that there are different perceptions of the same factors. This experience is in line with the research of Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) who described the use of 'scripts', their relevance to mothers being that they have experienced it before and have an idea of what it entails to return to work and the confidence that they have done it successfully before.

Mary specifically mentioned alleviating some financial anxiety by earning from the KIT Days, referring to the extra financial costs that are associated with having a new baby. When Mary spoke of her actual KIT Days, she remembered preparing to return to full-time work, at about ten months, when, unexpectedly to her, she had a more stressful time. She had arranged for her son's initiation at nursery and then was going to start around the following week. She took him to the initiation and both she and her son quickly dissolved into tears. As she recounted the story, her heart was pounding just speaking about it again. It was a moment in which she truly questioned her decision to return to work and

determined that she would delay that date if that were what it would take to alleviate that feeling.

For Christine, her feeling of stress arose during the first of her KIT Days, when she met her new manager and realised how she had been stripped of her previous managerial responsibility for people. Her new manager was not welcoming. Everything had changed and Christine was caught unawares. In hindsight, she could see that it was indicative of the working environment to which she would be returning. Once back after her maternity leave, her worst fears were realised, as it became a very stressful place to work. It was the contrast that was particularly difficult for Christine. She had been very relaxed compared to most participants in preparing for her KIT Days, not expecting anything out of them except a rehearsal for the actual first day back. That neutral position was therefore thrown into disarray with a painful reintroduction to her workplace on her first KIT Day.

Lou's stress also rose during KIT days and originated from her manager as it did for Christine, but for a different reason. For Lou, the stress rose when her manager started to become evasive, rather than being told directly of her employment changes as Christine experienced. Lou had to wait longer, growing more despondent daily, to hear about her request for a two-day week, having proved its feasibility during earlier KIT Days. She felt confident that it could be done but her manager continued to avoid her. When Lou eventually had a phone call with her manager, she got the bad news that he did not think that it would work. The reasoning was wrong in her mind, and purely to do with her manager keeping the department size as large as it was already, whereas her two-day week would cause him to lose a half-head in his headcount. After all that Lou had done to prove herself, and to keep her department functioning, it felt like a huge blow.

In summary, each of the stories carried a degree of anxiety related to the KIT Days, whether before, during or after. Anxiety was caused by wondering about the KIT Day content, worry about how one was going to be received on those KIT Days by one's manager and colleagues, anxiety about job security, and anxiety about the unknown regarding changes that have happened. All these factors can contribute to an avoidable unease for the returning mother. Some of

the participants, such as Daisy, Christine and Lou developed further stress and anxiety from what they experienced on the KIT Days. For Daisy it was how the days were used, to deliver a politically charged project. For Christine and Lou, it was even more existential. Their very livelihoods were threatened by job changes and cuts. When one considers the United Kingdom Government's motivation in creating these opportunities for mothers to reconnect with work, the undue level of anxiety incidence would appear to be unintended and avoidable by companies, if given the right level of attention to the phenomenon (United Kingdom Government, 2006a).

In conclusion, therapeutic help to deal with stress and anxiety, before, during or after KIT Days would appear to be beneficial. KIT Days relative to a first child, the subject of the earlier small-scale research (Hampson, 2021) and a second (or subsequent child) were likely to raise different issues for a mother, and that was borne out in the various sources of anxiety felt by the mothers in the research study.

6.7 Differences in motivation for undertaking KIT Days

In terms of the motivation for agreeing to the use of KIT Days, there were differences between the participants. Some financial benefit was mentioned as a factor in all but Christine's and Lou's stories. Christine specifically mentioned that she had wanted to take all her maternity leave instead of taking the money but was forced into taking more KIT Days as her job was in jeopardy. If KIT Days were purely financial in value to the mother, then it is somewhat perverse as an incentive when the mother could simply terminate her maternity leave earlier, if that was her pressing need. There must be non-financial incentives also.

For most participants, however, that incentive was to resume their careers. Ann was in a good position at work, highly supported and with good manager communication during her maternity leave. Interestingly, Ann was the only participant who had a person be employed specifically to cover her maternity leave while she was away from work.

For the other participants, the work either got carried along in part by them, such as for Dr Mama or was passed to other colleagues to be shared between them.

For Ann, therefore, there was an extra anxiety about whether the replacement would either be better than her and highlight Ann's flaws or be worse than her but then leave a mess for her to clear up upon her return. Seemingly a 'no-win' situation for her. Similarly engaged with the wish to reconnect with work, Daisy experienced the fear of missing out whilst away and was ambitious to pick her career up again. Therefore, the KIT Days were a welcome relief, as she could re-engage and connect again with senior people. The KIT Days held that opportunity for her and, if not for the nature of the project allocated to her, the KIT Days could have worked well for her motivation. However, her contact with senior people turned into having to defend herself and her actions, relative to the project.

In contrast to Ann and Daisy, for Dr Mama, the KIT Day motivation was the fairness of being recompensed for time expended during maternity leave. She was in a unique position amongst the participants in that she was doing most of her job, unpaid, throughout her maternity leave anyway. The only part that she had been able to drop was her teaching. Her research interests and supervision of PhD students continued. Given that she was not compensated for this continued work, outside of the regular maternity pay, getting some recompense for the many hours was a motivator. The only reason that she did not claim all of her entitlement was that she did complete the administrative side of her claim in time.

Mary's motivation was something of a mix. For Mary, the motivations were receiving some pay during the period and easing back into her challenging role in what she had thought would be a gentler way, via KIT Days. However, the nature of her mental health work was that there really was no easy work to do, and so was given regular work; work that was difficult because of its psychological content and difficult caseload.

Rather than being about resuming her career, any financial motive or easing back into work, such as expressed by Ann, Daisy, Dr Mama and Mary, Christine had the logistical motivation to try out the nursery run, to dress up in a suit again for work and to rehearse the necessary timings for when she returned to work. Christine was unprepared for how upsetting the first meeting with her new boss

would be and compared to the logistical simplicity that she had expected, it was a shock to her.

Uniquely among the participants, Lou's motivation for her KIT Days was a mission of creating evidence. She had resolved to show management that her role could be completed in two days a week. She managed to make it happen on her KIT Days using her evenings to complete work and leveraging the help of her colleagues during the day. In terms of proving her case for a shorter working week, she amassed the evidence but did not reckon with the motivation of her manager to keep the role as a three-day role (as that would count as one headcount whereas a two-day person would be treated as a half-headcount). He was not prepared to give that up, even though Lou could prove it was a viable and cheaper option for her company.

6.8 Differences in the content of the KIT Days

It was striking in the research study as to how the KIT Days had been used by the participants. There is no governmental legislation that dictates what the KIT Days should contain, and so this actual use was an interesting insight gained via the research. Ann had taken the lead role in planning her days, and they were even scheduled relative to what her annual budgetary calendar required at work. Daisy had a project imposed on her, that she relished initially before she realised what a 'poisoned chalice' the high-profile project could be. Dr Mama was alone in taking her days with little interest or involvement from her manager and they comprised mainly her old role that she had never really stopped doing anyway. Mary had a challenge like Daisy, but her issue was more that her daily work was challenging anyway and so she was really 'back in the thick of it', as there was nothing less challenging that would allow her to start 'gently'. Mary did however have a conference outside the UK included in her KIT Days, and that was noted by her as helping her realise how 'bold' she had become.

Christine spent her time networking within the company to try to resurrect previous connections, to help her find a new role. Lou stepped back into her old role, completing it using two KIY Days a week, and adding a lot of unseen, and unpaid, time in the evenings to make it work.

When considering this diversity of content, with every woman experiencing a different type of KIT Day, it helped consolidate a view that KIT Days are a rich area for early discussions between a manager and a mother, ripe for clarity and improvement. KIT Day improvements, suggested in Chapter 10, emphasise that these Days could be provided with better boundaries and definitions, to reduce anxiety for the mother.

6.9 Differences in childcare coverage

In practical terms, the participants were covered differently in terms of childcare to be able to attend the KIT Days. A practical matter, that was apparent in reviewing the narratives, was that attending these KIT Days requires significant planning and childcare coverage. For Lou, there was no option, as she did not have the childcare cover and decided to do the KIT Days anyway with her baby in the background. Working from home due to COVID-19 was helpful in that regard and the norm at the time. The other participants used the help of family or their partner. For the one KIT Day, Christine used a nursery that she had already engaged for her full-time return and arranged a trial day there.

It can easily be forgotten that KIT Days arise during maternity leave, and therefore often before parents' back-to-work childcare arrangements are in place. Therefore, these mothers are often leaving their children for the first time and using a temporary childcare solution. As a precursor to a KIT Day, having to make such arrangements, ones that can be emotional can add pressure to the KIT Day experience.

6.10 Recommendations for improving KIT Day implementation

The participants were sources of valuable ideas for improvements for future mothers experiencing KIT Days. Each of them had both practical insights and, also, therapeutic, nurturing suggestions. Ann wondered if her HR Department might have provided more about what to expect and what not to expect on the days, including feelings and emotions. She also highlighted the timing of them, relative to the ability to make the most of them, when a mother is going through major sleep deprivation. In therapeutic terms, Ann found the KIT Days allowed for an experience of being cared for and helped by colleagues around her.

Daisy also recommended talking about feelings. Daisy thought that other mothers had the potential to offer 'mother-to-mother discussions' and use mentoring groups that matched mothers together. This insight concurred with the research of Cust (2016), on the risk of postnatal depression and the impact of peer support, in which the effect on the mothers of the support was found to be positive, leading to higher self-esteem and positivity, through the perception of empathy.

Daisy concluded that mothers should be kind to themselves, valuable advice, although she reflected that, therapeutically, some women might need assistance in being able to provide that for themselves. Daisy also advocated some external validation, using inputs from outside the workplace to increase the variety of assistance. An example used was joining an external body such as becoming a School Governor, to increase exposure to a wider set of people. She had in mind anything that helped boost one's skillset and network at this important juncture of a mother's life.

Similarly, Dr Mama believed that expectation management was key and even when she was back at work, she was left unclear about whether she made the transition to part-time to her manager's satisfaction. Similar to Ann and Daisy, Dr Mama recommended emotional expectation management for the mother during KIT Days, in the way in which a mother balances her life. Mary had a similar suggestion, referring to it as guidance, and that it would be tailored to the woman in question. The tailoring would take account of her circumstances and own needs. It would be important too that the woman was asked directly what she needed. Mary also was very keen to see KIT Days being used for reconnecting with colleagues. She felt that the manager does not always know what to suggest to the returning mother and some guidance to both the manager and the mother would be useful.

Given the very upsetting time Christine had during her KIT Days, unsurprisingly she advocated that there be some warmth to them, for example from a nurturing manager or a caring, empathetic, senior person. The KIT Days could be the start of an ongoing relationship that sees the mother through the KIT Day, into her actual return period and for some time thereafter. Christine expressed support for an idea embedded in her story, that there could be a three-step support

pattern; before maternity leave, during maternity leave (using KIT Days) and after a mother's return.

Lou included the most social events of any participant in her KIT Day return to work. She was the most content with her KIT Days at the time, however, it was in retrospect that she realised how her manager had avoided difficult conversations about work patterns. In terms of suggestions, for Lou, it would be about expectation management being timed for earlier in the process of returning. KIT Days are a likely contender for such conversations timed as they are before a mother's return. A protocol would need to be in place to ensure that a manager initiates the correct conversations. For all the participants, the anxiety-provoking randomness of a manager's interventions, in terms of timing and content (or lack thereof) could be standardised and controlled in the future via better training. In terms of comparators, the women with better expectation management, and with better manager, senior manager and colleague support, reported more satisfaction with their KIT Day experiences.

6.11 Reflections on the analysis of the narratives

It became more apparent, when considering the psychotherapeutic benefit of this research, that it would be important to address the different emotions such as those of a confused identity, belonging, self-esteem, the need for support, of anxiety and other negative emotions such as guilt, stress, and reduced confidence. The theme of needing structure and understanding changes, arising from the research, is a helpful indication of what might help alleviate the anxiety. In addition, tangible aspects arose, such as a reported high level of tiredness and other factors, such as working from home, the financial incentive of being paid for KIT Days and practical issues such as childcare and commuting.

To deliver research of lasting benefit to the psychotherapeutic community and to mothers, understanding the emotional aspects of the mothers' stories was important to the research. The emotions were considered across the stories. As KIT Days are taken during maternity leave, it is often the first time that the mother is separated from her baby. Also, because the childcare arrangements that she will have in place once she returns after maternity leave have not yet

commenced, typically, a mother may be asking for favours or trusting her child with someone she might not have engaged previously for childcare.

The aim of the research was to think across the stories and use the similarities found in taking the research forward into research products. Additionally, the differences were important to the research too, in not assuming that 'one size fits all' and in building flexibility into those products. How those thoughts, from the stories, were transitioned into a survey product of the research, and further into training modules, is covered in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Discussion of the survey

7.1 Translating unique stories into a resultant survey

A feature of the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional Studies at the Metanoia Institute is the development of resultant psychotherapeutic products from the research. This chapter explains how the challenge was overcome, of taking the six unique stories forward into the development of practical, repeatable psychotherapeutic approaches, leveraging the ‘analysis of narratives’ stage, detailed in Chapter 6.

This approach required the extra step of distilling the similarities found across the stories into specific questions in the resultant product survey. It also required a structuring of the differences into more open questions for the survey, understanding that making them open would encourage a greater range of answers, consistent with the research approach of inviting the unique stories of mothers. The purpose of the survey was to create a durable research product that would continue to develop and evolve, ensuring that its format and content remained relevant to mothers returning to work. The survey is intended to be a commercial product that can be used by companies’ Human Resource departments, by coaches and by psychotherapists.

The distillation resulted in four major areas of survey focus leveraged from the stories: ‘Emotions’, ‘Support’, ‘Change’ and ‘Self-identity’, which are covered in the following section. These sections explain exactly how the mothers’ stories shaped the resultant survey and other products of the research. The survey is in Appendix 11.

The results of the survey were then added to extracts from the stories, the rich narratives of the participants’ voices helping emphasise the learning points, to create a modular suite of psychotherapeutic training sessions. Each module benefits a returning mother directly or indirectly and uses different channels to reach her, such as via therapists and companies. The modules are covered in more detail in Chapter 9.

7.2 Emotions

Emergent emotions across the mothers' stories included guilt, anxiety and stress, to different degrees, and for different reasons. As concluded in previous research, this pivotal time in a mother's life can lead to guilt and anxiety in making that decision, (Alstveit et al., 2011; Davey et al., 2005). Those negative emotions were found in the mothers' stories, such as Ann's guilt, Daisy's stress in completing her KIT Day project, Dr Mama's anxiety as to whether she was claiming her allowance correctly, Mary's anxiety over leaving her son at his nursery, Christine's stress in having to find another role and Lou's stress once she realised her manager was not accepting of her proven ability to handle the work in a shorter week.

Anxiety went by many guises for the mothers, with synonyms such as 'worry' and 'fear' being prominent too. Linked to anxiety were some aspects of not knowing what had changed during their time off. Ann was the only participant who had maternity coverage at work, a fact that gave her additional anxiety that she would be judged as inferior to the temporary replacement colleague.

Also emerging across the stories were the needs to feel wanted and valuable by their employers, a need to feel a sense of self-worth through role identity and status and a requirement to deal with their mixed emotions around returning to work, helped through the support of management, other colleagues and, to a lesser extent, the partners of the women and other people outside of work. An important example, in this regard, in developing the survey was the experience of Daisy, who wanted to regain the feeling that she had previously of her career progressing and took on an overly taxing project as a result.

These findings were absorbed into the survey in the form of specific questions. The sense of mothers having to prove themselves to their employers, while still on maternity leave, prompted the open question on the survey to learn more of the effect on emotions. In the case of emotions, this focus area was explored in the survey by asking the mothers if they could remember their emotions in the context of their KIT Days and allowing free-format answers.

7.3 Support

The KIT Days take place when a mother has decided to return to work or is still deciding, and she can use the KIT Days to help her make that decision should she wish. Social factors arose in the research as being important to all participants and correspond to the multi-factorial decision suggested by the research of Khalil and Davies (2000).

Buzzanell and Liu's (2007) and Killien's (2005) research suggested that encouragement could help a mother return to work and all participants noted someone's input being impactful to them. From Ann and Daisy's supportive women in their companies to Christine's and Mary's partners, and Lou's very supportive colleague. When reflecting on the impact of a partner, it was considered that their support overall in the mothers' lives might be helpful, however, they were mentioned far less in the women's stories than were their managers.

This research results suggested that, regardless of the difficult balancing role that a working mother must navigate, there was a psychotherapeutic value in the encouragement and recognition of others that could play a pivotal role. The support of senior women, in Daisy's and Ann's companies, accords with Greer's research (2013) noting that women who network with other women may have beneficial results from that interaction.

Having a very supportive manager, who understands the emotions of a mother's return was noted as beneficial by Rouse et al. (2021), but they also warned that it was dependent on the manager's willingness and capability. Rather like the small-scale research noted in Chapter 1 (Hampson, 2021), in which women would 'sink or swim', leaving such a pivotal point in a woman's life to the randomness of the manager's perception and actions, is an avoidable risk. As Millward (2006) noted, the unmet needs of mothers at work, if not actively acknowledged, can lead to a mother starting to withdraw and considering that her maternal responsibilities outweigh her work commitments.

A manager is in the prime position to understand a working mother's needs, with easy access to speak with her, given his or her position. Good practice would

suggest that employers hold pre-maternity-leave interviews with their employees, at which expectations of those days would be set (Wood, 2012).

In terms of transition for use in the survey, the need for support, relative to KIT Days, was covered by asking the mothers specifically about how important support was, from their manager, work colleagues and people outside work, using a scale ranging from '*Not Important*' to '*Very Important*'.

