

**Gender and Parenting: The (re)production and  
(re)negotiation of gender identity in the context of  
first time parenting.**

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## **Abstract**

This study set out to investigate the ways in which first-time parents construct their gender identity as they grapple with a new addition to the family soon after the birth of their first child. Two white middle-class heterosexual couples participated in the semi-structured interviews. The study took a social constructionist perspective and the data analysis followed a critical discourse analysis approach. The broad findings are fivefold: competing ideologies persist within these comparatively modern couples' discourses; equality is a disruption to gender identity; the construction of motherhood compared to fatherhood is asymmetrically evaluative; for these mothers, the transition from non-parent to parent is a more embodied experience; and the transitional period of becoming a parent provides both opportunity and resistance towards new versions of gender identity.

## **1. Introduction**

The following chapter provides the reader with a general overview of the study, including researcher rationale, aims, objectives and the specific research questions. Lastly, there is a section which addresses issues of researcher reflexivity.

### **1.1 Rationale for the study**

Traditionally, parenting has been associated with dichotomous gender-based roles, whereby men fulfil the role of breadwinner and disciplinarian, whilst women take on primary care-giving responsibilities (Deutsh, 2001). These dichotomous mother/father identities are inseparable from dichotomous sex roles which historically have been considered to map on to biological sex. These gendered expectations restrict both men and women to ways of being and acting as parents that may or may not be in the best interest of the individual or the child(ren).

Although women have been largely disadvantaged by polarized, dichotomous parent roles (for example by being excluded from the job market), they are also rewarded for their own subordination as primary caregivers. To explain this, Ambivalent Sexism Theory (AST) asserts that both men and women hold hostile and benevolent attitudes towards women simultaneously to justify and maintain gender hierarchies. Incentives are then in place, which benefit women who conform to the ideology of traditional female roles, and punishes those that do not (Cikara, Lee, Fiske & Glick, 2009). Unfortunately, this also translates from the private to public domain, hindering woman's career opportunities and advancement (ibid.). Men are also empowered and disadvantaged by their role as primary breadwinner, as masculinity research shows that although men are able to maintain their superior social standing through ambivalent sexism directed towards women, they are also being excluded (or excluding themselves) from very valuable and positive aspects of care and connection in family life (Magarragia, 2012).

Gender has been theorised as socially constructed, and quite distinct from the physical and biological dissimilarities between men and women (Ainsworth, 2015). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2016) defines gender as socially constructed behaviours, activities and roles that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Parenting roles,

then, are not biologically determined but related to social constructions of gender. Despite this distinction, parenting practices often reflect dichotomous constructions of gender in a patriarchal society. Women are traditionally constructed as feminine and having a 'natural' ability to nurture and care for their child, whilst men are constructed as masculine and therefore more equipped to protect and provide for their family (Arendell, 2000). In turn, parenting roles are prescribed from an idealisation of women as homemakers and child raisers, and men as breadwinners, with a secondary status at home. The roles and responsibilities assigned to mothers or fathers are then largely influenced by this societal level norm, which further justifies and stabilises the power differentials in a patriarchal society (Cikara et al., 2009).

If gender is socially constructed and prescriptive of people's behaviours (Kite, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Talbot, 2010) then it becomes apparent that a parent's identity as a mother or father is also socially constructed. The qualities associated with masculinity and femininity, mothers and fathers are inherently connected to socially constructed gender stereotypes, which describe who individuals are, and how they should behave (Kite, 2002). These socially constructed stereotypes are a part of a much broader belief system influencing people's identity and their perceptions of appropriate behaviours and responsibilities taken on by men and women (Kite, 2002).

Gender literature suggests that adjusting to parenthood is an important moment in constructing gender identity. One theorist goes as far as to describe the institution of family as a 'gender factory', which historically speaking creates and perpetuates the polarization of feminine and masculine roles (Beck, 1985 in Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998). When people become parents, they have to grapple with their gender identity in relation to various roles and obligations as parents of a new and helpless human being. A new child demands many changes to the way new parents live their lives. A child requires love, security and constant attention which people have to negotiate at the level of the couple. However, cultural expectations of womanhood and manhood become prescriptive and normative to peoples' identity as either father or mother (Talbot, 2010).

Although gender identities are constructed at societal levels, couples do have scope to renegotiate and redefine identity in their own relationships and practical arrangements. In



modern society, there is a broad range of parenting arrangements that are now possible. For instance; dual-earner couples see both partners working full or part-time to provide for their family, single parent households, where one parent takes on all parental responsibility, whilst increasing employment opportunities for women means that some fathers can take on 'house-husband' responsibilities whilst mothers work full-time, and it is within these individual exchanges and negotiations that gender identity is produced and reproduced (Connell, 2001; Cowdery & Kudson-Martin, 2005; Talbot, 2010; Solomon, 2014). In light of this, an important aspect of the following research was to recognise how couples construct their gender identity in respect to family work, and to unravel the discourses in action as they construct their experiences as parents.

A shift in gender identity is thought to take place at the level of the couple once they become parents. This has been largely overlooked in gender research, but is elemental to understanding gender construction in contemporary society. This paper addresses this gap in the literature, through an investigation of the joint negotiations that take place in relation to becoming a parent

## **1.2 Overview of the study**

This research aims to explore men and women's talk around the experiences of becoming a parent. In particular, an attempt is made to examine how gender is discursively produced and/or (de)constructed during, and in relation to their transition into parenthood. This research takes a critical constructionist perspective on gender identity; as socially constructed as well as performative (Burr, 1995; Talbot, 2010). Talk of any kind is action, and not necessarily reflective of 'reality' (Burr, 1995; Lock & Strong, 2010). That is, couples actively negotiate their roles and responsibilities, but rely on dominant life narratives or discourses of the social context in which they live to construct their individual identities and experiences. Consequently, participants' talk will be analysed for its role in "creating, maintaining and changing aspects of people's social identities that are specifically linked to gender" (Talbot, 2010, p. 117).

The broad objectives of the study are described as follows:

1. To explore how gender identity is negotiated by men and women within the first three years of becoming parents. These first years are of particular interest because gender identity is thought to be in a state of flux.
2. Further, the study is an exploration into men and women's constructions of parenting roles and norms, and how they negotiate these based on social ideals of masculinity and femininity.
3. Underlying the first two objectives is the hope that the study will provide insight into alternative modes of parenting that resist or adapt to traditional oppressive narratives and constructions, (for example, that women are required to stay at home, while men follow their careers) that only prevent change and gender equality.

The data consists of six in-depth semi-structured interviews (three per couple), presented as two discursive case studies. Social constructionism, and in particular Foucault's critical attention to the socially constructed nature of gender identity is of interest to the current analysis. Discourse analysis, as an approach to inquiry, owes a particular debt to post-structuralism (Coyle, 2007), and was chosen as the method of choice in the current study. The interview data was analysed using the two main tenants of discourse analysis; Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. The synthesis of the two approaches was developed by Edley and Wetherell (1999) and is typically referred to as critical discourse analysis. The aim is then two-fold; firstly, to focus on the pragmatics of the context whilst emphasizing the *action orientation* and intersubjective understandings of social reality, and secondly to critically interpret discourses as constituting or reflecting historically developed institutions (such as the family) which generate and reinforce forms of power relations.

The small sample nature of the study opts for very detailed interviews with a small number of couples rather than less detailed interviews with larger numbers. The study's focus is on sampled *discourses* rather than people, and makes the assumption that if these discourses are available to these particular participants to use then they are available to others in a given society as well. The research questions that guided this study's focus on the selected participants were as follows:

1. What grand social ideals are discursively constructed (challenged or negotiated) within the personal experience of becoming a parent?
2. How are gendered identities negotiated between couples in relation to parenting roles, responsibilities and parenting styles?
3. How are gendered identities negotiated in relation to transitioning into parenthood?
4. Do mothers and fathers construct their own and their partners' parenting identities differently, and how?
5. How do experiences or definitions of masculinity or femininity impact on how the other partner is able to define their own gender identity?
6. What, if any, are some of the discourses and narratives around parenting that challenge traditional gender roles?

### **1.3 Reflexivity: Researcher motivation and position**

Reflexivity implies that people are active participants in co-constructing their experiences of reality, and suggests that any form of research analysis is a constitutive process whereby the researcher is actively involved in the whole process of generating new knowledge (Garfinkel, Goffman & Giddens, 2010). Reflexivity is particularly important in qualitative research, where it is thought to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of research findings. To be a reflexive researcher requires the practice of self-awareness, and critical reflection of personal beliefs, values and attitudes (Payne & Payne, 2004). As such, I felt that it was important and relevant to provide my personal motivation and position as a researcher and writer up-front, and how this was addressed in relation to method and data interpretation of the study.

I am a 30 year old woman, of British Decent, residing in South Africa since 2004. I am currently legally separated from my wife. I am childless at present, but I do plan to have children in the future. I am motivated towards gender research, not only because of my identity as a women and a lesbian, who rejects hetero-normative stereotypes about such things as parenting, but as an aspiring clinical psychologist who is consistently reminded of the various power-laden undercurrents of men and women's experiences of themselves and others. I do not identify myself as a feminist *per se*, but I do recognise the harmful political, social and cultural repercussions of a perceived gender binary, and seek further critical

engagement with previously taken for granted knowledge about who we are as a gendered being. Further, I believe that men and women are powerful agents of change, and hope to empower individuals I come across to embrace change where it is required for our own and others' well-being. In the context of gender, this involves critically reflecting on submissive gender rhetoric, but also requires active participation in the renegotiation of what it means to be a woman or a man in our diverse and multicultural context.

Although I remained aware and critical of how my presence impacted on the interview data and analytical findings, my identity as a woman, and critical stance on gender norms was integral to my interactions with participants, both male and female. To assist in remaining reflexive, extensive field notes were taken during the interviews with the participants, as well as regular documentation of the whole process in a personal note taking format. The latter can be referred to as "regular, on-going, self-conscious documentation" (Payne & Payne, 2004). For further detail pertaining to researcher reflexivity, refer to section 6.2. I believe that remaining self-critical and consciously aware of my influence throughout the whole research process, from conception to analysis enhanced the quality and authenticity of the research findings.

## **Chapter overview**

Chapter 1: Provides the rationale and overview of the study introduction, including a section on researcher reflexivity.

Chapter 2: Presents a review of the literature covering gender in general, to masculinity, femininity, and parenthood in particular.

Chapter 3: Outlines the methodology used for the study, and provides a motivation and discussion for using a social constructionist epistemology. This is followed by an outline of the sampling method and the data collection process. A description and discussion is provided on the use of critical discourse analysis. Lastly, issues pertaining to data management are addressed.

Chapter 4: Presents an in-depth exploration of the results attained from the critical discourse analysis of the interview data

Chapter 5: This chapter discusses the five broader findings in relation to the literature.

Chapter 6: A conclusion of the research findings, reflecting back to the specific research questions outlined in chapter one. Lastly, this chapter offers a critical reflection of the study with recommendations for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Firstly, the problem of biological essentialism is explored, with reference to current research suggesting that binary notions of gender and sex are no longer clearly defined. Gender differentiation as it relates to gender inequality in the South African context is addressed as a significant societal issue which requires further investigation. Social constructionism as a paradigm for understanding gender identity and parenting is discussed. Masculinity and femininity research provides a fundamental backdrop, as it addresses gender identity development. Finally, in order to explore gender identity in the context of parenting, it was important to explore key literature focussing on motherhood and fatherhood, and the potential for alternative constructions in the modern world.

### **2.1 The problem with biological essentialism and the sex/gender dichotomy**

What are little boys made of?  
Slugs and snails and puppy dog tails,  
That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?  
Sugar and spice and all things nice,  
That's what little girls are made of.

The nursery rhyme above speaks to the discourse of difference. Biological essentialism refers to the belief that gender/sex is determined by distinct (biological) differences between men and women. However, research has shown that this distinction is too simplistic, and that sex/gender more likely exists on a spectrum rather than at opposite ends of a binary (Talbot, 2010; Ainsworth, 2015).

Ainsworth (2015) argues that biologists have been working on a more nuanced view of sex and gender in response to countless cases that render any definitive dividing line ambiguous. Writing on the complexity of gender/sex development and the variations of disorders of sex development (DSD), Ainsworth (2015) documents cases where sex/gender assignment is more complicated and not easily resolved by an unhelpful binary.

Developmentally speaking, a person's sex/gender is commonly determined by obvious physical features in utero or at birth. However, an embryo is sexless until five weeks, at

which point it starts to develop gonads with the potential to form both female and male organs. At six weeks, the gonads trigger the development of male testes or female ovaries, promoting the associated sex hormones and development of external genitalia, and secondary sexual characteristics during puberty.

However, research has shown that this process of sex development is more about the balance between “opposing networks of gene activity”, with a variety of possible mutations and variations (Ainsworth, 2015, p.289). For example, mosaicism is a condition whereby a person develops cells with different chromosomal information, allowing a man (or woman) to contain cells that are both XY and XX. There is a documented case of a 46 year old pregnant woman made up of two sets of cells, one set being chromosomally male – supposedly the result of an embryonic merger with a male twin. There are a host of different examples, with an estimated 1 in every 100 people with a diagnosable DSD, many of whom are unaware. Controversially, the pressure to conform to a binary sex model has meant many babies born with both male and female organs (a DSD commonly known as intersex) undergo reassignment surgery, with cases documenting how developmentally confusing this can be for such individuals as they start to form their identity (Ainsworth, 2015). Contemporary technology that looks at DNA sequencing and cell biology is quickly revealing that almost everyone is a combination of various genetic cells, not all of which match a person’s physical characteristics (ibid.). Other fields are also recognising the oversimplification of a sex/gender binary, including but not limited to the field of psychology.

Historically speaking, gender research in psychology has primarily focused on uncovering the key differences between men and women (American Psychological Association [APA], 2005; Hyde, 2005). Based on the notion that men are biologically distinct from women, research into psychological differences between men and women has managed to affirm a sex/gender binary. This largely remains the case despite biological and genetic research proving otherwise (Ainsworth, 2015). However, Hyde’s (2005) analysis of 46 meta analytic studies of gender differences revealed a very different story, one in which men and women are actually more alike than different, called the *gender similarities hypothesis*. Hyde (2005) inspected the effect size for psychological gender differences across six main categories of meta analytic studies (including; verbal and nonverbal communication, social and

personality traits, psychological well-being, and motor behaviours), and found that 78% of gender differences were in the small or close to zero range. A few exceptions (where the differences are classified moderate to large) were found to be in the domain of motor performance (i.e. men could throw further), some measures of sexuality (i.e. men masturbate more than women, and hold more positive views regarding casual sexual relationships), and men are found to be more physically aggressive (Hyde, 2005).