7.4 Change

All the participants returned to environments that had changed in some way, and those who had the additional impact of COVID-19 found that the world had changed at the same time. For Daisy, that changed her work environment in a major way and, consequently, she found her attempts to advise other colleagues to be ignored, as everyone else was struggling to adapt at the same time. In terms of negative emotions, the practical benefit and positive impact of knowing what had changed during maternity leave became apparent through the stories of Ann, Daisy and Christine, in particular. Their roles were filled with technical and process-type information, so any changes were important to their subsequent returns. Ann had pre-empted some of the major changes by planning her KIT Days to coincide with key decision days, and so had reduced the risk of not knowing of a change. However, no specific research in this area of technical change was found in the literature search and remains a potential area for future research.

In terms of the survey, this aspect of KIT Days was transitioned into the survey by asking the mothers specifically about how important it was to them to understand the content of a KIT Day in advance, using a scale ranging from '*Not Important*' to '*Very Important*'.

7.5 Self-identity

The participants all confronted their self-identity as mothers and as working women. For Ann, it was from the moment she was pregnant and wondered if she would still have a career. The KIT Days helped her fears subside in that regard. Daisy felt early in her maternity leave that she might be missing out on career

progression and be excluded from that option. For Dr Mama, there was an identity issue around becoming part-time as an academic, seemingly not fitting with the complete absorption in her career that she had before maternity leave and keeping up as far as she could during it. For Mary, less of an identity concern arose, and she was one of the participants who found KIT Days to be the most positive during her second maternity leave. Such a better outcome could be indicative of the returning to work 'script' already having been experienced, as in the research of Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) who describe how well people transition through change might depend on how well the 'scripts' to follow are known. Christine was completely thrown by the turn of events and needed to find another job via her KIT Days. Having been known as a competent and trusted manager, she was given no respect, especially by junior colleagues who pressed her to take meetings in her evenings. A feeling of low compassion, after a long career with her company, had an impact on her identity as a successful career woman. For Lou, who had no issues with identity during the process, her need to resign rather than work more days than she wanted, did change her identity as she then decided to become a stay-at-home mother with a thought to start an entrepreneurial venture. As suggested by J. Smith's (1999) research, there was a shift in priorities, all the women made accommodations relative to their career, Lou's being the most radical.

In terms of the survey, this aspect of KIT Days was explored by asking the mothers open, not leading, questions about their emotions and any other factors, and a general open question to end the survey allowing the addition of any other pertinent comments they wished to make.

7.6 Survey purpose and usage

Although there are indicative themes for all mothers emerging from this research, the use of a survey for each mother, personally, is intended to tailor what she receives from her company or therapist to what she needs.

The mother's own psychotherapeutic input needs assessment, including managerial contact, prompted by this research, is via a more personalised, tailored survey, emerging from this research, that leads to a more targeted insight into her own negative and positive feelings about the return. Modules are

available to address each of the feelings and with a manner of coaching for leveraging her already-strong feelings and for therapy to address her negative feelings, such as her sense of identity.

7.7 Relevant psychoeducational practices

In terms of relevant psychoeducational practices that this research is informing, the modules resulting from the research provide a concise means of covering a range of topics pertinent to a mother returning to work. Psychoeducational products and practices can encompass a wide variety of media, from in-person information sharing to leaflets, workbooks and videos. Lukens and McFarlane (2004, p.206) describe psychoeducation broadly as “embracing several complementary theories and models of clinical practice” including learning theory, stress and coping models, social support models, and narrative approaches.

As an example of psychoeducation being researched with working mothers, Morgan and Hensley (1998) conducted a study, of five mothers, over six weeks, meeting once a week. In the six weeks, the women received psychoeducation and participated in cognitive restructuring and cognitive behavioural exercises. The researchers concluded that “group work can be an effective tool to assist working mothers in finding support as they manage multiple roles” (Morgan & Hensley, 1998, p.309). A similar social support model, led by a Human Resources department, could be constructed inside a company.

Individual psychoeducational work with a returning mother can also be helpful, with mothers in companies which provide it. Chen and Lappano (2023) explored individual career counselling with mothers and concluded that exercises could be followed that explored the mother’s beliefs relative to certain situations. The researchers found that the mothers were helped by “a discussion of perceived internal and external outcome barriers that may be preventing the client from planning and implementing a strategy to follow a desired path” (p.60).

In the case of this research, the psychoeducational vehicle of choice has been a series of modules, supported by summary leaflets. While each resulting module is informed by existing literature and enhanced by this current research, thought has gone into the packaging of it, to be delivered to, and by different parties. For

example, the mothers themselves, experiencing the emotions related to a KIT Day, will benefit more from the normalisation of their emotions than will their managers. However, the managers will benefit from understanding what actions they can take personally to improve the KIT Day experience for the mothers.

A Human Resources manager would be in a good position to create relevant networks and groups, such as the networks sought by mothers such as the research participant Christine. The extra value of this research therefore has been to add to the body of knowledge of the experience of a KIT Day but, also, the researcher's own previous and current roles as working mother, manager, psychotherapist and coach have been leveraged in the packaging of the materials to position them relative to their intended audience.

Chapter 8: Limitations of the research

8.1 Representation

This research study, having a total of six participants will not be a wholly representative cross-sectional view of the state of KIT Days in the UK. It provides a rich and deep insight into the experiences of six women and a degree of diversity was sought and found to a degree among the participants, in terms of whether it was their first or subsequent child (three participants in each category), disability (one, self-identified as partially disabled) and race (one participant considered herself non-White and described herself as Mediterranean and another self-identified as a Black woman).

8.2 Heterosexual bias

The research was limited in that it covered only heterosexual couples as parents. Although the advertising did not invite participation only by heterosexual mothers, and the mother participants were all cisgender females, nor did it explicitly invite other sexualities and genders of partners.

8.3 Job type diversity bias

The research was also limited in that there was no coverage of manual workers. To reach such workers in future research, consideration could be given to how to reach them in terms of advertising and any specific networks that they might use.

8.4 COVID-19 context

Other limitations included the influence of COVID-19 restrictions on the women during their maternity leaves, resulting in three participants taking their KIT Days during COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK. Especially for first-time mothers, having a baby and returning to work in a COVID-19 era would have been their only reference point, and could have influenced the use and the value that they received from KIT Days.

Chapter 9: Future implications of this research

9.1 Potential future products of the research

The full range of products can be seen in Appendix 8 and are described below. In summary, the products comprise a suite of therapeutic, training and informational products. KIT Days are taken during a key stage in a mother's transition to becoming a working mother in the case of first-time mothers. Given that the KIT Days are taken during maternity leave, the change can affect second-time mothers too, given the extra burden of caring for a first child, added to the responsibility and cost of a second or subsequent child.

All products emerging from the research are designed to capture the potential of the KIT Days in adding value, primarily psychotherapeutically for the mothers, but also financially and operationally for the employers. The comprehensive overview, provided in Appendix 8, is described below. In all cases the ultimate beneficiary of the products is the mother, but the benefits to her can be provided via other sources too, such as through therapists, partners, HR departments, colleagues and managers.

9.2 Product survey

Following the review of the similarities and differences of the six stories, the first product was the delivery of a survey, emerging from the narratives, and intended as a vehicle to 'live on' beyond the research study period. As a research product, it was considered of therapeutic benefit to leverage the Narrative Inquiry results in such an interactive and evolving manner as described in Chapter 7. The core of the survey was the design of the questions that would elicit a woman's feelings about her return to work, so that a KIT Day experience could be designed specifically for her, that would address her concerns and be supportive and motivational. The survey will adapt over time to take account of changing policies, attitudes and workforce demographics.

9.3 Survey creation

The themes from the similarities of the stories were carried forward into the survey. The participants of the Narrative Inquiry research study had found that support, in varying degrees, was needed by their management, colleagues, and outside of work to be able to anticipate the content of their KIT Days. Using the survey to check if those basic feelings were more universally experienced was designed into the approach. The six participants shared the emotions experienced during KIT Days and reconnected with their feelings as they underwent the step of reading their co-constructed story out loud. Those same emotions and a wider set of emotions also were expressed in the survey results.

The design of the survey was aided by the supervision of the researcher's Academic Consultant, Dr S. Orgad, herself a researcher of working mothers (Orgad, 2019; Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015) and by Dr A. MacBeath of the Metanoia Institute who helped in the selection of the optimal survey tool to use. The survey was deliberately structured in three parts; the first part gathering facts about the KIT Days themselves, the number and their usage, the second part gathering information on emotions and what was important to the mother and the third part gathering demographic data about the mother herself. The survey was designed with busy mothers in mind, at a forecast reply time of around five minutes. The results, using Momentive (SurveyMonkey), showed an average time of two seconds under five minutes, so the time objective was achieved. It was important to not waste the opportunity once a mother had accessed the site, so the clarity of questions and the ease of use were important for the completion rate. The eventual score of 100% of mothers completing the survey, once they had access to it, was considered a met objective.

9.4 Distribution

The survey required promotion and repromotion for the respondent numbers to be achieved, and this was done by reposting the entry on the sites involved. What was noted was a swift response on the posting day and the following day, and then the responses would cease as, presumably, attention had moved elsewhere. A learning point from the survey was that getting respected people to promote a survey can be useful for response rates. However, it is important to

be able to analyse the effect of their promotion. The survey was originally distributed via a network of which the researcher is a Founding Member called Careering into Motherhood, an organisation that recently published the results of its survey of 2,100 working women, with results such as 40% of the mothers finding the ability to work from home to be important to them, and showing a value in tailored coaching for working mothers, to consider their career plans before returning to work after maternity leave (Human Resources Zone, 2023). This organisation exists as a network for mothers returning to work and when the researcher received an invitation to join it, with this research study in mind, she joined as one of a limited forty initial invitations. It continues to be a useful platform for mothers who have or wish to have, a career (Careering into Motherhood, 2023).

9.5 Survey results

The survey product was trialled with a response rate of 121 replies (of which 117 were analysed, and four replies were removed in total, as not meeting the criteria required). Two replies dated before the earliest year permitted in the survey (the year '2017'), were removed on that basis (the years '2014' and '2015'). Two more replies were removed due to the respondent not having taken KIT Days and replying more to explain that they wished that KIT Days had been available to them.

Considering each of the similarities, the aspects taken forward specifically into the survey related to support (having a supportive manager, receiving support or advice from a work colleague and receiving support or advice outside of work), change (being brought up to date on changes) and to expectations (knowing in advance what the KIT Days will involve). However, the survey was kept deliberately open in terms of question format, to elicit other important elements, as each mother's story is unique to her context.

From an initial distribution (that was reposted several times), there was interest from the educational field and that network proved to be the most prolific of all respondents, via several and various social media channels. Consequently, approximately half of the survey replies came from the field of education and

provided an opportunity to compare the survey results for that cohort versus the general replies.

The survey respondents' ethnicity was gathered, via a free text field to both give autonomy to how it was answered and to make a less lengthy scroll down for a usable survey format. The United Kingdom Government recognises nineteen ethnic groups (Office of National Statistics, 2021) of which this research had some representation from fewer than ten groups. In the Narrative Inquiry, using the government definition of ethnic diversity, those identifying as a member of the White ethnic population had been 66%, and the survey results were very similar at 67.5%, both being below the reported 74.4% recorded in the UK in 2021 (Office of National Statistics, 2021). Therefore, the survey met the goal of recording a level of diversity although not across all ethnic groups, and that shortfall could be a subject for further research as the survey is developed beyond the current use. The seniority of the respondents was assessed via a tagging process during analysis. The mothers had a free-form text box to describe their roles.

9.6 Survey themes

Important results of the survey were that the subjects of importance to the six participants were borne out. For example, most survey respondents also rated as '*Important*' or '*Very Important*' the support from the manager, from colleagues and from outside of work, all sources mentioned by the Narrative Inquiry participants.

The results were:

	First-time mothers	Second+ time mothers
	Important/Very Important	Important/Very Important
Manager support	98%	100%
Colleague support	86%	83%
Outside support	65%	62%
Change updates	89%	95%
KIT Day content	89%	88%

Table 9: First- and second+ time mothers reporting support importance.

It became clear that, even though this survey was answered in the main by more senior people who might have had more autonomy from their manager, there was still a need for that interaction with their manager and colleagues. Although still important or very important, to two-thirds of respondents, outside help such as from partners, spouses, coaches and therapists did not approach the level of company-related help. In terms of how a therapist might help such a returner therefore, a two-pronged approach of helping the mother herself, but also helping the company and especially its managers to assist in that support, was included in the design of the research products. A company outsider typically cannot be present during a mother's workday, although they might help in the context of the mother's overall work-life balance.

9.7 Discussion of the results: First versus a subsequent child

When the survey results were analysed along first and second (or subsequent) child lines, there were signs of difference in the experience of KIT Days. The percentage of first-time mothers recording a negative KIT Day experience was 53% versus a second (or subsequent child) mother negatively recalling the experience at 33%. Although both cohorts had very similar mixed recollections (31% and 32% respectively), the second+ time mothers were doubly likely to report a wholly positive experience (35% versus 16%).

	At Home (survey answers)	At Work (survey answers)	Hybrid (survey answers)	Total (survey answers)	Percentage	
1st Time Mothers	Negative	5	16	9	30	53%
	Mixed	0	12	6	18	31%
	Positive	2	5	2	9	16%
	Total	7	33	17	57	100%
2nd Time Mothers	Negative	4	13	3	20	33%
	Mixed	5	7	7	19	32%
	Positive	7	6	8	21	35%
	Total	16	26	18	60	100%

Table 10: Kit Day experiences

In therapeutic product terms, the research points towards expectation setting in providing hope for first-time mothers, in that second+ time mothers find the KIT

Day experience to be more positive. Those mothers have experienced the whole returner process before, and they appear from the results to have more appreciation for what is ahead of them.

The results considered whether being full-time or part-time might affect the experience of the KIT Days.

	Full-Time/ First	Full-Time/ Second	Part-Time/ First	Part-Time/ Second
Negative	42%	32%	67%	34%
Mixed	42%	32%	17%	32%
Positive	15%	36%	17%	34%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 11: Full- and part-time mothers reporting support importance.

Interestingly, the results suggest that being part-time with a first child has the highest likelihood of the perception of a negative experience. When one considers why that might be the case, some of the previous research might provide some insight. Tomlinson et al. (2009) remarked on the lack of a choice of part-time roles causing women to take a lower-level role than their qualifications would suggest. If there is such a correlation, leading to more negative perceptions, that could be a topic for further research.

It could also be possible that a woman returning part-time would, by simple arithmetic of the number of hours she works, need a longer elapsed period than her full-time equivalent maternity returner to catch up and feel comfortable once more. In the survey results, second time (or subsequent) part-time working mothers fared similarly in terms of negative, mixed and positive experiences as second-time full-time working mothers, suggesting that the gap narrows. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) noted that mothers can use ‘scripts’ during a period of change, such as a maternity leave return, and for a second-time mother, the ‘script’ of returning to work has been played out before, providing, potentially, a reason for the better second-time mother scores in the survey.

9.8 Restrictions of the survey

The restrictions of the survey were that it was taken by women who were reached via networks that would only include women who had time to spend online and might have excluded women too busy or disinclined to be using social media. The success of the survey being endorsed and distributed widely by an educator led to approximately half of the respondents coming from that sector, however, the themes between industries were consistent.

9.9 Future iterations of the survey

Future iterations of the survey could take more of the positive and negative words shared by the women survey respondents, to check for relevancy and to personalise the therapeutic modules that could be employed to a mother's benefit.

In addition to KIT Days, both parents can use Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) Days (United Kingdom Government, 2024) that provide twenty additional days, to be taken by the mother and/or by the father. Subsequent surveys and research can be expanded to cover SPLIT Days.

9.10 Training modules

A modular set of psychotherapeutic training sessions for use by therapists, coaches, mothers, partners and companies has been produced from the research study and the resultant survey. These modules are being distributed solely, and via joint ventures, with other related psychotherapy professionals. **Ten modules** have arisen from this research.

The first key output is **Module 1, for therapists**, a comprehensive resource module providing a synopsis of the research and its findings. The module also helps therapists to understand the range of emotions involved, for a mother returning to work and who would have access to KIT Days. The module helps the therapist to understand how he or she might best assist such a mother and also how to signpost the mother client to extra help. Some of that signposting is to the other resultant modules of this research. The therapist module leverages the other modules, relating to self-identity, guilt and anxiety and uses the 'what

to expect' module (Module 6) to help the mother to manage her anticipation anxiety.

In cases in which the mother's partner is involved, such as in couples' counselling, that additional module, for partners (Module 9) is also available to the therapist. Fathers can be an important support for their partners but if suffering with their own emotions, might need some support themselves (Hodgson et al., 2023). The therapist also has access to all the modules in the suite and can leverage them as appropriate for their clients and their presenting issues.

Module 2, for help with self-identity. As Daisy said, the question of “who am I?” can be explored by a mother at this key transition point. Normalising the difference between mothers to adopt a new self-identity is covered, as is the choice of demonstrating being a responsible employee and a responsible mother, often with the attendant feelings of not being good enough (Alstveit et al., 2011). Awareness, via the training, is important, given that a mother will respond differently depending on how she is treated relative to her change, and that can affect her self-identity, (Millward, 2006). The therapist can help her formulate what she needs to request of, or from, the people in her work and personal life, to help her manage her self-identity transition. While the mother is in the process of discovering her new identity as a working mother, awareness for the therapist and mother of the state of liminality helps in minimising the anxiety of that feeling. When a mother is neither feeling like her previous self-identity as a career woman and not yet fully adopted her working mother role, awareness of liminality as a normal, transitional experience could be reassuring to her (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

Module 3, for help with guilt, is partially inspired by Ann's remark of, “all the guilt that... goes with [returning to work]”; a social norm assumption that guilt is expected of a mother, that can be addressed through psychotherapeutic interventions. For example, Mary's constant guilt in the pit of her stomach at having to leave her son at nursery could have been normalised with empathetic listening and the awareness training of this module. Societal norms are covered in this module, including sharing that mothers are at risk of guilt, from societal

pressure, even if they do not subscribe to society's unachievable high expectations of what constitutes a good mother (Henderson et al., 2016).

This module helps the therapist and the mother to understand that a mother can become overwhelmed and fall into an unending cycle of aim and failure unless she can understand the sources of her guilt and challenge them (Hays, 1996). The mother's guilt might cause her to question the whole basis of her life and consider giving up work or perhaps retarding her career progression by moving to part-time hours. This module leverages research such as that of Gunderson and Barrett (2017) who found that such a strategy might not be the solution that the mother seeks, as it led in their research to no better life satisfaction. Therefore, this module helps the therapist and mother to consider the source of the guilt rather than assume the solution that part-time hours will resolve the feeling.

As well as modules for therapists, there is a specific **Module 4, for coaches** that picks up also on leveraging the positivity of the returning mother, as over half of mothers in the survey expressed mixed emotions. By leveraging her expressed positive emotions, at the same time as addressing her negative emotions, logic would suggest that an element of double leverage can apply, leading to better outcomes. That bilateral aspect could be part of future research also. Coaching has been researched as a re-entry tool for mothers into the workforce and found to help emotionally and practically, creating a foundation for career development once the mother has returned (Filsinger, 2012). Even short-term support, such as during KIT Days, could be beneficial (Bussell, 2008) and the perception of a returning mother could be boosted by seeing to be engaging in such a programme (Hideg et al., 2018). Whereas a mother's therapist might help her to focus on her emotions, such as guilt and anxiety, her coach might be able to leverage her strengths at that vital return point. In the survey, there were very many positive words being used by mothers relating to excitement, happiness, reconnection and appreciation. A coach, knowing a mother's goals, skillsets, positive feelings and strengths can help her re-enter her company with a momentum that she might not otherwise have.

There is a module to help with understanding and relieving a main negative emotion expressed by the participants and highly present in the survey results;

Module 5, for help with anxiety. As Lou helped illuminate, unexpected managerial contact during maternity leave can be unnerving and so helping a mother articulate to herself and her manager. In planning her KIT Days, what she wants, and what she does not want, is of therapeutic benefit.

This module also provides training for the therapist and awareness for the mother that it is common for mothers to feel anxiety from several sources, such as management, around breastfeeding and around her change in self-identity (Buzzanell & Liu, 2007; Rojjanasrirat, 2004; Snir, 2019). Normalising the feeling for mothers, of the anxiety that they may always feel that they can try harder, and achieve more, can be comforting and allow strategies to be put in place to address that common feeling for working mothers (Collins, 2021).

Another module aimed directly at the mother, for her psychotherapeutic benefit, is **Module 6, for help regarding ‘what to expect’**. This module addresses how women experience the KIT Days and their return to work, drawing on the research directly. Helping a mother understand that what she is feeling, fearing and experiencing is normal, and that it passes as a phase could be useful to her. Training will be valuable to all parties involved in her maternity leave and will assist in designing explicit steps to help relieve herself of the feelings, such as planning, talking and ways to communicate her agency and commitment to her role (Leslie et al., 2012).

This module also addresses issues rarely discussed in training, of the extra burdens that the mother might feel after the arrival of a first or subsequent child. One example of awareness training relates to the additional maternal thinking now required, such as the planning and organising aspects of the household and the child’s life (Goffman, 1959; O’Reilly, 2010). Professional and personal sacrifices and their impact relative to a mother’s personality are considered (Vejar et al., 2006).

Module 7, for managers helps a mother indirectly, and, as the participants’ stories suggested, remains an area left very much to chance that a manager can handle the maternity-to-work transition well for the returning mother. The manager is encouraged, via this training module, to become aware of their pivotal position in a mother’s return. As well as reference to HR advice on the legalities

of handling KIT Days, the training shares the summarised results of the research and the survey, to demonstrate how important mothers find the employee-manager relationship to be. Other research such as that of Rouse et al. (2021), Jones et al. (2022 and Greer (2013) are also shared, to reiterate how the manager can impact the well-being of the returning mother, and lead to her increased confidence and self-esteem.

This research study also showed that loyalty to her manager might lead to a reluctance to share what she truly needs and puts more onus on the manager to be proactive in working with her on that expression of her needs. The manager is also provided with an awareness that some women might prefer less contact, as in the case of Lou, and provided with techniques to gauge that carefully with her. The importance of structure is shared in the manager training, also, in that all the mothers in the research study would have preferred more for their KIT Days and helps a manager to prepare for that in collaboration with the mother.

Module 8, for Human Resources (HR), similarly helps that key department to help their managers and colleagues to interact positively with the returning mother, in a way that is constructive for her. This module leverages the other modules in a summarised way, to provide HR professionals with an insight into how a mother could be feeling, with feelings covered in Modules 2, 3, 5 and 6. HR professionals are also provided with the module for managers and colleagues so that they can share them as needed and be aware of the training that is available to those specific people. The module for partners is also provided, for use with fathers and SPLIT days, the most recent type of parental days available (United Kingdom Government, 2024). To help with the distribution of the information, HR leaflets have also been created.

Module 9, for partners is another indirect help for the mother, covering the research findings, helping normalise the feelings that arise for the mother so that the partner might have more insight and empathy, thus leading to additional psychotherapeutic benefit for the mother. This module is also of help to fathers, covering topics such as how they feel about their part in the decision-making around the child (Leach et al., 2006). Normalising the feelings of fathers is one purpose of this module, including their feelings and how they are feeling as both a partner and a father (Hodgson et al., 2023). The readjustment that is needed

for a father, after the birth of a baby, is covered including the feelings of loss and struggle that might result (Dallos & Nokes, 2011).

There is also **Module 10, for colleagues** that helps, in a work setting, to understand how a colleague might help assist a mother's return. The research study has shown the importance of colleagues in the mother's return and KIT Days, one woman in the survey was very upset when, because of the increase in working from home days since COVID-19, none of her colleagues was physically present when she took her KIT Days. The psychological impact on that woman was felt strongly and could have been avoided if this key set of stakeholders had engaged correctly. In this training module, colleagues are encouraged to help a returning mother by sharing the results of the survey, which rated the benefit of colleague support as important or very important for over 80% of all returning mothers. It also shares the research of Cust (2016) on the positive impact of peer support, something that could easily be built in structurally to KIT Days.

9.11 Research communication

To communicate to therapists who could be working with mothers, the research has been presented at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) conferences of 2022 and 2023 (Hampson, 2022; Sansom, 2023b). The complete set of modules will be made available to therapists via the training being rolled out via a leading counselling training company in the UK. Companies will have access to the modules for their staff so that the therapeutic benefit can surround a mother and increase her chances of a successful return. In addition, a session for mothers and fathers was held at a leading UK retail company to coincide with Maternal Health Week 2023 (Sansom, 2023a). The research prompted audience participation and was well-received by the HR staff members, and by managers, mothers and fathers. This session will be adapted for future use with other companies and their staff.

The research has been publicised among coaching companies to offer to mothers engaged with their company and the major counselling training company will publish it on their website. The mothers' stories have provided rich and deep narratives, potentially to be used in writing a later book aimed at

mothers returning to work. Having had two books published previously, the researcher is aware of the necessary effort and standard of attainment required (Hampson, 2015; Hampson & Ortega, 2017).

9.12 Potential future research and products

Although this research study has been conducted based on UK KIT Days only, the concept of mothers using such opportunities to be back in touch with their place of employment before their return to work, applies to other countries, recognising the value of reintroducing mothers back into the workplace ahead of their maternity leave ending. Therefore, an expansion of the research into other such countries could be beneficial, particularly those with legislation which protects parental rights during maternity leave. Therefore, there is an expectation that these research products have the potential to be extended into additional countries, subject to legislative and regulatory requirements.

As an example, the International Labor Office (2023) published standards for international maternity practices and extensive, including useful worksheets for use by employers. Although maternity leave is covered within their training, and the mother's subsequent return to work features, the focus is mainly on physical health, including breastfeeding and economic security. This extensive training does not cover feelings on the part of the mother, suggesting that there is scope to augment other training programmes with psychotherapeutic products of this research, within and beyond the UK.

Future research could include a longitudinal study of the effects of the COVID-19 era on women returning from maternity leave and using KIT Days from home. Similarly, researching the long-term success of the careers of women who had the requisite support from their returns to work would add to the body of knowledge. The impact of a manager's role emerged through the research however, no specific analysis was performed on whether the gender of the manager might have an impact, and this area could also be a focus for future research.

In addition, longitudinal studies on mothers who used KIT Days versus those who did not could be useful in helping determine the value in assisting a mother's

maternity return and her ability to continue the trajectory of her previous career. In cases where the KIT Days are altered in line with this research study, this researcher intends to employ the tailored survey and the modules, and subsequently perform further qualitative research on the resultant impact on the mothers' experiences.

The impact on returning mothers of not understanding non-obvious technical changes in their work processes that have arisen during their maternity leave, and the impact on her as a result, is another area that could benefit from future research. The phenomenon of part-time mothers suffering from more negative KIT Day experiences during their first maternity leave, relative to their full-time counterparts could be further researched also. Given that this gap was found to be negligible for second-time mothers, understanding that turn-around for first-time mothers could be useful in developing further tailored products for that subset of mothers.

Chapter 10: Overall conclusion

10.1 Conclusion on the approach

Having researched the research question of “Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers’ stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches”, one conclusion is that Narrative Inquiry was a suitable methodology for the subject matter. In addition, the method of recruitment of participants, briefing them, interviewing them, transcribing personally, rewriting their stories reflexively and working with these mothers to retell their stories was both well-received by them and was useful in adding to the body of knowledge of KIT Day experiences.

This Narrative Inquiry approach was appropriate for the nature of the research intention of hearing the stories of six women who had engaged in KIT Days. The stories were in-depth, as intended in a Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in exploring the mother’s feelings in the context of her broader maternity leave and return to work. That context is vital to the understanding of the impact of the KIT Days. The stories were treated as important pieces of research but also, via the technique of analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1988) or ‘thinking across the stories’ (Etherington, 2020), the approach allowed for the inclusion of the reflexivity of the researcher and for recurring/common themes to be identified. The results and conclusion are congruent with the Narrative Inquiry principle that “a reflexive researcher does not simply report facts or truths but actively co-constructs meanings and interpretations of his or her experiences in the field” (Etherington, 2016). The overall conclusion is that each woman is an individual in terms of her experience of KIT Days and the contribution of her own, unique story, has illuminated a path forward for psychotherapeutic assistance to all women going through this transitional phase of her life.

10.2 Conclusion on the survey product

As a product arising from the research, the first iteration of the survey was successful in terms of participation and completion rate, suggesting that it could

be used and refined into a viable, long-term product, that will aid the diagnosis of helpful psychotherapeutic interventions for the mother. Under a five-minute completion time already, when used in a known company context, some of the demographic questions can be taken out to reduce the time further and the available psychotherapeutic products could be added as a picklist for her to 'self-help' in the identification of the modules of most value to her at that time. Some modules could become part of a core offering with optional, additional modules at her discretion. The survey can also be adapted for use by managers, to help them navigate this period similarly.

10.3 Conclusion on the value of the research and its products

The purpose of the research, as described in its title, was twofold. The first objective was to discover what we can learn from women's stories about KIT Days, and the second objective was that this research would inform the development of new and relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.

In terms of the first objective, notwithstanding that the output was produced from the stories of a small subset of the thousands of working women returning to their companies in the UK each year, there were several learnings of note. The women described different experiences, including the content of their days and experienced different emotions and levels of anxiety and guilt. They had experienced changes in their self-identity, in becoming a working mother, with that transition arising at different points in their maternity leave and their return to work. For second-time mothers who had already lived the script of a previous return to work and their new self-identity, the change was far less pronounced with their second child.

The mothers' typical reluctance to criticise their managers' performance about the KIT Days and yet their reliance on his or her support was an interesting outcome. It suggested that a more prepared manager could have a beneficial impact on a mother's well-being, and yet loyalty could interfere with mothers asking for what they need. The one participant who had a woman for a manager happened to have been very well-prepared for her maternity leave in general. That one case is insufficient to draw any conclusion on the gender of managers.

However, the general benefit of that participant's good management support accorded with the other participants' stories.

A surprising outcome was that the flexibility afforded by the United Kingdom Government in how to use KIT Days was considered counter-productive to the benefit obtained by the mothers from them. All the women would have preferred more thought to have gone into the structure of their KIT Days, in advance of taking them.

There is a potential consideration for Human Resource departments and the United Kingdom Government itself, as to whether the balance of flexibility versus structure is currently correct. The research conclusions would suggest that more direction on what mothers find beneficial in terms of the content of a KIT Day should be explored by policymakers. Similarly, the research indicated that managers were pivotal to the success of the KIT Days for the mothers and, armed with an understanding of what a mother needs (assisted by completing the research product survey), Human Resources departments could improve the chances of the successful management of the situation, through training and education.

Also, with the United Kingdom Government's allowance of Shared Parental Leave in Touch (SPLIT) Days, a mother can apply for an additional twenty SPLIT Days to add to her ten KIT Days. If her company agrees, the combined thirty days of working during maternity leave add to the research conclusion and argument that the combined KIT and SPLIT Days should be as beneficial as possible to both the mother and the company and hence more policy direction could be advantageous (United Kingdom Government, 2024).

The stories all elicited positive and negative emotions and experiences for the participant mothers. The addition of the resultant survey, emerging from the mothers' stories, helped expand the range of emotions experienced by the six mothers. That mix of emotions demonstrates that there are positive emotions surrounding KIT Days too, such as the excitement of reinvigorating their career upon their return, as well as the negative aspects to be addressed through psychotherapeutic approaches, such as the module for guilt. The potential leverage for the mothers' positive feelings was developed further into a module

for coaches. The KIT Days are a pivotal time to help a mother rediscover her feelings of professional expertise and value, the leveraging of which would be a coaching opportunity.

In terms of the contribution to the psychotherapy world, before this research, the content of KIT Days was left deliberately vague by the United Kingdom Government and companies, and that stance was unquestioned in the literature. The mothers' stated need in their stories, for more structure, was reiterated by the survey results also. This outcome suggests that companies introducing a survey and KIT Day modules would be welcomed by the mothers involved. In addition, the specific situation in which a returning mother finds herself will be of interest to therapists and coaches, who might not have any specific pre-training with this situation for a client. The participant mothers' anxieties and stresses can be checked via a survey-type checklist in the future, in addition to the therapist training via the modules, allowing more relevant and tailored psychotherapeutic interventions.

As a conclusion, the narrative research output has been transformed into a suite of psychotherapeutic tools to envelop a returning mother, a suite of modules to address her emotional needs related to her return to work, using KIT Days as an ideal time to deliver them. Importantly the tools focus on her needs directly and involve all the people who could feature in her return to work, leveraging informed research findings in their creation. In addition, the research contains insights into the experiences of KIT Days for Human Resources departments and for policymakers in governments, both in the UK and in countries such as Australia that also recognise KIT Days (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2024). There is the potential for company policies to ensure that managers are properly trained to help a mother maximise her use of the KIT Days during her maternity leave, including their understanding of an individual mother's needs. Similarly, there are insights for Human Resources departments to endorse and promote useful peer and mentoring networks. Policymakers could retain the flexibility of KIT Days but add more directive help on what typically works in terms of expectation-setting and structure.

Permitted Word Count: 65,000 words +/- 10% (Word Count: 66,524 words)

References

- Alstveit, M., Severinsson, E., & Karlsen, B. (2011). Readjusting one's life in the tension inherent in work and motherhood. *Journal of Advanced Nursing: Returning to work after maternity leave*, 67(10), 2151–2160. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2011.05660.x>.
- Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and investigating motherhood: The decade's scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62(4), 1192–1207. <https://doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01192.x>.
- Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman. (2024). Keeping in touch days. Retrieved from <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/parental-leave/during-parental-leave/keeping-in-touch-days#:~:text=A%20keeping%20in%20touch%20day,by%20agreement%20with%20their%20employer.>
- Bailey, L. (1999). Refracted selves? A study of changes in self-identity in the transition to motherhood. *Sociology (Oxford)*, 33(2), pp. 335–352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038599000206>.
- Baim, C. (2021, October). *Multi-modal grounded research: integrating reflective inquiry, action research, the Kolb experiential learning cycle and applied phronesis in a PhD study of ethics and safety with personal narratives*. Professional knowledge seminar presented at the Metanoia Institute, London.
- Baker, M. (2008). *The family life of academics: gendered priorities and institutional constraints*. Prepared for the Annual Conference of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Barclay, L., Everitt, L., Rogan, F., Schmied, V., & Wyllie, A. (1997). Becoming a mother: an analysis of women's experience of early motherhood. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25, pp.719-728. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.t01-1-1997025719.x>.
- Barnett, R. C., & Gareis, K. C. (2000). Reduced-hours employment: The relationship between difficulty of trade-offs and quality of life. *Work and Occupations*, 27, 168 – 187. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/0730888400027002003>.
- Barr, R. (2010). Women in banking. *Northwestern financial review*, Vol. 195, Issue 24 (Dec 15-Dec 31, 2010): 6.
- Baughman, R., Di Nardi, D., & Holtz-Eakin, D. (2003). Productivity and wage effects of 'family-friendly' fringe benefits. *International Journal of Manpower* 24(3): 247–259. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437720310479723>.
- Beck, C. (1992). The lived experience of postpartum depression: a phenomenological study. *Nursing Research*, 41(3), pp. 166-170.