Hyde's (2005) report investigated developmental trends as a possible factor for gender differences, and found that differences in domains such as self-esteem (Kling et al. 1999, in Hyde, 2005) and computer self-efficacy (Whitley, 1997, in Hyde, 2005) fluctuate with age, thereby discrediting the assumption that gender differences are concrete in nature. Hyde's (2005) analysis also highlighted the importance of context, and how it can significantly influence results at various levels. For instance, participants from a study which looked at the importance of context and social norms, found that gender stereotyped aggressive behaviour is erased, and even reversed when the participant's gender and other identifiable traits remained anonymous (Lightdale & Prentice, 1994, in Hyde, 2005). Lastly, Hyde (2005) argued that overinflated claims about gender difference lead to great disadvantages in areas such as work, relationships and parenting. Gender stereotypes are highly influential, as once taken on will impact on people's behaviour and attitudes towards men and women in general. Likewise, the ratified stereotype that women are inherently better at nurturing a child, may leave men feeling inadequate in their role as a father, therefore costing them a chance at securing a nurturing bond (discussed further in section 2.8.1).

It is suggested that gender stereotypes exist in the social realm, reinforced by popular culture and taken on as fact (APA, 2005; Hyde, 2005). Given that the gender/sex binary has been largely discredited in both the biological and psychological domains, it is argued that the disparities between men and women are intimately connected to socially constructed gender identities and stereotypes produced and reinforced by a patriarchal society. Social constructionism as a paradigm for understanding gender and parenting norms is discussed in section 2.3, after an exploration of gender inequality as it relates to parenting in the South African context.



## **2.2 Gender inequality in South Africa and its relation to parenting**

Gender equality does not imply that men and woman are the same, but that they should be accorded the same value and equal treatment. Many people believe that the objective of gender equality has not been achieved (Moffett, 2006; Juttig, Luci & Morrison, 2010; Mattheyse, 2007; Peacock, et al. 2008). In theory woman can; study at university, become CEOs of large multinational organizations, earn an income on par with their male counterparts, and in theory choose not to marry or have children without discrimination. Despite equity policy development and the advancements of gender research and interventions, the majority of women are still found to be the primary caregiver of their children, often in conjunction with part and full-time employment, while men still fulfil the role of provider and protector occupying few care-giving and domestic labour obligations (The South African Board for People Practices [SABPP], 2011).

Historically speaking, women have been pervasively subjected to numerous types of discriminatory attitudes, behaviour and policy formation. In South Africa, it is particularly evident that a gender divide exists in the health and wellbeing of its people (Moffett, 2006). From an employment perspective, it is internationally understood that paid work plays a vital role in the empowerment of women. Despite this, women face severe disadvantages in the workplace (SABPP, 2011). Women can greatly advance their social standing, their family's welfare and improve their wellbeing towards greater self-worth, yet in many countries including South Africa; women are facing formidable barriers to quality jobs (Juttig, et al., 2010). A report by the South African Board for People Practice [SABPP] (2011) shows that although there is an increasing representation of woman in the workplace, there are still 2 237 000 women without any form of paid employment, and not looking to be employed. A sample taken from 339 South African companies showed that only 4.4% of CEO positions, 5.3% of chairpersons, 15.8% of directors and 21.6% of the executive managers were women. This is strikingly low, considering that women make up 51.3% of the country's population of 55.6 million (Statistics South Africa [Stats, S.A.], 2015). Further, Kanjere, (2008, in SABPP, 2011) found that women dominate the informal domestic sector, and due to pervasive social and cultural stereotypes, access to leadership and management positions is severely undermined.

Women who do work are still found to work longer unpaid hours on household chores and responsibilities. It has been estimated that a woman will spend 15, 500 hours more than men on productive activities in their life. This is partly due to women taking on a major proportion of care work, which remains unpaid and unaccounted for in terms of recognition for their contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (South African Government [Gov], 2015). Further, the demands on women to take on unpaid work has implications for their participation in the paid labour force, as they are unable to care for children and work full-time, especially in women headed households.

Post-Apartheid South Africa has actively initiated progressive policies and interventions (e.g. the Constitution and the Freedom Charter) to promote gender equality within social and economic spheres. However, there is compelling evidence that socio-cultural factors are playing a powerful role in the pervasive gender inequalities experienced in South Africa today. According to the South African Government report on the Status of Women (Gov, 2015), social norms about men's and women's work within the home needs to change if a more equitable gender-distribution of unpaid work is to be realised.

### **2.2.1 The link between the private and public sphere**

According to Deutsch (2001) the believe that women have a superior capacity to nurture and 'bond' with their children leads women to abandon their careers to be more available for their children, whilst the ideal of the male breadwinner further encourages an unequal division of labour. This suggests that men and women are actively constructing gender roles and norms which are causing devastating and inequitable consequences at a macro level.

Research in the 1990s (from America) looked into the sharing of household labour and child care roles, found that fathers performed about 26% of child care tasks (e.g. bathing, feeding, dressing and putting the children to bed), and 21% of household chores (e.g. cooking, shopping, house cleaning and laundry) (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992). Further, Bulanda's (2004) study on paternal involvement found that a father's gender ideology (either egalitarian or traditional) was a significant predictor of paternal involvement with child care roles, whereas a mother's ideology had less of an impact. These studies not only provide insight into how an inequitable division of labour is experienced within the home, but also

hint at the importance of people's personal beliefs for paternal involvement for both household chores and the work of childcare.

More recent literature suggests that there is still a pervasive gendered division of labour at household level, particularly stark during the transition into parenthood (Yavorsky, Kamp Dush & Schoe-Sullivan, 2015). A recent study conducted on tertiary educated and dual earner households in the US, found that mothers take on the majority of child care responsibilities when becoming a parent, without decreasing their paid hours of employment. This gender gap in unpaid work emerged after the birth of their first child, with mothers taking on at least two hours of extra work compared to the fathers extra 40 minutes (ibid.).

The available gender statistics in South Africa do not fare much better. Firstly, women headed households make up 39.3% compared to 3.7% of father headed households. It shows that 62.5% of women in South Africa have not attained a matric compared to 59.6% of men; over 62% of men are considered literate compared to only 55% of women. Further, the unemployment rate for women was found to be 5.4% higher than for men (Statistics South Africa [Stats S. A.], 2011). Although these statistics strongly suggest larger structural and political problems with regards to access to education and employment, they also point towards the disparity between men and women in South African society generally.

Research conducted by Cikara et al. (2009) connects family and public life with regards to gender inequality. They argue that *ambivalent sexism* shapes men and women's interactions within the home, whilst also limiting women's role in the public sphere. Ambivalent sexism is described as

...the combination of complementary gender ideologies, held by both men and women worldwide which serve to maintain the present social hierarchy (Cikara et al., 2009. p. 445)

Cikara et al. (2009) contend that ambivalent sexism is made up of both benevolent (BS) and hostile (HS) sexist stereotypes. BS is the paternalistic belief that women need to be protected and treated as precious beings, best suited to domestic and nurturing roles. HS is described as a 'combative ideology' that rejects women's attempts to achieve status or

power, by utilising their feminine sexuality or feminist belief systems. Although BS appears subjectively positive, it reduces women's capacity to attain higher status positions in the work place, where masculine traits (such as competence and independence) are considered more valuable. A paradox is in place when women try to reject such patronising discrimination and become the target of hostile sexism. Women who do so are judged harshly and at times even sabotaged for their attempts to demonstrate that they are qualified for a high status role (ibid.).

Research by Rudman and Glick (1999, in Hyde, 2005) looked at the repercussions experienced by women who violate typically feminine qualities in the work place. Both studies found that, although women were more likely hired by presenting themselves as agentic and independent, they were less likely to be promoted due to unfavourable evaluations based on their lack of nurturing and personable qualities. They concluded that women who violate stereotypes are more likely to experience and receive discrimination in employment. Cikara et al. (2009) argue that such patronising and discriminatory attitudes towards women in the workplace cannot be fully understood without considering the romanticized ideals or benevolent sexist beliefs about women within the private sphere and their role in heterosexual relationships. They conclude that:

Hostile sexism and the exclusion of women who seek or obtain power and status in the public realm is legitimated and justified by those seemingly innocuous, subjectively benevolent and romantic ideals of women as fragile damsels and men as white knights (Cikara et al., 2009, p. 458)

It is therefore argued that women can benefit from their own subordination, as they conform to the benevolent attitudes and beliefs about women in a paternalistic system. However, ambivalent sexism is embedded within the public sphere, negatively impacting on women's ability to attain higher positions and equal opportunities for employment. Lastly, it is argued that this gender disparity is based on problematic and archaic beliefs regarding biological essentialism: the assumption that men and women exist at opposite ends of a sex/gender binary.

## 2.3 Social constructionism as a paradigm for understanding gender and parent roles

According to Terre Blanche, Kelly and Durheim (2006) Social constructionism:

treats people as though their thoughts, feelings and experiences were the products of systems of meaning that exist at a social rather than an individual level. (p. 278)

Hyde's (2005) report (discussed in section 2.3) problematizes psychological research that prescribes to the gender/sex differences model, and highlights the social nature of gender differences. Social constructionism endorses this move towards the social, prescribing an anti-essentialist and anti-realist approach to understanding the world we live in (Burr, 1995).

Social constructionism argues that there is no given or determined nature to people or the world we live in (Lock & Strong, 2010). It is anti-essentialist in that it considers people to be self-defining and socially constructed agents in a shared world. Rather than seeking to uncover predefined and objective characteristics of people, it focuses on "processes that operate in the socio-cultural conduct of action to produce the discourses within which people construe themselves" (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 7). In this sense, gender identity is understood as constructed and shaped through shared meanings and interactions with others and the broader society, rather than something predefined in cognition, biology or genetics. Social constructionism also subscribes to anti-realism, which maintains that knowledge cannot be objectively known as it is constructed by people (ibid.). Gender identity then, is something that cannot be understood as an independent phenomenon, but something that is co-created in a particular socio-historical and cultural context. Social constructionism is thus interested in the processes rather than the structures of knowledge, and as a result focuses on social interaction and practices in order to understand how knowledge, or in this case - identity, is achieved. The person is seen as the "*constructor*" rather than the perceiver of a life-world (Ashworth, 2003, p. 15).

Ashworth, (2003) outlined three core shifts initiated by taking a constructionist framework. First, languages (discourse), as well as cultural and social symbols are considered the tools and means by which an individual constructs their reality (or in this case, gender identity).

Second, an individual is not considered a single unique entity, but a member of society, “with ways of conceiving of reality typical of the historical epoch of a certain culture” (Ashworth, 2003, p. 15). Third, the researcher is considered very much part of the research process rather than as an objective observer. These three elements of social constructionism form the theoretical back-drop of this study.

### **2.3.1 Discourse and anti-essentialism**

Social constructionism recognises that knowledge and understanding are constructed between people. This knowledge about the world and all that is in it becomes shared and sustained through social processes (Burr, 1995). Language is particularly interesting to social constructionists as it views personality, identity, and even our emotions as subject to the concepts entrenched in language rather than existing within the individual (Burr, 1995).

It is a worldview that perceives the self as multiple, diverse and ever changing in relation to the social historical context of those present. From this perspective, our understanding of the person, their (gender) identity and the prospect of individual and social change is opened up to multiple interpretations and possibilities. The term ‘discourse’ refers to:

a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light. (Burr, 1995, p48)

This suggests that any particular event, person or object can be interpreted in multiple ways depending on the discourses drawn on in making meaning of that object (Burr, 1995). For example a wife describing her husband’s role at home (the object) could be represented in two differing discourses; The ‘husband as the provider’ discourse could represent the husband as a hard-working man who does his best for the family; or ‘the husband as the uninvolved father’ discourse may be used to present her husband as an unloving and lazy father. This will ultimately depend on the context and the person drawing meaning from her words. Discourses that are culturally available to us are the building blocks drawn on in people’s interactions with others to construct their own and others’ identities.

According to Burr (1995) the adoption of a critical attitude towards our taken-for-granted knowledge of the world is essential. Social constructionism challenges our perceptions of reality, by forcing a critical mind on what is usually considered an objective and unbiased observation of the world. Michel Foucault was a prominent advocate of social constructionism, and developed the concept of anti-essentialism. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously argued that even gender and sexuality are artificial designs, constructed from an interaction of cultural and societal norms that are historically constituted, containing no essential or necessary nature in and of themselves (Talbot, 2010). In his work, Foucault contended that “practices and relations between people are brought into being as a result of (those) socially constructed bodies of knowledge” (Talbot, 2010, p. 119).

Therefore, social constructionist research into the domain of gender identity should remain critical of assumptions that render men and women essentially different. For example, the view that men are less caring than women is a product of socially constructed knowledge, using discourses particular to the socio-historical and cultural context. The critical and anti-essentialist stance taken in this research seeks to uncover the multiplicity of ways which gender identity can be constructed and reconstructed.

### **2.3.2 Historical and cultural relativity**

Constructionism shifts the focus of research to meaning making, with the recognition that people make meaning of themselves and the world through the cultural practices available to them at a particular place and time (Lock & Strong, 2010). Gender discourses, and the cultural symbols and signs that perpetuate them will ultimately influence how a person creates meaning from being either a man or a woman (Burr, 1995). The Good Wife’s Guide below was an article published in a popular women’s magazine (called *Housekeeping Monthly*) in May, 1955 (retrieved from: <http://www.littlethings.com/1950s-good-housewife-guide/>). It is evident that a woman’s ‘role’ in the family context was centered around housework, nurturing, and making sure her husband was happy. This article reflects the practices of gender, as it relates to a western female identities in the 1950s when society encouraged women to participate in particular actions in order to construct an identity around the success or failure in her role as a housewife. This article articulates the subjugation of women in the mid 1950s, but the expectations of women as expressed in this

article are by no means exclusive to this historical era. Gender discourses and narratives in modern society continue to put pressure on women to remain youthful and attractive to the opposite sex. Marriage is still a measure of success for many women, and men continue to value their ability to provide for the family above the role of caregiver. The media is a prime example of these discourses at play, with advertisements and womens' magazines drawing on their supposed desire to successfully attract the perfect man through the betterment of her looks and other feminine qualities.