- Bell, L., Goulet, C., Tribble, D. S., Paul, D., Boisclair, A., & Tronick, E. Z. (2007). Mothers' and fathers' views of the interdependence of their relationships with their infant. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 13 (2), 179-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1074840707300774>.
- Blum, L. (2007). Psychodynamics of postpartum depression. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 24(1). <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0736-9735.24.1.45>.
- Bornstein, S., Williams, J. C., & Painter, G. R. (2012). Discrimination against mothers is the strongest form of workplace gender discrimination: lessons from US Caregiver Discrimination Law', *The International journal of comparative labour law and industrial relations*, 28(1), pp. 45–62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.54648/IJCL2012004>.
- Bowyer, D., Deitz, M., Jamison, A., Taylor, C., Gyengesi, E., Ross, J., Hammond, H., Ogbeide, A. E., & Dune, T. (2022). Academic mothers, professional identity and COVID-19: Feminist reflections on career cycles, progression and practice. *Gender, Work and Organization*. 2022;29(1):309-341. <https://doi:10.1111/gwao.12750>.
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11.4, 589-597, <https://doi:10.1080/2159676X.1628806>.
- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions. (2018). <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions>.
- British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-ethics-and-conduct>.
- Brouwer, S., Reneman, M. F., Bultmann, U., Van der Klink, J. J. L., & Groothoff, J. W. (2010). A prospective study of return to work across health conditions: perceived work attitude, self-efficacy and perceived social support', *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 20(1), pp. 104–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-009-9214-z>.
- Bruner, J. (1988). Research Currents: Life as Narrative. *Language arts*; Vol. 65, No. 6, Critical Literary/Critical Thinking (October 1988), pp. 574-583.
- Budig, M. J., & England, P. (2001). The Wage Penalty for Motherhood. *American Sociological Review*, 66(2), 204–225. <https://doi.org/10.2307/10.2307/2657415>.
- Buehler, C., O'Brien, M., & Walls, J. K. (2011). 'Mothers' part-time employment: Child, parent, and family outcomes'. *Journal of family theory & review*, 3(4), pp. 256–272. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2011.00110.x>.
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism* (3rd ed.). Hove: Routledge.
- Bussell, J. (2008). Great expectations: Can maternity coaching affect the retention of professional woman? *International journal of evidence-based coaching and mentoring*, 2008-11-01 (S2), p14-16.

- Buzzanell, P., & Liu, M. (2007). It's 'give and take': Maternity leave as a conflict management process. *Human Relations (New York)* 60(3): 463–495.
- Careering into Motherhood. (2023, July). Retrieved from <https://www.careeringintomotherhood.com>.
- Chen, C. P., & Lappano, S. (2023). Career counselling considerations for mothers returning to work, *Canadian Journal of Career Development*, 22(1), pp.53-62. <https://doi.org/10.53379/cjcd.2023.353>.
- Cheng, G. H. L., & Chan, D. K. S. (2008). *Who suffers more from job insecurity? A meta-analytic review*. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, Vol. 57 No. 2, pp. 272-303. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2007.00312.x>.
- Chi, M. T. H., de Leeuw, N., Chiu, M., & LaVancher, C. (1994). Eliciting self-explanations. *Cognitive Science*, 18(3), 439-477.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry; experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Wiley & Sons.
- Coleman, L., Dali-Chaouch, M., & Harding, C. (2020). *20th annual childcare survey*, Coram Family and Childcare. <https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-survey-2020>.
- Collins, C. (2021). Is maternal guilt a cross-national experience? *Qualitative Sociology*, 44, 1–29 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09451-2>.
- Community Care. (2007). Keeping in touch days offer new mothers flexible return to work (2007). *Community care* (Haywards Heath, England), (70).
- Connolly, S., & Gregory, M. (2008). Moving down: Women's part-time work and occupational change in Britain 1991-2001'. *The Economic Journal (London)*, 118(526), pp. 52–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2007.02116.x>.
- Cooke, L. P., & Gash, V. (2010). Wives' part-time employment and marital stability in Great Britain, West Germany and the United States. *Sociology*, 44(6), 1091–1108. <https://doi:10.1177/0038038510381605>.
- Cowan, C., & Cowan, P. (1995). Interventions to ease the transition to parenthood: Why they are needed and what they can do. *Family Relations*, 44.
- Cukrowska-Torzewska, E., & Matysiak, A. (2020). The motherhood wage penalty: A meta-analysis. *Social Science Research*, Volumes 88–89, 2020,102416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102416>.
- Curry, D. S. (2020). Interpretivism and norms. *Philosophical studies*, v.177, n.4, p.905-930, <https://doi:10:1007/s11098-018-1212-6>.
- Cust, F. (2016). Peer support for mothers with postnatal depression: A pilot study. *The Journal of the Health Visitors' Association, Community Practitioner*, 89(1), pp. 38-41.

- Dallos, R., & Nokes, L. (2011). 'Distress, Loss, and Adjustment Following the Birth of a Baby: A Qualitative Exploration of One New Father's Experiences', *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 24(2), pp. 144–167. doi.org/10.1080/10720537.2011.548223.
- Daminger, A. (2019). The cognitive dimension of household labor. *American Sociological Review* 84:609–33.
- Davey, B., Murrells, T., & Robinson, S. (2005). Returning to work after maternity leave. *Work, Employment and Society* 2005 19:2, 327-348.
- Deave, T., & Johnson, D. (2008). 'The transition to parenthood: what does it mean for fathers?', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 63(6), pp. 626–633. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2008.04748.x>.
- Dewey, A., & Drahota, A. (2016). Introduction to systematic reviews: online learning module *Cochrane Training*. <https://training.cochrane.org/interactivelearning/module-1-introduction-conducting-systematic-reviews>.
- Dex, S., & Scheibl, F. (2001). Flexible and family-friendly working arrangements in UK-based SMEs: Business cases. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 39(3): 411–431.
- Dillaway, H., & Pare, E. (2008). Locating mothers: How cultural debates about stay-at-home versus working mothers define women and home. *Journal of family issues*, 29(4), pp. 437–464. doi.org/10.1177/0192513X07310309.
- Douglas, S., & Michaels, M. (2004). *The mommy myth: The idealization of motherhood and how it has undermined women*. Riverside: Free Press.
- Du, S. (2023). Childbearing risk, job sectors, and the motherhood wage penalty. *Popul. Res Policy Rev* 42, 21 (2023). doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1007/s11113-023-09763-5.
- Dunford, E., & Granger, C. (2017). Maternal guilt and shame; relationship to postnatal depression and attitudes towards help-seeking. *Journal of Child & Family Studies*, 2017;26(6):1692-1701. <https://doi:10.1007/s10826-017-0690z>.
- Eickers, G. (2023). Coordinating Behaviors: Is social interaction scripted? *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 53(1), 85– 99. doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/jtsb.12357.
- Emmott, E., & Myers, S. (2021). Communication across maternal social networks during the UK's national lockdown and its association with postnatal depressive symptoms. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 75, pp. A30.
- Engward, H. (2013). Understanding grounded theory. *Nursing Standard (Royal College of Nursing (Great Britain): 1987)*, 28(7), 37-41.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1993). *Protocol analysis: Verbal reports as data* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Esping-Andersen, G. (1999). *Social foundations of post-industrial economies*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using ourselves in research*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599-616. doi.org/01.1177/1077800407301175.
- Etherington, K. (2016). Personal experience and critical reflexivity in counselling and psychotherapy research. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 2016, 0(0):1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12080>.
- Etherington, K. (2020). Becoming a narrative inquirer. In S. Bager-Charleson & A. McBeath (Eds), *Enjoying research in counselling and psychotherapy* (pp. 71-93). Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Etherington, K., & Don, M. (2007). *Part 3: Thinking across the stories, in Trauma, drug misuse and transforming identities*. United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Evans, E., & Grant, C. (2008). *Mama, PhD women write about motherhood and academic life*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813544984>.
- Felfe, C. (2012). The motherhood wage gap: What about job amenities? *Labour Economics*, Volume 19, Issue 1, 2012, pp. 59-67, ISSN 0927-5371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2011.06.016>.
- Filsinger, C. (2012). How can maternity coaching influence women's re-engagement with their career development: a case study of a maternity coaching programme in UK-based private law firms. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 46-56.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swap: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research* 2002 2:2, 209-230.
- Fletcher, R. J., Matthey, S., & Marley, C. G. (2006). Addressing depression and anxiety among new fathers. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 185: 461-463. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.5694/j.1326-5377.2006.tb00650.x>.
- Gabriel, A. S., Volpone, S. D., MacGowan, R. L., Butts, M. M., & Moran, C. M. (2020). When work and family blend together: Examining the daily experiences of breastfeeding mothers at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 2020:63(5):1337-1369. <https://doi:10.5465/amj.2017.1241>.
- Gangl, M., & Ziefle, A. (2009). Motherhood, labor force behavior, and women's careers: an empirical assessment of the wage penalty for motherhood in Britain, Germany, and the United States. *Demography*, 46 (2) (2009), pp. 341-369.

- Gatrell, C. (2011). Managing the maternal body: a comprehensive review and transdisciplinary analysis. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13, pp. 97-112.
- General Data Protection Regulation. (2016). Official Journal of the European Union. <https://gdpr-info.eu/>.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor.
- Gould, D., & Fontenla, M. (2006). Commitment to nursing: Results of a qualitative interview study. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 14 (3), 213– 221.
- Graham, L. (2019). Transforming adversity into learning and growth. *Therapy Today*, December 2019, Vol. 30, Iss. 10. pp. 40-43.
- Greer, T. (2013). Facilitating successful re-entries in the United States: Training and development for women returners. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 25(3), pp.41-61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20030>.
- Gunderson, J., & Barrett, A. E. (2017). Emotional cost of emotional support? The association between intensive mothering and psychological well-being in midlife. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(7), 992–1009. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1177/0192513X15579502>.
- Hampson, C. (2015). *An introduction to behavioural risk*. London: Incisive Media.
- Hampson, C. (2020, April). *Review of personal and professional learning*. Assignment presented to the Metanoia Institute, London.
- Hampson, C. (2021, July). *What do first-time mothers experience upon their return to work, following their maternity leave?* Assignment presented to the Metanoia Institute, London.
- Hampson, C. (2022, May). *What do first-time mothers experience upon their return to work, following their maternity leave?* Presentation for the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) 2022 annual conference, Durham.
- Hampson, C., & Ortega, G. A. (2017). *The fundamentals of operational risk for insurers*. London: Incisive Media. ISBN:9781782723233.
- Harrison, N. (2008). Maternity plan delivers the goods. *Human Resources Journal*, Jan. 2008, p.28.
- Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contraindications of motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Heilman, M. E., & Okimoto, T. G. (2008). Motherhood: a potential source of bias in employment decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol 93(1), Jan. 2008. pp.189-198.
- Henderson, A., Harmon, S., & Newman, H. (2016). The price mothers pay, even when they are not buying it: Mental health consequences of idealized motherhood. *Sex Roles* 74, 512– 526 (2016). <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1007/s11199-015-0534-5>.

- Hideg, I., Krstic, A., Trau, R. N. C., & Zarina, T. (2018). The unintended consequences of maternity leaves: how agency interventions mitigate the negative effects of longer legislated maternity leaves. *Canada Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 103, No. 10, 1155–1164 0021-9010/18 <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000327>.
- Higgins, J. P. T., & Green, S. (2013). Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions. *The Cochrane Collection*, Version 5.1.0., 2013.
- Hill, J. E. (2005). Work-family facilitation and conflict, working fathers and mothers, work-family stressors and support, *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 793-819.
- Hodgson, S., Painter, J., Kilby, L., & Hirst, J. (2023). "Crying on the bus": First time fathers' experiences of distress on their return to work. *Healthcare (Basel)*, 2023 May 8;11(9):1352, p.6-7. <https://doi:10.3390/healthcare11091352>
- Houston, D. M., & Marks, G. (2003). The role of planning and workplace support in returning to work after maternity leave. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41: 197-214. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/1467-8543.00269>, p.1.
- Howard, G. S. (1991). Culture tales: A narrative approach to thinking, cross-cultural psychology and psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 46, 3, pp.187-197.
- Human Resources Zone. (2023, July). <https://www.hrzone.com/lead/change/why-fake-flexibility-just-wont-cut-it-for-working-mums>.
- Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (2010), pp. 135-154.
- Ibarra, H., & Obodaru, O. (2016). Betwixt and between identities: Liminal experience in contemporary careers. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, pp. 47–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.11.003> .
- International Labor Office. (2023). *Maternity Protection Resource Package (Annex I)*. Retrieved from <https://mprp.itcilo.org/pages/en/index.html>.
- Jackson, A., & Scharman, J. (2002). Constructing family-friendly careers: Mothers' experiences. *Journal of Counseling & Development*. 80(2), pp. 180–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2002.tb00181.x>.
- Jackson, C., Vaughan, D. R., & Brown, L. (2018). Discovering lived experiences through descriptive phenomenology. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 30 No. 11, pp. 3309-3325. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2017-0707>.
- James, G. (2007). Enjoy your leave but 'keep in touch': Help to maintain parent/workplace relationships. *Industrial Law Journal*, Vol. 36, Iss.3, Sept. 2007, pp.315-318.

- Jiang, L. (2017). Perception of and reactions to job insecurity: The buffering effect of secure attachment. *Work & Stress*, 31, 256–275.
- Johnston, D. D., & Swanson, D. H. (2006). Constructing the “good mother”: The experience of mothering ideologies by work status. *Sex Roles* 54, 509–519 (2006). <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1007/s11199-006-9021-3>.
- Johnston, D. D., Swanson, D. H., & Luidens, D. A. (2008). Mother’s work history in the construction of adult daughter’s worker-mother discursive strategies. *Sociological focus (Kent, Ohio)*, 41(2), pp. 159–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.2008.10571328>.
- Joinson, A. N., Reips, U. D., Buchanan, T., & Schofield, C. B. P. (2010). Privacy, trust, and self-disclosure online. *Human-computer interaction*, 25(1), pp. 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07370020903586662>.
- Jones, K. P., Brady, J. M., & Lindsey, A. P. (2022). The interactive effects of co-worker and supervisor support on prenatal stress and postpartum health: a time-lagged investigation. *J Bus Psychol* 37, 469–490 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-021-09756-1>.
- Josselson, R. (Ed.). (1996). *Ethics and process in the narrative study of lives (Vol. 4)*. London: Sage.
- Khalil, A., & Davies, N. (2000). The experiences of nurses returning to work after childbirth: Making a difference. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 8, pp. 337– 344.
- Killien, M. G. (2005). The role of social support in facilitating postpartum women’s return to employment. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynaecologic and Neonatal Nursing*, 34, pp. 639– 646.
- Kim, J. H. (2016). *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Kirkpatrick, C. E., & Lee, S. (2022). Comparisons to picture-perfect motherhood: How Instagram’s idealized portrayals of motherhood affect new mothers’ well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, Volume 137, 2022, 107417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107417>.
- Kucan, L., & Beck, I. L. (1997). Thinking aloud and reading comprehension research: Inquiry, instruction, and social interaction. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(3), pp. 271-299.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ladge, J. J., Clair, J. A., & Greenberg, D. (2012). Cross-domain identity transition during liminal periods: constructing multiple selves as professional and mother during pregnancy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(6), pp. 1449–1471. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0538>.

- Lashley, K. S. (1923). The behaviouristic interpretation of consciousness II. *Psychological Review*, 30(5), 329-353.
- Law Society of Scotland. (2024). How to ask for and make the most of keep-in-touch days. <https://www.lawscot.org.uk/members/wellbeing/parents-in-the-profession/how-to-ask-for-and-make-the-most-of-keep-in-touch-kit-days/kit-days-before-you-leave/#:~:text=You%20can%20have%20up%20to,no%20legal%20right%20to%20them>.
- Leach, P., Barnes, J., Nichols, M., Goldin, J., Stein, A., Sylva, K., & Malmberg, L. E. (2006) 'Childcare before 6 months of age: a qualitative study of mothers' decisions and feelings about employment and non-maternal care', *Infant and child development*, 15(5), pp. 471–502. <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.473>.
- Leslie, L. M., Manchester, C. F., Park, T. Y., & Mehng, S. A. (2012). Flexible work practices: A source of career premiums or penalties? *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 1407–1428. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.0651> .
- Lewis, S. E., & Nicolson, P. (1998). Talking about early motherhood: Recognizing loss and reconstructing depression. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 16(2), pp. 177-197.
- Ling, F. Y. Y., Zhang, Z., & Tay, S. Y. L. (2020). Imposter syndrome and gender stereotypes: female facility managers' work outcomes and job situations. *Journal of management in engineering*, 36(5). [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)ME.1943-5479.0000831](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)ME.1943-5479.0000831).
- Lock, A., & Strong, T. (2010). *Social constructionism sources and stirrings in theory and practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lukens, E. P., & McFarlane, W. R. (2004). Psychoeducation as evidence-based practice: considerations for practice, research, and policy. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention* Vol. 4 No. 3, Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/brief-treatment/mhh019.
- MacKenzie, H., Dewey, A., Drahota, A., Kilburn, S., Kalra, P. R., Fogg, C., & Zachariah, D. (2012). Systematic reviews: What they are, why they are important, and how to get involved. *Journal of Clinical and Preventive Cardiology*, October 2012, Number 4, pp193-202.
- Macran, S., Joshi, H., & Dex, S. (1996). Employment after childbearing: a survival analysis, *Work, employment and society*, 10(2), pp. 273–296, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017096010002005> .
- Madörin, S., & Jacinto, S. (2023). Achieving Gender Equality through Paid and Unpaid Work: An Exploration of Mothers' Perspectives on Work. *Social Sciences*, 12(4), pp. 218. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci12040218>
- Maushart, S. (1999). *The mask of motherhood: How becoming a mother changes everything, and why we pretend it doesn't*. New York: New Press.

- Maxwell, N., Connolly, L., & Ni Laoire, C. (2019). Informality, emotion and gendered career paths: The hidden toll of maternity leave on female academics and researchers. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 2019;26(2):140-157. <https://doi:10.1111/gwao.12306> .
- McDonald, P., & Moye, H. (2010). Why do English-speaking countries have relatively high fertility? *J. Popul. Res.*, 27 (2010), pp. 247-273.
- Miller, G. E. (1985). The effects of general and specific self-instruction training on children's comprehension monitoring performances during reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20(5), pp.616-628.
- Millward, L. (2006). The transition to motherhood in an organizational context: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, September 2006, Vol. 79, Issue 3, pp315-333. <https://doi:10.1348/096317906X110322> .
- Minnotte, K. L. (2023). Decentering intensive mothering: More fully accounting for race and class in motherhood norms. *Sociology Compass*, e13095. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/soc4.13095>.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). The analysis of interview-narratives. In T.R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 233-255). New York, NY: Praeger.
- Mitchell, W., & Green, E. (2002). 'I don't know what I'd do without our mam': Motherhood, identity and support networks. *The Sociological Review*, 50(1), 1–22. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/1467-954X.00352>.
- Mohan, H., Ali, O., Gokani, V., McGoldrick, C., Smitham, P., Fitzgerald, J. E. F., & Harries, R. (2019). Surgical trainees' experience of pregnancy, maternity and paternity leave: a cross-sectional study. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 95(1128), 552–557. <https://doi:10.1136/postgradmedj-2018-135952>.
- Morgan, B., & Hensley, L. (1998). Supporting working mothers through group work, a multimodal psychoeducational approach. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 23:3, 298-311, DOI: 10.1080/01933929808411402.
- Morgenroth, T., Ryan, M. K., & Sønderlund, A. L. (2021). Think manager–think parent? Investigating the fatherhood advantage and the motherhood penalty using the think manager–think male paradigm. *J Appl Soc Psychol*. 2021; 51: pp. 237– 247. doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/jasp.12728.
- Muñoz Medina, F., Lopez Bohle, S., Ugarte, S. M., Chambel, M. J., & Wall, E. (2022). Employees' perceptions of job insecurity and performance: a qualitative approach. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(24), p.16665-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416665>.
- Newman, D. (2008). Rescuing the said from the saying of it: living documentation in narrative therapy. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. No.3.

- Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84(3), 231-259.
- Oakley, A. (2018). *The sociology of housework (reissue)*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Office of National Statistics. (2021). *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>.
- Ohata, R., Asai, T., Imaizumi, S., & Imamizu, H. (2022). I hear my voice; therefore, I spoke: The sense of agency over speech is enhanced by hearing one's own voice. *Psychological Science*, 33(8), 1226–1239, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1177/09567976211068880>.
- O'Reilly, A. (2010). *Encyclopedia of motherhood*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Orgad, S. (2019). *Heading home: motherhood, work and the failed promise of equality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Orgad, S., & De Benedictis, S. (2015). The 'stay at home' mother, post feminism and neoliberalism: content analysis of UK news coverage. *European journal of communication* (London), 2015-08, Vol. 30(4), pp.418-436.
- Pålsson, P., Persson, E. K., Ekelin, M., Kristensson Hallström, I., & Kvist, L. J. (2017). First-time fathers experiences of their prenatal preparation in relation to challenges met in the early parenthood period: Implications for early parenthood preparation. *Midwifery*, 50, pp. 86–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2017.03.021>.
- Panteli, N., & Pen, S. (2010). Empowering women returners in the UK high-tech industry. *Personnel review*, 39(1), pp. 44–61. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011007850>.
- Piccoli, B., Reisel, W. D., & De Witte, H. (2021). Understanding the relationship between job insecurity and performance: hindrance or challenge effect? *Journal of career development*, 48(2), pp. 150–165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845319833189>.
- Pittway, L. (2008). Systematic literature reviews. In Thorpe, R. & Holt, R. *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative management research*. SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi:10.4135/9780857020109>.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2007). Validity issues in narrative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 13(4), pp. 471–486. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406297670>.
- Pressley, M., Harris, K. R., & Marks, M. B. (1992). But good strategy instructors are constructivists! *Educational Psychology Review*, 4(1), 3-31.

- Qiong, W., Tatjana, F., & Ming, C. (2021). Breastfeeding, maternal psychopathological symptoms, and infant problem behaviors among low-income mothers returning to work. *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 285,2021,114288, ISSN 0277-9536, <https://doi.org/10.1016>.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. London: SAGE Publishing.
- Rojjanasrirat, W. (2004). Working women's breastfeeding experiences. *MCN Am J Maternity Child Nursing* 2004 Jul-Aug;29(4):222-7; quiz 228-9. <https://doi:10.1097/00005721-200407000-00004>.
- Romanyshyn, R. D. (2013). *The wounded researcher*. New Orleans: Spring Publications, Inc.
- Ronai, C. R. (1997). On loving and hating my mentally retarded mother. *Mental retardation (Washington)*, 35(6), pp. 417–432. [https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765\(1997\)035<0417:OLAHMM>2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1352/0047-6765(1997)035<0417:OLAHMM>2.0.CO;2).
- Rouse, J., Atkinson, J., & Rowe, A. (2021). Peering inside mutual adjustment: Rhythm analysis of return to work from maternity leave. *International Small Business Journal*, 39(8), 709–731. doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1177/0266242620984739.
- Sansom, C. F. (2023a, May). *Women returning to work*. Paper presented at the Maternity Health Week 2023 annual conference for the N Brown retailing group, Leeds.
- Sansom, C. F. (2023b, May). *Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches*. Paper presented at the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) 2023 annual conference, Leeds.
- Schein, V. E., Mueller, R., Lituchy, T., & Liu, J. (1996). Think manager—think male: a global phenomenon? *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 17: 33-41. [https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1379\(199601\)17:1<33::AID-JOB778>3.0.CO;2-F](https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(199601)17:1<33::AID-JOB778>3.0.CO;2-F).
- Schmidt, E. M., Décieux, F., Zartler, U., & Schnor, C. (2023). What makes a good mother? Two decades of research reflecting social norms of motherhood. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 15(1), 57– 77. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1111/jftr.12488>.
- Schunk, D. H., & Rice, J. M. (1985). Verbalization of comprehension strategies: Effects on children's achievement outcomes. *Human Learning*, 4(1), 1-10.
- Shin, Y., & Hur, W. M. (2021). When do job-insecure employees keep performing well? The buffering roles of help and prosocial motivation in the relationship between job insecurity, work engagement, and job performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 36(4), pp. 659–678. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-020-09694-4>.
- Smagorinsky, P. (Ed.). (1994). *Speaking about writing: Reflections on research methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Smith, J. (1991). Conceiving selves: A case study of changing identities during the transition to motherhood. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 10(4), 225–243. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1177/0261927X91104001>.
- Smith, J. (1999). Identity development during the transition to motherhood: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 17(3), pp.281-299.
- Smith, J. A. (Ed.). (2015). Introduction. *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods*. (3^d ed.). London: SAGE
- Snir, R. (2019). Tarzan, Jane, the baby and the boss: Managers' evaluations of married employees' job performance and parental functioning. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 2019-11-04, Vol.27 (5), p1422-1444.
- Sparrow, S. (2009). Back to work without a bump. *Personnel Today*, 1, pp 16-17.
- Spence, M. (1973). Job Market Signaling, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), pp. 355–374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>.
- Staffans, S. (2016). *Layered storytelling – the art of the future*. <https://simonstaffans.com/2016/02/10/layered-storytelling-the-art-of-the-future>.
- Stern, D., Bruschweiler-Stern, N., & Freeland, A. (1998). *The birth of a mother*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Stumbitz, B., Lewis, S., & Rouse, J. (2017). Maternity management in SMEs: A transdisciplinary review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 20, Iss. 2, April 2018, pp.500-522.
- Teli, M., Pisanu, F., & Hakken, D. (2007). The internet as a library-of-people: for a cyberethnography of online groups. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 8, No 3 (2007) Art. 33 – September 2007.
- Thompson, J. W. (2017). *An analysis of Alasdair MacIntyre's after virtue*. 1st edition. Milton: Macat Library. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781912281954>.
- Tomlinson, J., Olsen, W., & Purdam, K. (2009). Women returners and potential returners: Employment profiles and labour market opportunities--a case study of the United Kingdom. *European Sociological Review*, 25(3), pp. 349–363. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcn053>.
- United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct. (2019, December). London: UK Council for Psychotherapy. Retrieved from <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/bkjdm33f/ukcp-code-of-ethics-and-professional-practice-2019.pdf>

- United Kingdom Government. (1999a, December). Employment Relations Act 1999. London: United Kingdom Government. Retrieved from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/26/section/7>.
- United Kingdom Government. (1999b, December). The Maternity and Parental Leave etc. Regulations 1999. London: United Kingdom Government. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/3312/contents/made>.
- United Kingdom Government. (2006a, February). *Work and families: choice and flexibility*. London: Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Retrieved from <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20060213223940/http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/workandfamilies.htm>.
- United Kingdom Government. (2006b, June). Explanatory memorandum to the maternity and parental leave etc. and the paternity and adoption leave (amendment) regulations 2006. London: United Kingdom Government. Retrieved from https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/2014/pdfs/uksiem_20062014_en.pdf.
- United Kingdom Government. (2006c, July). The Maternity and Parental Leave etc. and the Paternity and Adoption Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2006. London: United Kingdom Government. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/2014/contents/made>.
- United Kingdom Government. (2023, July). *Maternity pay and leave*. London: United Kingdom. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/maternity-pay-leave>.
- United Kingdom Government. (2024, January). *Shared parental leave and pay*. London: United Kingdom Government. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/shared-parental-leave-and-pay/booking-blocks-of-leave>.
- Van Boxel, E., Mawson, I., Dawkins, S., Duncan, S., & Gijs, V. B. (2020). Predicting risk of under confidence following maternity leave. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 105(11), pp. 1108-1110.
- Vejar, C. M., Madison-Colmore, O. D., & Ter Maat, M. B. (2006). Understanding the transition from career to fulltime motherhood: A qualitative study. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 34(1), pp. 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180500301352>.
- Vincent, C. (2009). The sociology of mothering from: *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*: Routledge. <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203863701.ch10>.
- Waldfoegel, J. (1997). The effect of children on women's wages. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 209–217.
- Warren, T. (2004). Working part-time: achieving a successful “work–life” balance? *British Journal of Sociology*, 55, pp. 99 – 122.

- Whittock, M., Edwards, C., McLaren, S., & Robinson, O. (2002). The 'TenderTrap': Gender, part-time nursing and the effects of family-friendly policies on career advancement. *Sociology of Health and Illness* 24(3): 305–26.
- Wiese, B. S., & Ritter, J. O. (2012). Length of leave and working mothers' daily reentry regrets. *Developmental Psychology*. 2012;48(6):1797-1807.
<https://doi:10.1037/a0026211>.
- Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Wiseman, E. (2006). Take advantage of keep-in-touch days. *Personnel Today*, 2006-10-10, p.25.
- Wood, K. (2012). Working mothers. *Employers' Law*, 2012-05-07, (385), p.18.
- Zabucky, K., & Moore, D. (1989). Children's ability to use three standards to evaluate their comprehension of text. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24(3), 336352.

Appendix 1: Example of Narrative Inquiry ‘broadening’

Example approach: (R: is ‘Researcher’, P: is ‘Participant’)

<p>R: “Let it just ‘flow’ as you wish... I would be really happy if you could tell me your story, however you want to do it, as long as, you obviously cover KIT Days amongst it?”</p>	<p><u>Paraphrasing of sample question:</u> Please tell me about your KIT Days in context of your overall story?</p>
<p>P: “the biggest challenge was, I suppose, the practical side of things, more than anything. I was still breastfeeding at that time, so it was the first time I had spent that much time away from the baby, erm ..., and again, with the lockdown pandemic I hadn’t done anything away from her, she’d been with me the entire time, and therefore I’d never had to express milk, and I was working the whole day. She went to Mum’s those days, so I was able to pop round at lunchtime as she doesn’t live very far away, so it was a few hours each side. I think that was the biggest challenge, I just hadn’t really prepared”.</p>	<p><u>Field Notes / Field Texts:</u></p> <p>Interview takes place online, the COVID-19 lockdown is mentioned as important context and the participant is blaming herself for not being prepared when, in fact, of all the participants she has the greatest input into the Days themselves and how they ran. What caught her out was no previous experience, as it was her first child.</p> <p><u>Broadening:</u></p> <p>Often women simply go back into covering their own role, as if an early return to work or they do something very different such as training modules. Ann had full discretion to design them as she wished and chose meetings and annual processes such as budgeting.</p>
<p>P: “The subsequent Keep in Touch Days, followed a similar pattern. I didn’t learn my lesson about expressing milk (laughs). So, I got to the next and still had that anxiety about that part of the day, but the work side was always fine. Erm ... and ... my manager, as I said he doesn’t really so the ‘social side of things’ so I would log on and a couple of times he would forget I was doing it, but I think that’s just him”.</p>	<p><u>Field Notes / Field Texts:</u></p> <p>Noting the humour of her not learning her lesson, but interested in her anxiety regardless, when that part of the Day to express milk came around, as it was very different to her previous workdays pre-birth. Very surprised at the simple acceptance that her manager forgot she was doing a KIT Day, when in fact that could have been quite hurtful.</p> <p><u>Broadening:</u></p> <p>Seemingly an example in which there was a good managerial relationship but with a manager who was not trained adequately.</p>

Appendix 2: Example of Narrative Inquiry ‘burrowing’

(including Relationship, Temporal and Situational Dimensions)

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional space of “place (situation)” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50), a temporal aspect of “past, present and future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) and the relational aspect of “personal and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.50). An example is in Appendix 2.

Examples from this stage: (R: is ‘Researcher’, C: is ‘Participants/Participants’)

The narratives are rewritten into chronological order, that help place the feelings and experiences in a pattern for analysis.

The order is:

Prior Career and Home Baseline

Maternity Leave (including feelings regarding maternity pay adequacy)

‘Keeping in Touch’ Days

Feelings about the imminent return

Day 1 Return Experience

Day 2+ Experience

Having re-ordered all the transcripts into this chronological view, the three dimensions of the Narrative Inquiry methodology applied, and the requisite patterns, tensions, reflections and themes analysed and determined as in the following example.

Keeping in Touch Days			
Personal and Social (Interaction – inward and outward)	Temporal aspect (backwards and forwards)	Situational aspect (place and circumstances)	Patterns, Tensions and Similarities
<p>Narrative: “Just speaking to some of the women who had taken time off saying that after that time they found it very difficult to want to come back, and then they felt forced into it”.</p>	<p>Narrative: “It took quite a long time to get back into it, to get motivated. I think the first couple of months I spent a lot of time looking at photos of the baby, but I think I’m now back and going at it again. That was something I did not expect beforehand. I expected to go back and just pick it up again, but I felt quite differently when I got back. So, it does take some time to get back in the swing of it, and now it’s great, I have a great company to work for and a job I enjoy, but I do it for different reasons now”</p>	<p>Narrative: “I just really wanted to make the most of my maternity leave. I think, possibly, perhaps if they had been in the office, but there was actually little going on and I’d planned out what I wanted to be involved in, the budget, the business planning, I knew how long it would take me to do that, and just some time to have some catch ups”.</p>	<p><u>Pattern</u> of inward interaction, of speaking with other women in the absence of previous experience and of friends/sisters who can share intimately. Possible feeling of ‘missing out’ due to the circumstances of COVID-19 isolation.</p> <p><u>Tension</u> in what she felt before ‘to just pick it up’ versus the reality, ‘looking at baby photos’ moving back and forth before ending with a conclusion that it has been worked through and is now ‘great’.</p> <p><u>Similarity</u>: Expectations are not always met and speaking with others who have been through the experience could help.</p>

Appendix 3: Example of ‘re-storying and reflexivity’

Example: Story of Ann

Ann spoke about guilt in the planning of the KIT Days’ conversation, and almost absorbed it from speaking with other mothers, saying:

“all the guilt that, sort of, goes with that, so... that side of it, I guess I did feel quite well prepared”

Reflexive Notes/Adding Knowledge – the Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Ann has chosen a male-dominated field in which to work. She has carved out a successful role for herself. She has had to adjust to having the role of a ‘working mother’ rather than simply as a ‘professional woman’. Having a job that makes her proud and, she anticipates, will make her daughter proud of her in the future, is important to her. My own reflection of returning from maternity leave, into ‘a male-dominated world’, was that one obscured the fact that you were a mother, not even displaying your children’s photographs on your desk. Even though Ann’s role was secure, and she planned her maternity leave, Keeping in Touch Days and her return without any pushback from her manager, she still struggled with her return. I was interested that guilt was seen as inevitable. When I thought about all the women that I have known in the same situation, all have expressed guilt, although I feel that for some it was a relief to restore some ‘normality’ and structure to their lives, but it feels that it is expected by society that you will express guilt regardless of the upside benefits of working.

Appendix 4: Similarities and differences

First each story was thoroughly narratively analysed (Step A below), to elicit possible emerging themes as below, line by line, followed by grouping each story first (Step B) and then overall into the thematic groups (Step C).