*Housekeeping Monthly* 13 May 1955



### *The good wife's guide*

- *Have dinner ready. Plan ahead, even thenight before, to have a delicious meal ready, on time for his return. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men arehungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal (especially his favourite dish) is part of the warm welcome needed.*
- *Prepare yourself. Take 15 minutes to rest so you'll be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking. He has just been with a lot of work-weary people.*
- *Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him. His boring day may need a lift and one of your duties is to provide it.*
- *Clear away the clutter. Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives.*
- *Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper, etc and then run a dustcloth over the tables.*
- *Gather up schoolbooks, toys, paper, etc and then run a dustcloth over the tables.*
- *Over the cooler months of the year you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too. After all, catering for his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction.*
- *Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair and, if necessary, change their clothes. They are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part. Minimize all noise. At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer, or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet.*
- *Be happy to see him.*
- *Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him.*
- *Listen to him. You may have a dozen important things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first - remember, his topics of conversation are more important than yours.*
- *Make the evening his. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner, or other places of entertainment without you. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure and his very real need to be at home and relax.*
- *Your goal: Try to make sure your home is a place of peace, order, and tranquility where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit.*
- *Don't greet him with complaints or problems.*
- *Don't complain if he's late home for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.*
- *Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.*
- *Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.*
- *Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.*
- *A good wife always knows her place.*

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Figure 2.1. The Good Wife's Guide (*Housekeeping monthly*, 1955)



The institutionalisation of gender inequity through historical, political and economic policy formation is by no means disregarded by a focus on discursive exchanges. Indeed, such elements are inseparable from peoples' talk as they are influenced and judged according to dominant ideologies of their cultural context. Therefore, this study perceives parents as active participants in shaping and directing their life, albeit situated in a particular cultural milieu.

### **2.3.3 Social constructionism and social action**

The following study conceptualises gender as culturally and socially produced, reinforced and countered through interaction; that language is a form of action, as it limits and prescribes what can and cannot, in practice, be done in society (Burr, 1995; Sunderland, 2004). People's constructions of the world go hand in hand with social action: if knowledge is negotiated in context, and can differ according historical time and place, then these variations will reinforce or sustain certain practices or patterns of social action and reject others (Burr, 1995).

When it comes to gender identity, social constructionism allows the participants to have a voice about their own experiences of being a man, woman, mother or father. It provides insight into the influences acting upon them in their context and through their discourses, rather than presuming such identities as static (Sunderland, 2004). This is a valuable approach to gender research, given its oppressive history.

### **2.3.4 The problem with dichotomous parent identities**

It is the best for all tame animals to be ruled by human beings. For this is how they are kept alive. In the same way, the relationship between the male and the female is *by nature* such that the male is higher, the female lower, that the male rules and the female is ruled. (Aristotle, *Politica* in Wijngaards, n.d.)

Historically speaking, human societies have depicted men and women as fundamentally different creatures, with different needs, thoughts, feelings, and appropriate forms of behaviour (Talbot, 2010). Above, Aristotle depicts women as subordinate beings "by nature", suggesting that womens subordination is morally right due to their natural

inferiority (Wijngaards, n.d.). Even though belief systems may have changed overall, prevailing frameworks of ideologies about what is natural continues to be reflected and reinforced by, for instance, nursery rhymes learnt during childhood, literature, newspaper articles, advertisements, ceremonies (both secular and religious) and everyday talk in interactions (Suthrell, 2004). These messages permeate people's lives during important life events such as becoming a parent. However, Foucault (in Keyssar, 1995 p.140) argues that the demarcation of these categories is blurry because "anatomy doesn't always settle the matter of sex identity; and gender is by definition uncertain because of its sociohistorical mutability".

From a social constructionist view point, masculinity and femininity are regarded as a category of gender rather than an indicator of one's biological sex (Talbot, 2010). Theorists have distinguished between 'sex' and 'gender', where "sex is biologically founded" in anatomical or biological differences, as opposed to gender which is "socially constructed; it is learned" (Talbot, 2010, p.7). The term 'gender' often refers to the designation of social characteristics that distinguish male from female (Keyssar, 1995). According to Sunderland, (2004 p. 14) gender, as opposed to sex, is a social concept that involves dissimilarities between men and women being "socially or culturally *learned, mediated or constructed*". Perceived feminine and masculine traits are acquired or produced rather than embedded deterministically in biology (Talbot, 2010). From this perspective gender is understood as fluid and historically contingent; affording opportunities for men and women to change and learn new ways to think and behave, both personally and socially.

As discussed in section 2.4, the traditional view that a person's sex is fixed and dichotomous is problematic. Women can be masculine, like men can be considered feminine. Likewise people can be born with a biologically indistinct sex, or choose later in life to medically change their sex to suit how they perceive themselves to be in the 'inside'. Indeed, Ainsworth's (2015) review highlights how sex in the biological sense does not exist on a binary at all, but on a spectrum of possible genetic and biological variations present in the majority of people. The media hype around the South African track runner Caster Semenya, is one well known example of how biological sex in contemporary society is still fixated on the rigid enforcement of the biological sex binary (McRae, 2016). However, such cases bring attention to the ways in which human biology often defies a dichotomous classification and

urges society to start thinking critically about biological 'facts' and the ways in which the notion of fixed sex/gender categories limits the full range of human expression. The issue is then to regard both sex and gender as both part of a continuum, and as socially constructed concepts.

The notion of gender as a socially constructed identity was a key theoretical component utilized during the Women's Movement in the 1970s and 1980s as it encouraged women to embrace lifestyles that were otherwise limited to men (Sunderland, 2004). This opened up the possibility of change, where women had a choice about becoming a mother and/or housewife, and could potentially earn on par with their male counterparts. Additionally, men would have an opportunity to share the duty of providing for the family, or even take on primary caregiving. Despite the differentiation of sex from gender, theorists have continued to rely on dichotomous and relatively fixed sex roles. Further, in popular discourse gender is still premised on 'difference' and constructed according to the heterosexual gender binary model (Nentwich, 2008). For example, the breadwinner role is still associated with masculinity and fathers, whilst primary caregiving is equated with femininity and mothers. Because men are considered more independent and competitive, their identity constructions traditionally rely on earning in the public sphere, and a mothers identity closely tied to nurturing in the private domain (Ibid.).

Social constructionism goes beyond both socialisation and role based models of gender, with boundaries between genders conceptualised as somewhat arbitrary and not necessarily representative of reality. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003):

Differences in what happens to women and to men derive in considerable measure from people's beliefs about sexual difference, their interpretations of its significance, and their reliance on those beliefs and interpretations to justify the unequal treatment of women and men (p.15)

This is an important aspect of gender theory and research; that the differences between men and women serve politically fuelled agendas rather than being based on 'real' differences (Sunderland, 2004; Talbot, 2010). Social constructionism offers an alternative account of gender differences and gender roles as situated within a particular context. As

such, parent identities are thought to be socially constructed using the gender norms and discourses of a particular time and place, rather than based on 'real' and fixed differences between men and women.

## **2.4 Masculinity and femininity as socially constructed stereotypes**

The qualities which are associated with masculinity and femininity are inherently connected to socially constructed gender stereotypes, which both describe who individuals are and how they should behave (Kite, 2002). These socially constructed stereotypes are a part of a much broader belief system influencing people's gender identity and their perceptions of appropriate roles for men and women (Kite, 2002). These gender identities form a hierarchy in which some identities are more prized, powerful and socially rewarding, crystallizing and socially validating inequality between men and women (Connell, 1995).