Ann's Story: Step A
The company has very good family-leave policies, is very positive about families and her CEO personally wrote her a letter when she was about to go on maternity leave. She could not fault how her company handled her maternity leave saying that they were:
Narrative key words: Support, positivity
<i>"brilliantly supportive"</i> . She describes the attitude of her company as being:
Narrative key words: Support
<i>"your job is secondary to your family life. It really is fantastic, the best place I've worked, the message really is there"</i> .
Narrative key words: Family
It would be difficult to imagine a better set of policies and company environment for a working mother. When Ann thinks of the choices that she has made in becoming a mother, she feels that she was 'decisive' in making that change, although knowing that it could affect her career.
Narrative key words: Support, Change
Ann took nine months off for her maternity leave during which she took five of the ten KIT days to which she was entitled. They were offered to her; she did not have to ask for them. As soon as she said she was going on maternity leave, she was told about them. Before she went on maternity leave, she discussed with her manager what she would be doing with those days. Her husband stayed at home for the KIT days to help her and they were all conducted remotely because of the pandemic.
Narrative key words: Planning, Support
I was struck by the relative comfort of her situation. Freedom to choose her days, freedom to even choose the topics to be covered. Freedom to not be disturbed during the days because her husband was covering the childcare. Surprisingly, however, Ann rated her KIT Day emotional experience as 'five out of ten'. I was left with surprise at that point in our dialogue, as the circumstances seemed to be ideal. What was causing the missing five marks?
Narrative key words: Freedom, Support, Emotions
Ann explained her worries about taking maternity leave at all, because of the potential impact on her career. She worried that she might not have a career to return to. In addition, she anticipated the pull of being separated from her child. Interestingly, at this point of her story I noted that she explained her reasoning; she expressed that her desire to ...
Narrative key words: Worries, Career, Emotions

KIT Day Experiences for Ann: Step B			
Personal and Social (Interaction – inward and outward)	Temporal aspect (backwards and forwards)	Situational aspect (place and circumstances)	Patterns, Tensions, Reflections and Themes
<p>Narrative:</p> <p>“People I really look up to and senior management who were really open with their stories, it was really, really lovely.”</p> <p>“We got on very well professionally. He’s not, kind of, a person who likes to socialise much. He’s quite ‘matter of fact’ ... it was like, “I’ve had a baby”, he was “great” ... (laughs) ... typical, typical male response, I think. Yeah, he was very, kind of ‘supportive’ I suppose. Mostly kept in touch, kind of, socially.”</p> <p>Ann had many thoughts about going back. Concerns about her replacement and whether work would prefer him.</p>	<p>Narrative:</p> <p>Ann reflects that she was a bit “naïve” about the feelings that she would encounter.</p> <p>[In retrospect], Ann would describe her KIT Day period as “anxious”, a level of “anxiety” throughout for her, but also “support from the company”.</p> <p>Although it took some time to get back in the swing of it, she now describes it as “great” and said, “I have a great company to work for and a job I enjoy, but I do it for different reasons now”.</p>	<p>Narrative:</p> <p>She did an online handover and recruited her temporary cover remotely. Both felt a little strange to her.</p> <p>Ann kept in touch [remotely] with her manager from the start of her maternity leave and used the word “obviously” regarding that contact.</p> <p>Ann also felt “frustrated” at herself for not doing more checking up on the coverage of the work while she was away.</p> <p>“...a sense of relief that her replacement had not reached her standards...”</p>	<p><u>Pattern</u> of expressing some felt negative emotion and then expressing how great the company and manager are to her. Taking some blame on herself due to ‘naivety’.</p> <p><u>Tension</u> highlighted through the COVID-19 period of remote working and being in a position that someone was filling her role, that could have been a comparator against her, leaving her exposed whilst away.</p> <p><u>Reflections</u>: Get the sense of mixed emotions including guilt, anxiety, relief and frustration at herself, but gratitude at having a supportive company, loyalty to manager despite his imperfections.</p> <p><u>Themes</u>: Emotions, Support</p>

The four main emergent themes were Emotions, Support, Change and Self-identity. Then themes were considered in the light of the mothers’ complete stories in Step C to consider the degree of similarity and difference.

Summary of Patterns, Tensions, Reflections and Similarities and Differences: Step C	Relevant Quotes of the Experiences of the Participants	Amalgamated and Named Similarities and Differences
<p>Similarity of feeling support from management was needed and that the Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days have highlighted a support level below requirements.</p> <p>Difference between first- and second-time mothers as to the degree required, and also types of work that set up different levels of expectation (such as academia being highly autonomous generally anyway)</p> <p>Field Notes: Having sub-optimal support before, during and after KIT Days could set up anxiety for women that makes the eventual return more difficult.</p>	<p><i>“unless HR was pressing him, he didn't really reach out”.</i></p> <p><i>“I wonder whether ... when you have children, then you're more able to understand what that might mean. How you might be feeling. I don't know if that's unfair to say”</i></p> <p><i>“I don't really know what my place in the team is going to be”.</i></p> <p><i>“you're more likely to go and speak to your relative at home on how to do something or deal with something”.</i></p> <p><i>“I guess mostly because I think in academia KIT Days work differently”.</i></p> <p><i>“it's kind of dipping your toe in and working out, like, how life is going to be now”.</i></p>	<p>Theme: Support</p> <p><u>Similarity</u>: A basic need for supportive management</p> <p><u>Difference</u>: First-time mothers - more support such as on Day content and expectation-setting</p>



These guidelines exist for candidates and staff, and for any external body wishing to access Metanoia Institute for the purposes of research. Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee oversees the process of approving all research undertaken by staff and candidates before the commencement of the study. If ethical approval has been obtained from a recognised Research Ethics Committee, the letter of approval must be submitted to the Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee before the commencement of the study with the application to Metanoia's research committee. You will need to complete the ethics form itself and also complete a risk assessment for the project work. Risk assessment materials are included at the end of this document. Please read these guidelines carefully, to ensure that you submit the correct documentation.

Approved proposals may be audited at random to verify that they comply with the ethical requirements/guidelines of Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee.

Please note that at Metanoia Institute we do not distinguish between categories of proposal since we require full documentation to be submitted for all proposed projects.

All applicants should read the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2010) (available to download at www.bps.org.uk), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* (2016) (available to download at www.bacp.co.uk), and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy *Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct* (2009). Applicants should also familiarise themselves with the Data Protection Act (1998) - information and guidance on this is provided by the Information Commissioner's Office (available at: www.ico.gov.uk) - and also the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2005) (available to download at: www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyandGuidance/ResearchandDevelopment).

Consistent with BPS, BACP and UKCP guidance, ethical conduct needs to be viewed as a process. Hence, ethical matters should be continually reviewed and addressed throughout the course of the project and in consultation with your research supervisor. If there are significant changes to your research design, you should consider the ethical implications of these changes and consider also, in consultation with your research supervisor, whether formal ethical approval needs to be obtained again.

Before completing this form, you should discuss the ethical implications of your research with your research supervisor.

Statutory data collected as part of a candidate's employment

Candidates do not need to seek approval for the collection of data obtained as part of their normal professional work roles and under statutory powers. However, should a candidate intend to use the data to address a research question outside their 'normal work role' ethical approval will be required. Permission for the access to and use of the data for research purposes should be provided by the employer with reference to the data protection act. In such cases, this committee does not approve the collection of data but only its use as part of the candidate's research project. To assist the committee in its deliberations candidates are advised to provide a paragraph outlining the capacity in which they are obtaining the data.

Studying abroad

When research is being carried out abroad, in addition to the requirements of the ethical procedure of the host country, candidates should seek written permission (concerning access), from the relevant bodies/departments to access the research participants/records/documentation. Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee will be responsible for the ethics scrutiny of the project and the candidate will be required to follow the normal procedures and guidelines for obtaining Metanoia's ethical permission.

Purpose of this form

This form is reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee to assess the ethical implications of your research project and your response to these implications. The research cannot proceed until ethical approval has been obtained. Applicants may be asked to review and re-submit this form in the light of the Research Ethics Committee's decision regarding whether ethical issues have been adequately identified and addressed before starting the research work.

Once completed, this form should be submitted to your Academic Coordinator, accompanied by:

1. Your finalised research proposal.
2. Any research materials such as participant recruitment advertisements, letters/email communications to participants, information sheets and consent forms.
3. Research materials such as interview schedules, topic guides, published questionnaires, or other research protocol materials.
 - Letter of consent from any organisation where researcher is conducting either interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations etc.
 - Evidence of permission to access data, or provide justification where permission is not required.
 - A letter of approval from a recognised Research Ethics Committee if ethical approval for the study to take place has been required from another organisation (e.g., NHS, MoD, etc.).

- **DETAILS OF APPLICANT AND RESEARCH SUPERVISOR**

1.1. **Applicant’s name: Catherine Hampson**

1.2. **Email address: catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk**

1.3. **Telephone number: +44 number provided**

1.4. **Research supervisor(s) name, qualifications and contact details:
Dr Maxine Daniels, DPsych, maxine.daniels@metanoia.ac.uk**

1.5 **Institution/contact details (if applicable): N/A**

1.6 **Do you have any external funding for this project? Yes/No (please circle)**
If yes, please provide brief details including the name of the funding body: N/A

1.7. **Project title: “Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers’ stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches”.**

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note: The items below cover all of those in the A/B categories of Middlesex University

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Will you describe the research procedures in advance to participants so that they are informed about what to expect? Please attach a copy of any recruitment letters and information sheet to be used.	x		
2. Is the project based on voluntary participation?	x		
3. Will you obtain written consent for participation?	x		
4. If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	x		
5. Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason and inform them of how they may withdraw?	x		
6. Will you ensure that participants are not subtly induced, either to participate initially, or to remain in the project?	x		
7. Will you give participants the option of omitting questions from interviews or questionnaires that they do not want to answer?	x		
8. Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	x		
9. Have you made provision for the safe keeping of written data or video/audio recordings?	x		
10. Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?	x		

11. Have you ensured that your research is culture/belief/social system sensitive and that every precaution has been taken to ensure the dignity, respect and safety of the participants?	x		
---	----------	--	--

If you have answered 'NO' to any of the questions listed in 1 to 12 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.

	YES	NO	N/A
12. Is there a realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If YES, what will you tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help.)	x		
13. Is there an existing relationship between the researcher and any of the research participants? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		x	
14. Your research does not involve offering inducement to participate (e.g. payment or other reward)? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		x	
15. Will the project involve working with children under 16 years of age? If YES, please describe parental consent and safeguarding procedures.		x	
16. Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way? If YES, please explain why this is necessary.		x	
17. Will you need to obtain ethical approval from any other organisation or source? If YES, please attach letter confirming their ethical approval.		x	
18. Are there any other ethical considerations in relation to your project that you wish to bring to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee that are not covered by the above? If YES, please describe on a separate sheet.		x	

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions listed under 13 to 18 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.

More information on any questions answered in the affirmative as Appendix 5

‘YES’ was the answer to question 12, as there could be sleep-deprived, vulnerable co-researchers involved in the research.

I will check before each conversation as to whether the mother is feeling ready for speaking and would postpone our meeting on any occasion if she would prefer. I did so during my Practice Evaluation project also, and on one occasion the mother decided to take a nap instead, and to meet me on a subsequent day. I will show the same regard for her well-being during this research also. Should I encounter any psychological distress once a session has commenced, despite checking pre-session, I will check the co-researcher’s needs and support available, and ensure that she leaves the session with a support plan in place. If no support is available in her network, I have agreed that I would fund two sessions with an independent counsellor.

Further information on any questions answered in the affirmative as Appendix 5

“YES” was the answer to question 12, as there could be sleep-deprived, vulnerable participants involved in the research. However, the phase of the interviewing, transcripts, storying and follow-up was completed in September 2022 without any issues of that nature arising.

I am now at the stage of writing an anonymised survey to go out to potential respondents via my LinkedIn profile and subsequent network sharing and using the network of ‘Careering into Motherhood’ (of which I am a founding member coach). I aim to send out the survey first to a small network to check the survey with a small cohort of approximately 30 participants, then review and amend any unclear questions before extending the survey to the mentioned networks.

This request is to agree my survey proposal. The questions, including the feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence, have been derived from the mothers’ stories in the narrative inquiry first part of my research.

Instead of completing a Participant Information Letter, given the anonymity, the following header would be attached to the survey.

My proposed survey questions are as follows (and have been authored, and the survey structured, in close collaboration with my Academic Consultant). I also checked survey understandability with five doctoral candidates as ‘critical friends’. The structure follows a structure that requests the Keeping in Touch Days’ data first, the impact of the experience in the middle and completes with demographic data and a final open-ended question. The survey is estimated to take approximately three to four minutes to complete.

As part of a doctorate programme at the Metanoia Institute (Middlesex University), I am researching mothers returning to work in the **last five years**. I would like to **understand your experience of Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days**.

Your response will help in the design of better **Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days** for returning to work in the future. Please feel free to contact me at catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk. *All responses will remain anonymous.*

*Please see Momentive's (previously 'surveymonkey') data privacy notice [here](#).**

(* Note: full address is: https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy/?ut_source=legal&ut_source2=privacy-basics&ut_source3=inline#how-we-use-the-information-we-collect but shortened for the survey user above).

1. As far as you remember, in **which year** did you take your most recent **Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days**?

>Space to add a year

2. What **age** were you at the time of taking those KIT Days?

>Space to add a year

3. Were you returning after your **first or second (or subsequent)** child?

>Selection:

- **First child**
- **Second (or subsequent) child**

4. As far as you remember, **how many KIT Days** did you take then?

>Space to add a number

5. As far as you remember, **where were you** on those KIT Days (e.g., at work, at home)?

>Space to add free text

6. As far as you remember, **what did you do** during your KIT Days?

>Space to add free text

7. Do you **remember any emotions** you felt related to your KIT Days?

>Space to add free text

8. **How important** do you think each of the following is, for a **good experience** of a KIT Day?

>Selection:

- **Having a supportive manager**
- **Receiving support or advice from a work colleague**
- **Receiving support or advice outside of work (e.g., family member/friend/coach/therapist)**
- **Being brought up to date on changes during my leave**
- **Knowing in advance what the KIT Days will involve (e.g., timing, content)**

>Parameters are:

- **Not important**
- **Neither important nor unimportant**
- **Important**
- **Very Important**
- **Unsure**

9. Are there any **other important factors** to add that would have improved your KIT Day experience?

>Space to add free text

10. About **your industry sector** (at the time of the KIT Days) ... which is your closest match?

>Selection:

- Use ONS categories of sectors

11. About **your job** (at the time of the KIT Days) ... how would you describe it?

>Space to add a description

12. About your job... were you returning **full-time or part-time**?

>Selection:

- Full-time
- Part-time

>Space to add 'Other'

13. About you... **your age now**?

>Space to add an age

14. About you... how do you describe **your ethnicity**?

>Space to add a description of ethnicity (*note: I did think of a pick list, but I prefer to see how the woman describes herself and will take on the analytical extra work for the field knowingly*)

15. About you... are you formally assessed as having **any disability**?

>Selection:

- Yes
- No

>Space to add 'Other'

16. About you... were you **parenting** on your own or jointly at the time of the KIT Days?

>Selection:

- On my own
- Jointly

>Space to add 'Other'

17. This is the end of the survey. Please share **any further ideas or comments** that you have on how KIT Days could be used to help a parent prepare best for their return. Thank you.

>Space to add comments

CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I have read the BACP and the BPS guidelines for ethical practices in research and have discussed this project with my research supervisor in the context of these guidelines. I confirm that I have also undertaken a risk assessment with my research supervisor:

Signed:.....Signature provided

Print name.....Catherine Sansom Date 3 Feb 2023
(Applicant)

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

- As supervisor or principal investigator for this research study I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that researchers/candidates under my supervision undertake a risk assessment to ensure that health and safety of

themselves, participants and others is not jeopardised during the course of this study.

- I confirm that I have seen and signed a risk assessment for this research study and to the best of my knowledge appropriate action has been taken to minimise any identified risks or hazards.
- I understand that, where applicable, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that is consistent with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (see <http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm>).
- I confirm that I have reviewed all of the information submitted as part of this research ethics application.
- I agree to participate in committee's auditing procedures for research Studies if requested.

Signed:.....Signature provided

Print name.....Maxine Daniels.
(Supervisor)

Date 3 Feb 2023

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL – see letter

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER (PIL)

Participant ID Code:

SECTION 1

1. Study title

‘Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers’ stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.’

The study is of six maternity-leave returners, who have returned to their work following their maternity leave and having used Keeping in Touch (KIT) days as provided by their employer. The study will use interviews to understand their feelings, upon that transition back into their working environment.

2. Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and to discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. **Please also read carefully the privacy information in Section 2.**

Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to understand the depth and range of emotions that a return to work can elicit. The end goal is to help design a programme from similar mothers in the future to aid that return. Your input will be valuable in helping design that programme. The study is an in-depth one, to understand what is being experienced. The outcome of the interviews will help steer the eventual design of that programme and will provide help in determining what elements of the programme are of most value to future maternity-leave returners.

4. Why have I been chosen?

It is important that we assess participants who are willing to share their experiences, and you have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study. Participants are mothers who have returned to work after a maternity leave and have used Keeping in Touch days in that return process. You have seen the time commitment involved and agreed that you can meet it. The interview process will take up to three hours (to

be spread over sessions to meet your needs and to be convenient). There will also be follow-up sessions to review the transcripts and to read the results of the researcher. Collectively the whole process is likely to take place over 3-5 months and take approximately 20-25 hours of your time.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, and they will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data please contact the researcher within a month of your participation. After this date it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as the results may have already been published. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way. A decision to withdraw will not be reported to your place of work, with which the researcher will have no contact at all regarding your participation throughout and after the research.

6. What will I have to do?

If you decide to take part in this research, the following steps will take place. Overall, the process will take three to five months, from the point of signing the documents. During those three to five months, your involvement will be up to three interviews (of up to one hour each), the reading and potential correction of transcripts from those interviews (likely to take approximately six hours) and the review and the reading and potential correction of the final output of the researcher, which will be written as an anonymised, flowing story of the feelings and emotions of returning to work after a maternity-leave period.

Due to COVID-19 still being a present issue, contact will be performed via an on-line provider of your preference, such as Zoom. Should you wish at a later point to meet in person, the researcher will provide the necessary private and safe place to do so.

The steps to be anticipated are:

- 1) You will be contacted to sign the necessary pre-research documents.
- 2) The researcher will check when you have availability for the first interview via an on-line provider, up to a maximum of one hour. The initial interview questions will be provided to you at least one week ahead of that session.
- 3) In the interview, there is scope for you to share your experiences and feelings beyond the initial questions. The researcher expects that they will lead to further questions at the time that you will have full authority to refuse to answer any questions and to withdraw from the interview and the research altogether should you wish. The interview will be recorded, in order that a transcript can be produced. Recordings will be made and secured; only a participant number will be used and a pseudonym used in later written narratives. Other details that could identify you will be obscured.
- 4) You will next receive a copy of the transcript of your interview session and have full decision-making power to decide if you require anything to be removed, upon reflection.

- 5) Once the transcript of each interview is agreed, the researcher will collate the information and 're-story' the narrative, one collected account of all the interviews arranged to flow as a story, that you should recognise when receiving it to review, that will include the researcher's reflective additions. As at the interview stage, you are free to request deletions.
- 6) At any of the stages above, you have the power to request a pause, a delay. Cancellation of your involvement and a withdrawal of your data will be possible up to the end of the interview process when you will be asked again for your permission to continue.
- 7) Your reasonable expenses incurred in participating in the research will be reimbursed within 48 hours, upon the production of receipts to the researcher.
- 8) Please note that to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we get from this study may help us to help design a programme from similar mothers in the future to aid their return to work. Your input will be valuable in helping design that programme. The study is an in-depth review of feelings of returning mothers. The point of understanding those feelings is to help design a better programme that truly meets the needs of returning mothers.

8. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

The potential disadvantages of taking part are that any residual negative emotions and feelings from that time in your life being covered might resurface, and that you might need additional support if that should be the case. Should that arise, you can raise your discomfort with the researcher who will cease immediately and check that you have the appropriate support in place, to ensure your safety, that could include an independent counsellor if no better, local support is available. The researcher will check your readiness to commence, and you will be able to cancel the session if you have any concerns.

9. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the research team, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act. Please see Section 2 for further information.

10. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study will be presented at conferences or in journal articles. The results will be used in the writing of a programme for maternity-leave returners to be used in companies. The results will be used in the publication of a book assisting

companies on ensuring that maternity-leave returners have the best experience possible in that situation. However, the data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed. Under the GDPR and DPA personal data collected for research purposes can be kept indefinitely, providing there is no impact to you outside the parameters of the study you have consented to take part in.

11. Who has reviewed the study?

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Metanoia Institute Research Ethics committee (MREC) who reviewed the study.

12. Contact for further information

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

The Principal Investigator leading this research is Catherine Hampson.

Address:

c/o Metanoia Institute
13 Gunnersbury Avenue
London
W5 3XD

Contact number:

Number provided

Email address:

catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk

In case you have concerns about this project you can contact:

Dr Maxine Daniels

Email address: maxine.daniels@metanoia.ac.uk

Contact number: Number provided

Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your participant code, important information and the research teams contact details.

SECTION 2

Metanoia Institute Guide to Research Privacy Notices

Privacy notices need to be presented whenever data is collected and should be understandable and accessible. Privacy notices must explain the type and source of data that will be processed. They will also set out the processing purpose, data retention schedules and data sharing. Privacy notices must include details of the subject's rights and who the subject can complain to.

The following example may be used and completed for your research purposes.

Metanoia Institute Privacy Notice for Research Participants

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects the rights of individuals by setting out certain rules as to what organisation can and cannot do with information about people. A key element to this is the principle to process individuals' data lawfully and fairly. This means we need to provide information on how we process personal data.

The Institute takes its obligation under the GDPR very seriously and will always ensure personal data is collected, handled, stored and shared in a secure manner.

The Institute's Data Protection Policy can be accessed here:

<http://metanoia.ac.uk/media/2363/privacy-policy-metanoia-institute.pdf>

The following statements will outline what personal data we collect, how we use it and who we share it with. It will also provide guidance on your individual rights and how to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO), the regulator for data protection in the UK.

Why are we collecting your personal data?

We undertake research as part of our function and in our capacity as a teaching and research institution to advance education and learning. The specific purpose for data collection on this occasion is to further the knowledge of the experience of returning mothers to work, to create a programme that will benefit future mothers in that situation.

The legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

Transferring data outside Europe

In the majority of instances your data will be processed by Metanoia Institute researchers only or in collaboration with researchers at other UK or European institutions so will stay inside the EU and be protected by the requirements of the GDPR.

In any instances in which your data might be used as part of a collaboration with researchers based outside the EU all the necessary safeguards that are required under the GDPR for transferring data outside of the EU will be put in place. You will be informed if this is relevant for the specific study you are a participant of.

Your rights under data protection

Under the GDPR and the DPA you have the following rights:

- to obtain access to, and copies of, the personal data that we hold about you;

- to require that we cease processing your personal data if the processing is causing you damage or distress;
- to require us to correct the personal data we hold about you if it is incorrect;
- to require us to erase your personal data;
- to require us to restrict our data processing activities;
- to receive from us the personal data we hold about you which you have provided to us, in a reasonable format specified by you, including for the purpose of you transmitting that personal data to another data controller;
- to object, on grounds relating to your particular situation, to any of our particular processing activities where you feel this has a disproportionate impact on your rights.

Where Personal Information is processed as part of a research project, the extent to which these rights apply varies under the GDPR and the DPA. In particular, your rights to access, change, or move your information may be limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we may not be able to remove the information that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally identifiable information possible. The Participant Information Sheet will detail up to what point in the study data can be withdrawn.

If you submit a data protection rights request to the Institute, you will be informed of the decision within one month. If it is considered necessary to refuse to comply with any of your data protection rights, you also have the right to complain about our decision to the UK supervisory authority for data protection, the Information Commissioner's Office.

None of the above precludes your right to withdraw consent from participating in the research study at any time.

Collecting and using personal data

The researcher will collect your data through two means: 1) signed documentation (that will be held securely in a locked cabinet with only your participant number upon them, and no identifying information held with the documents) and 2) recordings of the interviews (a Dictaphone device, that will be held within a separate locked cabinet and the recordings kept only until the transcripts from the recordings are agreed). The recordings will be used to create the transcripts (that will only carry a participant number and no identifying data), and the transcripts will be emailed to the participant in encrypted form and password protected. The final narrative will be communicated in the same way.

Data sharing

Your information will usually be shared within the research team conducting the project you are participating in, mainly so that they can identify you as a participant and contact you about the research project.

Responsible members of the Institute may also be given access to personal data used in a research project for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory

authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your records. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

If we are working with other organisations and information is shared about you, we will inform you in the Participant Information Sheet. Information shared will be on a 'need to know' basis relative to achieving the research project's objectives, and with all appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the security of your information.

Storage and security

The Institute takes a robust approach to protecting the information it holds with its encrypted server and controlled access.

Retention

Under the GDPR and DPA personal data collected for research purposes can be kept indefinitely, providing there is no impact to you outside the parameters of the study you have consented to take part in.

Having stated the above, the length of time for which we keep your data will depend on a number of factors including the importance of the data, the funding requirements, the nature of the study, and the requirements of the publisher. Details will be given in the information sheet for each project.

Contact us

The Principal Investigator leading this research is Catherine Hampson.

Address:

c/o Metanoia Institute
13 Gunnersbury Avenue
London
W5 3XD

Contact number: Number provided

Email address: catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk

In case you have concerns about this project you can contact: Dr Maxine Daniels

Email address: maxine.daniels@metanoia.ac.uk

Contact number: Number provided

The Institute's official contact details are:

Data Protection Officer
Metanoia Institute
W5 2QB
Tel: +44 (0)20 8579 2505
Email: dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk

Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent

Name of student: Catherine Sansom (formerly Hampson) Name of research project:

‘Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers’ stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.’

This is to verify that as Research Supervisor for the above research project I have seen proof that appropriate consent has been obtained from the participants used in the project.

Supervisor’s name: Dr Maxine Daniels - Signature: provided

Date: 1/08/2023

Metanoia Institute Data Protection Checklist for Researchers



Project title:	Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.
PI/Supervisor:	Catherine Hampson / Dr Maxine Daniels
Date:	October 14th, 2021

There are **8 Data Protection Principles**, which states that information must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed;
2. Processed for specified and lawful purposes;
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive;
4. Accurate and kept up date where necessary;
5. Not kept for longer than is necessary;
6. Processed in accordance within individuals' rights under the DPA;
7. Kept secure;
8. Not transferred to countries without adequate protection.

Section 33 of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) provides exemption to some of the eight data protection principles for processing personal data for 'research purposes' including statistical or historical purposes. These are noted in the checklist below.

For guidance on the Data Protection Act for Social Research please see the MRS/SRA Data Protection Act 1998: Guidelines for Social Research, April 2013 which can be accessed using the following link:
<http://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/2013-04-23%20MRS%20SRA%20-%20DP%20Guidelines%20updated.pdf>

Guidance on large data sets can be found at the Information Commissioner's Office website – Big Data and Data Protection July 2014.
http://ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2014/~media/documents/library/Data_Protection/Practical_application/big-data-and-data-protection.pdf

You may also find JISC Legal Information on Data Protection and Research Data Questions and Answers, Aug 2014 helpful. <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/ManageContent/ViewDetail/ID/3648/Data-Protection-and-Research-Data-Questions-and-Answers-21-August-2014.aspx>

Note: Personal data, which is anonymisedⁱ permanently, is exempt from compliance with the DPA and registration process. See endnotes for further details.

Conditions which must be met for a research exemption to apply under section 33 of the DPA 1998	Please indicate	
1. The information is being used exclusively for research purposes?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
2. The information is not being used to support measures or decisions relating to any identifiable living individuals?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
3. The data ⁱⁱ is not being used in a way that will cause or is likely to cause, substantial damage or substantial distress to any individuals or very small groups? <i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why an adverse effect is justified:</i>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree
4. The results of the research, or any resulting statistics, will not be made available in a form that identify individuals? <i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why identification is intended:</i>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Agree	<input type="radio"/> Disagree

<p>If you 'Agree' to all of the above conditions then the use of personal data is exempt from the Second Principle and the Fifth Principle, but you must comply with First, Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Principles of the DPA. If a research exemption does not apply then you must ALSO comply with the Second and Fifth Principles of the DPA</p>			
<p>First Principle: Fairly and lawfully processed</p>			
<p>5. Will you have appropriate informed consentⁱⁱⁱ secured from Participants for the personal data^{iv} that you will be analysing? i.e., inform Participants of</p> <p>a) What you will do with the data?</p> <p>b) Who will hold the data? (Usually MU, unless a third party is involved)</p> <p>c) Who will have access to the data or receive copies of it? (e.g., for secondary data sets, are you sure that appropriate consent was secured from Participants when the data was collected?) <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>6. If you plan to analyse sensitive personal data^v, have you obtained data subjects^{vi} explicit informed consent^{vii} (as opposed to implied consent^{viii})? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>7. If you do not have the data subjects' explicit consent to process their data, are you satisfied that it is in the best interests of the data subject to collect and retain the sensitive data? <i>Please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>8. If you are processing^{ix} personal data about younger individuals or those with reduced capacity, have you put a process in place to obtain consent from parents, guardians or legal representatives, if appropriate? <i>Please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>9. Will you have a process for managing withdrawal of consent? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>10. Will it be necessary or desirable to work with external organisations e.g., charities, research organisations etc. acting as a third party i.e., directly providing a service for us or on our behalf that involves them accessing, collecting or otherwise processing personal data the third party will become a data processor under the DPA?</p> <p><i>If 'yes' then you will be using a third party as a data processor you must take advice from the Metanoia Institute Data Protection Officer about the planned contractual arrangements and security measures.</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>11. If you hold or control personal data, will you register and/or inform the Metanoia Institute Data Protection Officer when:</p> <p>i) A new dataset has been established,</p> <p>ii) The purpose for which personal data stored in a dataset has changed,</p> <p>iii) A networked dataset of personal data is being used,</p> <p>iv) Extracting personal data from a networked dataset to create a new dataset.</p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>Second Principle: Processed for limited purposes - EXEMPT</p>			
<p>Will personal data be obtained only for one or more specified and lawful purposes, and not further processed in any manner incompatible with the purpose(s)? (Research data subjects should be informed of any new data processing purposes, the identity of the Data Controller^x and any disclosures that may be made.)</p> <p>Research Exemption Note (section 33(2)): Personal data can be processed for research purposes other than for which they were originally obtained if that processing does not lead to decisions being made about an individual and is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual. That data may also be held indefinitely (Section 33(3)).</p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>Third Principle: Adequate, relevant and not excessive</p>			

12. Will you only collect data that is necessary for the research? <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i>	Yes	No	N/A
Fourth Principle: Accurate and where necessary, kept up to date			
13. Will you take reasonable measures to ensure that the information is accurate, kept up-to-date and corrected if required? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No	N/A
Fifth Principle: Not kept for longer than is necessary - EXEMPT			
14. Will you check how long data legally must be kept and routinely destroy data that is past its retention date and archive data that needs to be kept? Research Exemption Note (section 33(3)): Personal data processed for research purposes can be kept indefinitely.	Yes	No	N/A
Sixth Principle: Processed in accordance with individuals' rights under the DPA^{xi}			
15. If you are intending to publish information, which could identify individuals , have you made them aware of this when gaining their informed consent? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No	N/A
16. Will you allow access to all personal data held about a data subject if an individual makes this request? Research Exemption Note (section 33(4)): Where the results of processing personal data for research purposes do not identify a data subject, that data subject does not have a right of access to that data.	Yes	No	N/A
17. Will you ensure that all researchers who have access to personal data understand that it must not be provided to any unauthorised person or third party (e.g. family members etc.) unless consent has been given?	Yes	No	N/A
Seventh Principle: Kept secure			
18. Will you ensure that personal data will be stored in locked cabinets, cupboards, drawers etc. (regardless of whether data is on paper, audio visual recordings, CDs, USBs, etc.)?	Yes	No	N/A
19. Will you ensure that if personal data is to be stored electronically it will only be kept on encrypted devices ?	Yes	No	N/A
20. Will you ensure that individuals who have access to the personal data are aware that email is not a secure method of communication and should not be used for transferring the data ?	Yes	No	N/A
21. Will you ensure that disposal of personal data will be via confidential waste services or in the case of electronic media and hardware should be destroyed in line with Metanoia Institute guidelines and procedures?	Yes	No	N/A
Eighth Principle: Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection			
22. Will you ensure that personal data is not transferred outside the EEA unless one of the following applies? i. The country you are transferring the data to has been approved as providing adequate protection ii. You have obtained explicit informed consent from the individual(s) iii. You have a contract in place with the recipient of the data, which states the appropriate data protection requirements. iv. You have completely anonymised the data.	Yes	No	N/A

Any concerns in relation to compliance with the DPA should be discussed with the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.

i) **Anonymous data** is prepared from personal information but from which, an individual cannot be identified by the person holding the data. **Anonymisation** is a **permanent** process. Personal data must be treated so that it

cannot be processed in such a way as to link the data to a specific individual (e.g., using an identifier). Coded data is not anonymised and therefore not exempt from compliance or registration.

ii) **Data** covers information that is held on computer, or to be held on computer to be processed. Data is also information recorded on paper if you intend to put it on computer.

iii) **Informed consent** means providing Participants with a clear explanation of the research project in order for them to give informed consent regarding the use of their data. Individuals should be informed that their involvement is voluntary and that they have the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

Informed refers to the following information being provided to the data subject/Participants:

- i) Who you are, the organisation you work for and who else is involved in the research project or using the data.
- ii) What data will be collected and how.
- iii) Who will hold the data, control access to the data and how it will be stored and kept safe and whether it will be transferred to a third party.
- iv) How the data will be used.
- v) How long it will be kept and what will happen to it at the end of the project.
- vi) Risks related to any aspects of the research project and data, benefits of the research project and any alternatives.

iv) **Personal data** (sometimes referred to as personal information) means data which relate to a living individual who can be identified from those data whether in personal or family life, business or profession, or from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller. The data is of biographical significance to the individual and impacts an individual in a personal, family, business or professional capacity. It includes any expression of opinion about the individual and/or statements of fact.

v) **Sensitive personal data** means personal data consisting of information about the **data subjects'**

1. Racial or ethnic origin,
2. Political opinions,
3. Religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,
4. Trade union membership
5. Physical or mental health or condition,
6. Sexual life,
7. Criminal matters

Also personal financial details are vulnerable to identity fraud and should be handled confidentially and securely although not defined as sensitive under the Act.

vi) **Data subject** is a living individual to whom the personal data relates. If an individual has died or their details have been anonymised then their data does not fall within the Act. Personal data relating to deceased individuals may still be owed a duty of confidentiality.

vii) **Explicit informed consent** is where an individual actively opts to participate.

viii) **Implied consent** is where an individual must inform the researcher that they wish to opt out.

ix) **Processing** of personal information includes collecting, using, storing, destroying and disclosing information.

x) **Data controller** is the person who either alone or jointly on in common with other persons determines the purposes for which, and the manner in which, any personal data are or are to be, processed. The fact that an individual or institution holds or processes personal data does not make them a Data Controller if they do not determine the purpose and manner of that holding or processing. (This is probably one of the most widely misunderstood definitions of the Act.) In most cases the Data Controller will be Middlesex University, however further guidance and clarification can be sought from the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.

xi) **Data subject rights** include rights to access, for accuracy, to prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress, to prevent direct marketing, to prevent automated decision making, to seek compensation and for no third party access. Access means an individual can make a subject access request for all copies of all personal data held about them and ask to whom it has been disclosed. An individual potentially has access to personal comments written about them. It is an offence to deliberately edit or destroy data once a subject access request has been received. Third parties do not generally have access to subject data unless an exemption applies or there is overriding public interest. There may be limited third party access to ordinary personal data relating to a business or professional capacity in the public interest through the Freedom of Information Act.



INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT

This proforma must be completed as part of the research ethics submission for all fieldwork. It is to be completed by the person carrying out the fieldwork (which in most cases is the candidate) in conjunction with the research supervisor.

FIELDWORK DETAILS

Name of person carrying out fieldwork (usually the candidate):

Catherine Hampson

Name of research supervisor: Dr Maxine Daniels

Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident

FIELDWORK NEXT OF KIN

Name: Dr Nigel Sansom (Husband)

Phone: +44 number provided

Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed fieldwork

None.....

.....

.....

.....

Any health problems (full details) which may be relevant to proposed fieldwork activity in case of emergencies.

None.....

.....

.....

.....

Locality (Country and Region)

UK, London / Other regions in the UK.....

Travel arrangements

Travel to London / other regions via train

NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always

be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork.

Dates of travel and fieldwork

Will depend on the date of approval; will take place 2-6 months after that date

.....

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment - PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed (**Col. 1**). For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern (**Col. 2**).

Examples of Potential Hazards :

- Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia).
- Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
- Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.
- Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (Weil's disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc.), parasites'.
- flooding, tides and range.
- Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
- Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural.
- socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
- Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc.), working at night, areas of high crime.
- Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies.
- fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.
- Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.
- Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.
- Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task.

If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
Crowborough to/from stations and meeting point	Road travel to/from the station, train travel to/from London and onwards as required, in adverse conditions
Locality of the Participants	Use of a non-safe space

Risk Minimisation/Control Measures PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY

For each hazard identified (Col 2), list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken (Col 3) to "reduce the risk to acceptable levels", and the safety equipment (Col 5) that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted (Col. 3), categorise the fieldwork risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high (Col. 4).

Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.

An acceptable level of risk is: a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

Examples of control measures/precautions:

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on fieldwork tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment before use. Assessing individual's fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel,

accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of fieldwork area.

Examples of Safety Equipment: Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	4. RISK ASSESSMENT (low, moderate, high)	5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT
Driving within acceptable boundaries, and avoiding adverse weather conditions – cancelling if required	Low	Car with adverse weather safety features, valid MOT and insurance
Use of only a safe space	Low	Use only pre-checked accommodation in which to meet the Participants

DECLARATION: The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s) listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the fieldwork period and additional precautions taken or fieldwork discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.

Signature of Fieldworker (Candidate/Staff)

Signature provided

Date 10 October 2021

Signature of candidate's Research Supervisor

Signature provided

Date 10 October 2021

APPROVAL:

Signature of Research Co-ordinator or Faculty Head

See approval letter

Date

FIELDWORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:
 - ✓ Safety knowledge and training?
 - ✓ Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?
 - ✓ Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?
 - ✓ Personal clothing and safety equipment?
 - ✓ Suitability of fieldworkers to proposed tasks?
2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:
 - ✓ Visa, permits?
 - ✓ Legal access to sites and/or persons?
 - ✓ Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?
 - ✓ Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
 - ✓ Vaccinations and other health precautions?
 - ✓ Civil unrest and terrorism?
 - ✓ Arrival times after journeys?
 - ✓ Safety equipment and protective clothing?
 - ✓ Financial and insurance implications?
 - ✓ Crime risk?
 - ✓ Health insurance arrangements?
 - ✓ Emergency procedures?
 - ✓ Transport use?
 - ✓ Travel and accommodation arrangements?

Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **research supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the fieldworker participating on the fieldwork. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.

Appendix 6: Advertisement for participants



Doctoral Research - could you help?

- Are you a mother who has returned to work after having a baby?
- Did you use Keeping in Touch (KIT) days in your return to work?
- Would you be interested in helping a student researching returning from maternity leave?

Fully confidential and designed to fit around your timing and availability.

On-line and/or in person to suit your needs and reflecting social distancing requirements.

Reasonable expenses of participation fully reimbursed.

Please contact catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk for more details

Appendix 7: Information pack

HOW THE RESEARCH IS DONE

- Recorded interviews
- Researcher creates transcripts of the interviews
- Transcripts shared with the participant to check accuracy
- All interviews collated, along with researcher notes
- Researcher creates a 'Narrative' (the method of research is 'Narrative Inquiry')
- Narrative shared with the participant to check understanding achieved

TIME AND INPUT REQUIREMENTS

- Expectation of three interviews – estimate of 3 hours - 1 hour each
- Transcripts from the recordings – reading time estimate of 5 hours
- Narrative Inquiry output – reading time estimate of 5 hours
- Other involvement, emails, presentation – estimate of 3 hours

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED

Participant will receive the following and a signed acknowledgment of understanding and agreement will be required of the following:

- Participant Information Sheet
- Consent Form
- Privacy Notice for Research Participants

QUESTIONS?

Appendix 8: Products' matrix

Proposed Product	Details of Contents	Engagement Party	Ultimate Beneficiary
BACP Presentation	BACP Research Conferences of 2022 and 2023	Therapists	Returning mothers
Modular Training Workshops	Training modules to help with the mothers' return experience, helping to normalise their feelings and emotions and to help them to access their own solutions and resources	Counselling Training, Workplaces and Coaching Companies	Returning mothers
Leaflets	A leaflet of suggestions on the use of Keeping in Touch Days that will support the mother therapeutically and practically	Human Resource Departments Therapists	Returning mothers
Future Book	A book aimed at leveraging the Keeping in Touch Days as a resource for both the mother and her employer	Book Publisher	Returning mothers as readers Employers, especially Human Resource professionals

Appendix 9: Ethical approval



Name and Address provided

DPsych by Professional Studies Metanoia Institute

07/02/2023

Ref:[Hampson /07/02/2023]

Dear Catherine,

Re: "Women returning to work: what can we learn from mothers' stories about 'keeping in touch days' during maternity leave? A narrative inquiry to aid the development of relevant psychotherapeutic approaches."

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by the Programme Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, you are required to submit an Amendment to Ethics form from the Moodle 'My Registry' page for approval before continuing with your project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cristina Harnagea', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cristina Harnagea

PhD, CPsychol, AFBPsS Director of Studies - Faculty 2 DPsych by Professional Studies

On behalf of Programme Research Ethics Committee

13 North Common Road Ealing, London W5 2QB Telephone: 020 8579 2505 Facsimile: 020 8832 3070 www.metanoia.ac.uk
Registered in England at the above address No. 2918520
Registered Charity No. 1050175

**Programme Research Ethics Committee (PREC)
Ethics review form**

Name of Candidate: Catherine Hampson

Project Title: What can we learn from mothers' stories of returning to work via "Keeping in Touch" days provided by their employers?

Reviewers: Dr Aleksandar Aksentijevic and Dr Cristina Harnagea

Comments and conditions:

Comments: The points requested by the panel have been addressed.

Decision of Committee:

- a. The Programme Research Ethics Committee has approved the application.
- b. The application will need to be resubmitted, addressing the conditions above.

Please resubmit the application using the next available deadline link on Moodle and ensure that you highlight all amendments.

Chair of PREC committee: Dr Cristina Harnagea



Date: 07/02/2023

28th January 2022

Name and address provided

Dear Catherine,

Re: D Psych Programme Research Ethics Committee (PREC)

The Programme Research Ethics Committee has recently considered your Learning Agreement within the Programme Module DPY 4444

The Committee decided that your submission satisfies the requirements for research ethics approval.

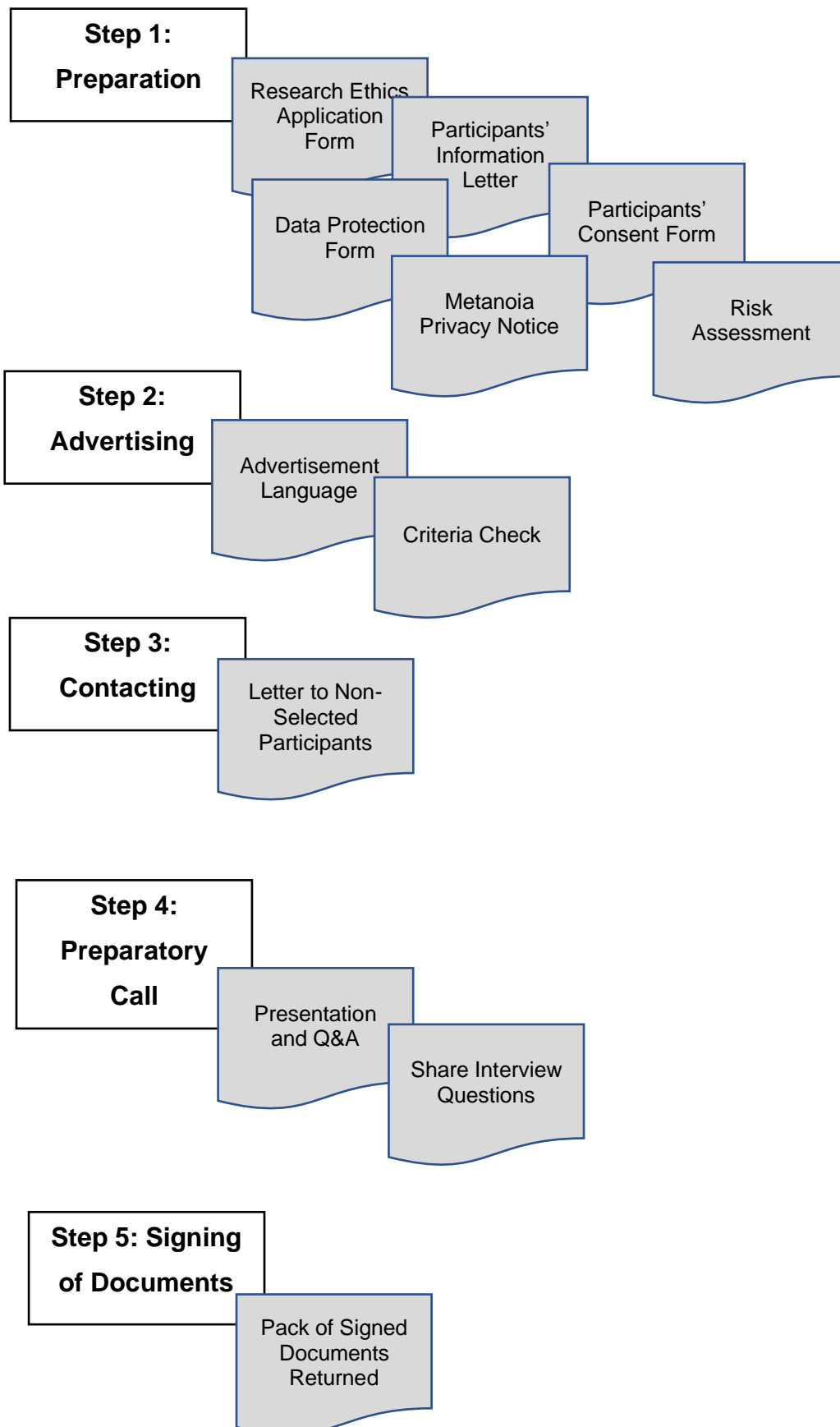
Yours sincerely,

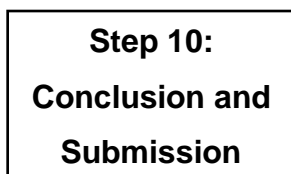
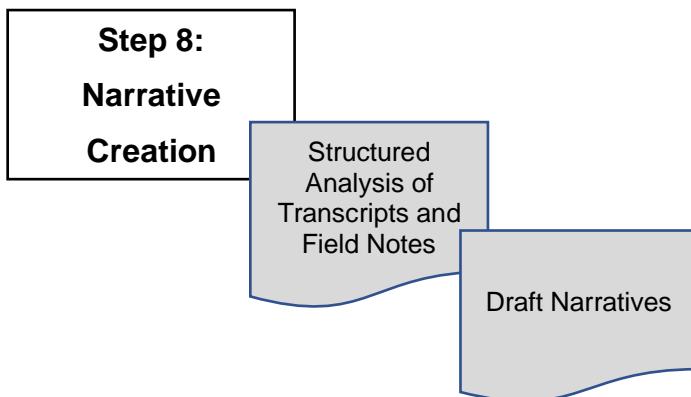
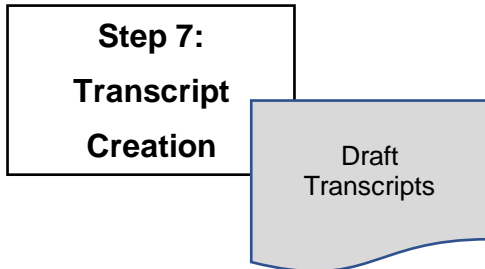
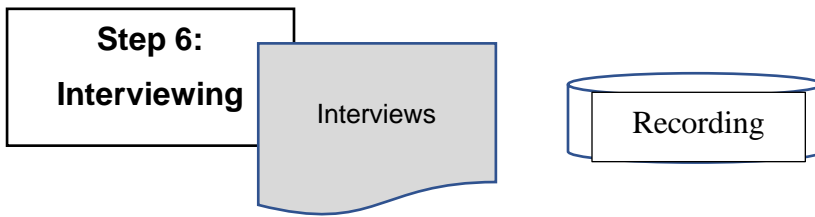


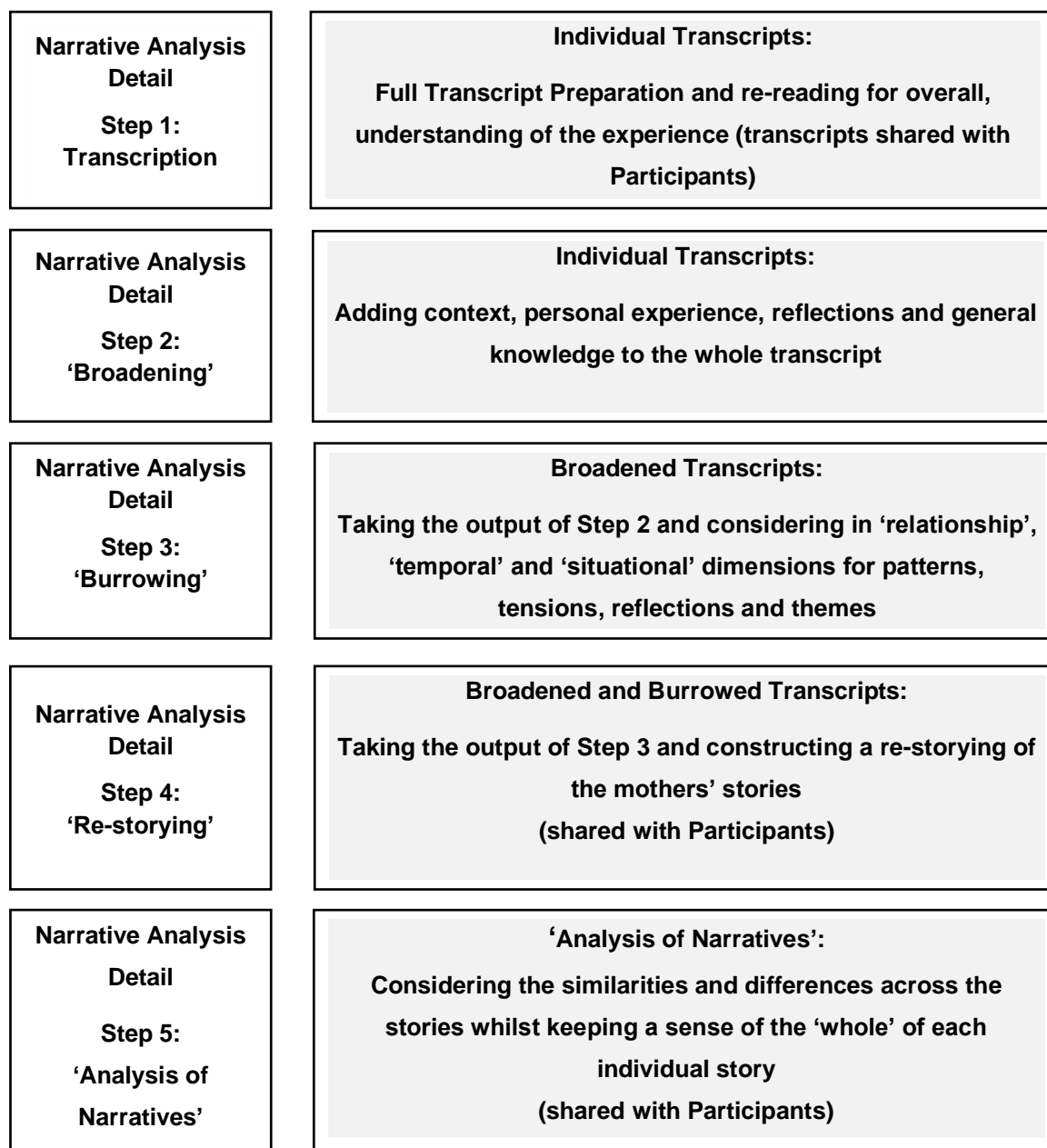
Dr George A Georgiou, MSc (CBT), PhD (Lond), CPsychol, AFBPS, FHEA, BABCP acc
Director of Studies (Management), DPsych by Professional Studies

13 Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing, London W5 3XD
Telephone: 020 8579 2505
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070
www.metanoia.ac.uk

Appendix 10: Research process flow







Appendix 11: Resultant survey

As part of a doctorate programme at the Metanoia Institute (Middlesex University), I am researching mothers returning to work in the last five years. I would like to understand your experience of Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days.

Your response will help in the design of better Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days for returning to work in the future. Please feel free to contact me at catherine.hampson@metanoia.ac.uk. All responses will remain anonymous.

Please see Momentive's (previously 'surveymonkey') data privacy notice [here](#).*

(* Note: full address is:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy/?ut_source=legal&ut_source2=privacy-basics&ut_source3=inline#how-we-use-the-information-we-collect-but-shortened-for-the-survey-user-above).

1. As far as you remember, in which year did you take your most recent Keeping in Touch (KIT)Days?

Space to add a year

2. What age were you at the time of taking those KIT days?

Space to add a year

3. Were you returning after your first or second (or subsequent) child?

Selection:

First child

Second (or subsequent) child

4. As far as you remember, how many KIT Days did you take then?

Space to add a number

5. As far as you remember, where were you on those KIT Days (e.g., at work, at home)?

Space to add free text

6. As far as you remember, what did you do during your KIT Days?

Space to add free text

7. Do you remember any emotions you felt related to your KIT Days?

Space to add free text

8. How important do you think each of the following is, for a good experience of a KIT Day?

Selection:

- Having a supportive manager*
- Receiving support or advice from a work colleague*
- Receiving support or advice outside of work (e.g., family/friend/coach/therapist)*
- Being brought up to date on changes during my leave*
- Knowing in advance what the KIT days will involve (e.g., timing, content)*

Parameters are:

- Not important*
- Neither important nor unimportant*
- Important*
- Very Important*
- Unsure*

9. Are there any other important factors to add that would have improved your KIT Day experience?

Space to add free text

10. About your industry sector (at the time of the KIT Days) ... which is your closest match?

Selection:

- ONS categories of sectors displayed*

11. About your job (at the time of the KIT Days) ... how would you describe it?

Space to add a description

12. About your job... were you returning full-time or part-time?

Selection:

- Full-time*
- Part-time*

Space to add 'Other'

13. About you... your age now?

Space to add an age

14. About you... how do you describe your ethnicity?

Space to add a description of ethnicity

15. About you... are you formally assessed as having any disability?

Selection:

Yes

No

Space to add 'Other'

16. About you... were you parenting on your own or jointly at the time of the KIT Days?

Selection:

On my own

Jointly

Space to add 'Other'

17. This is the end of the survey. Please share any further ideas or comments that you have on how KIT Days could be used to help a parent prepare best for their return. Thank you.

Space to add comments