This gender hierarchy is pervasive, and is maintained through interaction from as early as birth. This involves reinforcement of feminine traits in women, (such as being gentle and passive) and masculine traits in men (such as being aggressive and active). From a young age, men and women are punished, overtly or implicitly, if they do not align themselves to acceptable gender behaviour (Talbot, 2010). For instance boys will be reprimanded if they show signs of weakness such as crying. These expectations are portrayed and experienced as permanent features of identity and ultimately prescribe what people can and cannot do in the world as men and women.

In contrast to biological essentialism, Connell (1987) conceives of masculinity (and gender in general) as constructed in particular contexts in relation to class, age and race. As a result masculinity is perceived as fluid, consisting of multiple versions that all exist simultaneously along a complex and multidimensional hierarchy.

### **2.4.1 Hegemonic masculinity and its roots in a Patriarchal society**

In recent years the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* has informed the majority of academic research in South Africa surrounding men, gender and social hierarchy (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012). The term hegemony is theoretically derived from Gramsci's (1971) Marxist theories of class relations. He developed the sociological notion of hegemony to conceptualize the stabilization of class relations, and attempts to unpack the social,

cultural and political undercurrents that allow particular social groups to establish enduring power over another group. Scholars interested in exploring the mechanisms and nature of gender systems have employed Gramsci's term, and developed the notion of hegemonic masculinity in order to explain how society is organized by patriarchal systems.

The formulation of hegemonic masculinity was historically influenced by academic and political developments (Morrell, et al., 2012). Literature from the field of sociology and social psychology began to recognise the social dynamics involved in the practice of masculinity, hence the possibilities of shaping and changing men's detrimental behaviour (Hacker, 1957). Feminist theories of patriarchy followed, along with the women and gay liberation movements contributing further to the core concepts of power and gender difference. Indeed, heterosexuality and homophobia lay the foundation of hegemonic masculinity. The term hegemonic masculinity was first established in an article titled "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" (Connell, 1987). Written as a critique on the literature about the 'male sex role', this article incorporated a number of research endeavours on men and masculinity in Australia, providing insight into the hierarchical nature of multiple masculinities. According to Donaldson (1993) understanding the nature of the term (hegemonic masculinity) is based on the feminist outlook; that dominant men's relationship to women and other groups of men (homosexuals for example), is oppressive.

Connell, (2001) who is at the forefront of masculinity research, defines hegemonic masculinity as:

the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (p.77)

Patriarchy is a set of social structures that maintain the unequal distribution of power between men and women within a given society (Walby, 1990 in Haralambos, Holborn, & Hearld, 2004). Social structures such as education, paid work and household production have been primarily aligned with masculine ideals that suit a patriarchal system.

Hegemonic masculinity suggests a number of characteristics which represent the cultural ideal and privilege with being a white man in western society. Dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity exists in comparison to subordinated masculinities, so that white male privilege exists in relation to men of other races, heterosexual men in relation to homosexual men, and men as a whole in relation to women (Connell, 2009). Traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinities include traits such as aggressiveness, emotional constraint, risk-taking, heterosexual desire, agency, toughness, self-sufficiency and success (Hinojosa, 2010; Morrell et al, 2012; Donaldson, 1993). These characteristics are normalised in society through the media, sporting events, music, and various forms of literature. It becomes a normative feature in society, in such a way that men position themselves in relation to what is expected of them, restricting or permitting certain ways of performing manhood. Although very few men are able achieve the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, it is a set of ideals which men (and women) support, and which provides a platform for privilege and subordination (Connell, 2009).

Despite Connell's extremely influential work in the field of masculinity, her conceptual system of theorising masculinity and power has been contested (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Moller, 2007). One area of contestation is the application of a rigid typology, suggesting that there is one particular form of masculinity that is hegemonic (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Others have problematized her theory as over-simplistic as it suggests a form of hegemonic masculinity that is objective, without due consideration of the multiple and variable ways in which hegemonic forms of masculinity play out in particular contexts. Further, the concept does not allow due consideration for the complexity of men's practices and motivations in real life (Moller, 2007). In response to such criticisms, Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) published a reformulation of the concept emphasising; the dynamic and multi-dimensionality of a gender hierarchy; the global interrelationship of masculinity; the agentic role of women in its construction; the importance of people's lived experiences and personal accounts of masculinity; and the opportunities for change and transformation.

Hegemonic masculinity remains a useful framework for theorising gender in relation to power, family dynamics, identity formation, and parenting roles. Its wide application proposes that there may not be any society that does not incorporate some form of

governing masculinity, associated with more power and domination (Connell, 2009). This is evident in patterns of practices which represent these ideal ways of being a man, which legitimate the subordination of women by men and other 'lesser' ways of being a man. Her focus on the interplay between men and women's gender identity constructions can be seen in her concept of emphasized femininity, discussed next.

#### **2.4.2 Emphasized femininity**

In order to examine the complex negotiations between men and women, it is important to acknowledge women's role in the construction of gender identity. Therefore, Connell's (1987) concept of *emphasized femininity* as the female equivalent to hegemonic masculinity is explored, as the backdrop to more recent literature that explores the concept of hegemonic motherhood (section 2.7.2).

Connell, (1987) recognises that gender is not dichotomous, and that no one version of femininity is hegemonic. However, she introduces the concept of *emphasized femininity* which, much like hegemonic masculinity, is argued to be the form given most ideological and cultural support in contemporary society. Emphasized femininity is defined around women's 'compliance' to their own subordination and is "oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (1987, p. 1803). Connell (1987) stresses the significance of social control as a predictor in gender identity when she explains that particular aspects of femininity are given social privilege during different eras of a woman's life. Therefore, emphasized femininity presents itself differently depending on where women are in their life cycle. For example femininity is organised around sexuality and attractiveness in relation to young women, but in older women it is organised around the experience of motherhood (ibid.).

Connell's (1987) premise that emphasized femininity is organised differently during stages of a woman's life cycle has been explored. For instance, Bailey's (2001) article (*Gender shows: First-time mothers and embodied selves*) explores how women's gendered sense of self is renegotiated through discourses about their bodies. Bailey (2001) explored the relationship between the physical changes women experience during pregnancy and gender identity in relation to Connell's conceptualisation of emphasised femininity. Thirty middle-class white women from Britain were interviewed twice; once in the third trimester and

again after giving birth. Through a discursive approach to the data, Bailey (2001) was able to reflect the significance of the embodied self. He concluded that women's bodies go through multiple changes that can either facilitate traditional social positioning or provide an opportunity to renegotiate a more contemporary account of femininity.

Bailey's (2001) research highlighted the importance of physical changes in allowing the negotiation of alternative experiences, without suggesting women are determined by their physiology. However, there is very little research that explores how traditional conceptions of womanhood can be renegotiated or altogether redefined by experiences that would usually put pressure on women to conform to the dominant ideals of femininity and motherhood. Considerations of gender identity that don't take into account the complex reconstructions and experiences of women in relation to the grand societal pressures and prominent social discourses influencing them are out dated and unhelpful. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) reformulation of hegemonic masculinity somewhat highlights the importance of joint negotiations in gender identity by conceptualising masculinity and femininity as enmeshed constructs, which cannot be dealt with independently from one another.

To avoid viewing hegemonic gender relations as one dimensional, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) encourage an emphasis on the dynamics of hegemony and people's personal accounts, including the conflicts and contradictions they face in their lived experiences (ibid.). In order to understand the relationship between gender and practice, an exploration into the transitory nature of gender identity is worth further elaboration.

## **2.5 Gender identity in transition**

Central to the theory of hegemonic masculinity is the notion that constructions of masculinity are not static – they are historically and contextually fluid and multiple. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) acknowledge the construction of a diversity of masculinities within various gender orders and institutions such as the work place and within the family. However, early literature has been criticized for primarily focusing on the structure of gender hierarchies, providing little consideration of how these states of flux within masculine identities can be, and are, negotiated discursively (Moller, 2007; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).



In a discursive analysis of young men's health-related practices within gendered identities, Tyler and Williams (2014) found that whilst the men in their focus group tended to reject the 'cover man' ideal of masculine health, they still tended to draw on hegemonic identities which discourage health promoting behaviours. They discovered that men preferred to avoid taking an active interest in their health as either not an option or something they felt pressured to avoid communicating openly about. These identity constructions were framed from positive attributes related to men's 'provider' identity, in which men should stand back and allow those in greater need to access the health services first. It is of interest here to mention that the masculine ideals of strength, control and independence were utilized by these men in legitimating any health promoting behaviours they did practice, which highlights the adaptability and fluctuating nature of gender identity constructions.

However, this does not mean that renegotiating one's gender identity is an easy task, as individual identity is produced in relation to social expectations and obligations, and must be negotiated socially. Further, at certain pivotal periods of a lifetime, gender identity is brought into a state of becoming, of transition into something that will determine how that identity is lived out in practice. Spector-Mercel (2006) worked on this principle when developing a conceptual model that brings attention to the temporal nature of masculine identities. Spector-Marcel's (2006) narrative analysis of elderly men's western masculinity scripts found that as men age, their masculine identity changes and their use of hegemonic discourses in constructing an identity appears to diminish (ibid.).

Talbot and Quayle's (2010) study on women's constructions of masculinity across contexts found an interesting shift in socially accepted norms and roles of men. In their discursive analysis of women's talk they found that traditional ideals of masculinity were most desired in the context of romance and family. In particular, women preferred men to provide, protect and show dominance in the context of family, but preferred to draw on more egalitarian constructions in the context of friendship and work. Qualities such as being 'nice' were valued within male friendships and work colleagues, but not in romantic or intimate relationships. Therefore traits of importance to women are anchored by the context of their relationships demonstrating that gender identity and 'doing gender' is fluidly adapted across contexts and to different life events and circumstances (ibid.). Although this research

focused exclusively on female constructions, it highlighted the shifts in gender identity required by different contexts, environments, stages of development and life events.

### **2.5.1 The transition to parenthood**

The transition to parenthood is thought of as one of the most significant milestones of adult development (Katz-Wise, Priess & Hyde, 2010). Becoming parents is a particularly interesting life event to explore as it entails a challenge to gender identity predicated on the biological differences involved in sexual reproduction. Indeed, Beck (1985, in Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998) describes the institution of family as a 'gender factory' that historically speaking creates and perpetuates the polarization of feminine and masculine roles.

Eagly and Wood (1999) argue that couples will experience dramatic changes in roles, relationships and power during their transition to parenthood. It is further observed that identity will change in proportion to the shift in roles. The *Transition to Parenthood Hypothesis* posits that parents having a child for the first time will change more drastically than parents having an additional child (Katz-Wise et al. 2010). Research has indeed shown that couples perceive more change when becoming parents for the first time, in comparison to couples who have are having a subsequent child (ibid.).

The transition into parenting hypothesis acknowledges the different forces acting on women compared to men, both before and after the birth of a child, and how different opportunities at the level of society lead to a gendered division of labour (Katz-Wise et al., 2010). When becoming a parent, the societal pressures and practices of motherhood and fatherhood become prescriptive and therefore salient to the individual. The cultural expectations of motherhood compared to fatherhood aside, women also fulfil biological roles such as child-bearing and breast feeding that put pressure on them to fulfil particular care-giving roles.

However, the problem with this view rests on the lack of agency and negotiation at the level of the couple. It is argued here that individuals have the ability to construct their own identities in relation to, but independently of their roles; that gender identity is influenced by, but not dependent on the societal and biological pressures of role enactment. Finally,

research that provides a platform for exploring contemporary ideas about parenthood and gender could be an important source of empowerment and motivation for further investigation.

## **2.6 Masculinity and fatherhood**

Constructing manhood within the context of fatherhood brings attention to the fluid nature and complexity of masculinity. Exploring the complexities of masculinity during a man's transition into fatherhood has been explored in such countries as Italy, Sweden and the UK (Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Finn and Henwood, 2009; Magaraggia, 2012). In the UK, Finn and Henwood (2009) piloted a psychosocial exploration of men's identifications to different types of masculinities within men's talk of becoming fathers for the first time.

A random sample consisting of thirty men were interviewed right before and after the birth of their first child. These men were asked questions that allowed for a biographical expression of experiences of their own father as compared to being a father. They determined an interaction and conflict between the contemporaneous modern 'motherly father' and the differentiated traditional father positions, in both their talk of what they foresaw and their lived experience (Finn & Henwood, 2009). Men were able to reject the traditional father ideal in order to embrace undifferentiated parenting, yet their talk was interspersed with uncomfortable references to masculine traits when discussing their ongoing experiences and ideas about equal parenting. This brings attention to the stubborn salience of hegemonic masculinity as a yardstick against which alternative versions of masculinity are judged.

Since the 1970s Sweden has been politically focusing of gender equality by putting energy and resources into constructing the gender equal man and father (Johansson & Klinth, 2008). Motivated to correct gender inequality and underrepresentation in the workplace, the state championed various campaigns and slogans to encourage the construction of a new type of manhood; one which shares responsibility for childcare and housework. Despite these initiatives, statistical and sociological studies indicate that advantages encouraged by the state (such as paternity leave) have been slow on the uptake. Johansson and Klinth (2008) analysed the discussions of four focus groups of men from varying social and cultural backgrounds in order to explore men's identifications with fatherhood, with a particular

focus on their relation to the new caring and gender equal father ideal. They discovered an overall inclination to construct fatherhood in ways reflecting the ideology of gender equality:

Thus, the hegemonic structure is changing. To qualify for hegemonic masculinity, it is no longer enough to be rational, goal-means oriented, career oriented, and disciplined. Today, men must also show their readiness to engage in child care, their child orientation, and their willingness to live up to the ideal of gender equality (Johansson & Klinth, 2008, p. 58)

Factors such as socio-economic status, age and upbringing were found to impact on men's engagement with the topics raised. For instance, the Christian and male network group conveyed the current situation as needing improvement, but they were optimistic about men's ability to change the way they construct manhood. On the other hand, immigrants living in Sweden acknowledged the value and importance of men sharing parenting responsibilities, but were concerned with the social and economic obstacles that prevented men and women to negotiate parenting roles.

Literature on fatherhood highlights the complexity of men's identifications with traditional and alternative masculinities as they adapt to the various discourses and practices of fatherhood (Finn & Henwood, 2009; Johansson & Klinth, 2008). Indeed, Edley and Wetherell (1999) argue that men can alternate hegemonic and subordinated positions in relation to various situational influences, expectations and demands. For example, fathers were found to express more discouragement, defeatism or an otherwise resigned approach to their position as a father once they had encountered the difficulties in becoming an equal care-giver to their child (Finn & Henwood, 2009). They suggest that there is tension between and within what men envisage and what they experience in practice. This observation also points towards the complexity of identity formation, and the multiple dynamics which are in play, but not necessarily accounted for by a focus on fathers alone.

### **2.6.1 The 'New age' father in relation to motherhood.**

Recent history has seen a growing interest in the changing face of masculinity. Socially, politically and culturally speaking, there is a shift in people's understandings and awareness of the ideal man, whether referring to an unmarried bachelor, a husband or a father. Social, cultural and psychoanalytic theorists are particularly interested in understanding the reproduction of masculinities in contexts such as the 'new age' father as a vital constituent to the sociocultural construction of male identities (Connell, 1995; Edley & Wetherall, 1999; Finn & Henwood 2009).

Magaraggia, (2012) in a sociological study conducted in Italy found that there is "confusion and tension between old and new practices of fatherhood" (p.77). Traditional/patriarchal masculine traits are still valued and are primarily defined by affiliation with work activities rather than to their caring activities in the private sphere. Parents are continuously negotiating the father-child relationship. Men and woman want fathers to establish a close bond, but the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are socially pervasive (ibid.). Margaraggia (2012) hints at the complementarity of male and female parenting identities. For instance, there is a sense that men are squeezed out of caring by a nurturing mother, and/or that women may lose identity prestige should they share the care of children with their partners.

Negotiating the vicissitudes of parenthood may be influenced by particular social contexts, but is also individualized, and provides an opportunity to redefine their sense of self. For Magaraggia (2012) becoming a parent provides men with an arena to explore the complexities of care, whilst women are challenged to accept or reject the traditional expectations of motherhood. Magaraggia, (2012) proposes a situation in which women let go of the idealization of the self-sufficient primary care giver role, to give space for a redefinition of masculinity; one which affords a space for men to provide an intimate dimension of care to their child. However, the pressures brought to bear on mothers to embody traditional ideals of motherhood are substantial, and are discussed in the next section.

## 2.7 Mothering and Motherhood

Scholarship on mothering and motherhood has expanded from a focus on the effects of mothering on children, to a consideration of mothers' activities, understandings and experiences (Arendell, 2000). Research has shown that women are still largely responsible for the care and raising of children, despite contemporary engagement with *modern motherhood*, a new model of motherhood in which mothers combine paid employment and family care work (Leira, 1998; Arendell, 2000; Pederson, 2011). Arendell (1999) contends that mothers combine parenting and employment in a cultural context that idealises *intensive mothering*. Intensive mothering is described as mothering that is "exclusive, wholly child centred, emotionally involving and time consuming" (Hays, 1996 in Arendell, 2000, p.1194). The literature on mothering as discussed here, specifically relates to the dominant ideology in the United States. However, it is assumed that such an ideology is present in many modern societies, including South Africa, where a significant separation of paid work and unpaid family work still persists (Gov, 2015.)

The ideology of motherhood is embedded in gender structures and the concept of femininity. According to Arendell, (2000, p. 1192) because women traditionally fulfilled the role of mothering, womanhood and motherhood are now "treated as synonymous identities and categories of experience". Further, motherhood involves nurturing, which is inextricably linked to femininity and the ability to biologically reproduce. Although gender is itself a contested construct, the ideology of mothering persists and is institutionalised (for instance) in family arrangements, marriage laws, social policy and the capitalist economy, which, along with the images and rhetorically asserted representations of family life in popular culture, powerfully shapes women's identities and social activities.

The following section explores intensive mothering ideology as a normative standard from which women formulate an identity, and by which mothering practices, arrangements and identities are evaluated. Key concepts discussed include; the *good* mother, hegemonic motherhood, deviancy discourses and maternal gatekeeping.

### 2.7.1 A *good* mother is an intensive mother

In the United States, working women remain pivotal to family life. Mothers remain primarily responsible for providing care, nurturance and developmentally supportive activities for

their child's psychological and emotional well-being (Pederson, 2012). Hays (2003, in Pederson, 2012) proposed that the ideology of intensive mothering has grown even more culturally prominent since women entered the workforce. Indeed, research has shown that employed mothers who adhere to an intensive ideology spend more time with their children than housewives did in the 1960s (Bianchi, 2000 in Pederson, 2012). The intensive mothering ideal depicts a *good* mother as someone who is self-sacrificing, devoted to the care of others, and as a "subject without her own needs and interests" (Arendell, 1999, p.3). The good mother presupposes a traditional model of family and motherhood with roots in the evolution to an industrial capitalist economy from which came the gender-based division of labour, traditionally practiced in patriarchal society (ibid.).

A narrative study conducted by Pederson (2012) sought to examine definitions of 'good parenting' by both mothers and fathers in order to reveal how parents with young children perceive parenting ideals, especially in relation to paid work. Definitions of 'good parenting' were then compared to the same participants' opinions or definitions of 'good mothering' and 'good fathering' to see if any overlap existed. He found that mothers and fathers differ in the ways in which they understand and prioritise child care needs and family work. For mothers, mothering came first, and they experienced guilt when work commitments interfered with childcare. Good mothering was defined as distinct from good parenting, and included attention to detail (in childcare), and gatekeeping efforts in order to control the quality of care provided by fathers. For fathers, good parenting was inseparable from good fathering, and involved fitting in time between commitments of work. They felt empowered to take part in childcare tasks when at home and did not feel guilty for their lack of involvement due to work commitments. Further, mothers were found to ask *for* help only in times of need, whereas fathers only asked *to* help when they wanted to be involved. Mothers (compared to fathers) tend to define good mothering in distinct ways from good parenting which hints at the social pressure they experience to fulfil a primary caregiving role.

Many of these narratives can be contextualised in light of the social construction of the intensive mothering ideology. Their experience of guilt and being overburdened reflects the uneven pressure mothers feel compared to fathers in a society that evaluates mothers based on these all-to-often unrealistic ideals (Pederson, 2012). The next section provides an

exploration of hegemonic motherhood as a patriarchal construction which ties women's identities to their roles as primary caregivers.

### **2.7.2 Hegemonic motherhood and deviancy discourses**

Hegemonic motherhood is described as:

...a patriarchal construction: [that] ties women's identities to their roles as child raisers and nurturers of others, more generally.

Motherhood, no matter how closely conducted in accord with the ideological dictates, does not elevate its performers to the social and economic status experienced by men collectively. Rather, hegemonic motherhood remains subordinated to and under the force of hegemonic masculinity (Arendell, 1999, p.4),

Women, (as mothers or not-mothers) along with their practices and arrangements, are understood and evaluated according to standards of hegemonic motherhood in a "gender stratified society" (Arendell, 1999, p.4). According to Arendell (1999, 2000), the culturally and politically normative standard of the intensive mothering ideology regulates how women live their lives through the construction and internalisation of various deviancy discourses. These deviancy discourses are, for the most part, targeted at women who do not conform to the traditional script of full-time motherhood, in the context of a nuclear family with a providing husband. Importantly, maternal deviancy discourses are not consistent across race and socioeconomic status of women, given that poor, unmarried women are expected to prioritise employment over primary caregiving, which reflects the existence of overlapping systems of gender, class and race that typify a stratified society (Arendell, 2000). This signifies a paradoxical situation in which a mother's employment can be classified as deviant unless she is poor or unmarried for example. Further, such discourses do not take into consideration the positive employment related benefits such as improving a mother's access to basic rights, therefore improving her parenting abilities and her children's economic well-being.

There is said to be an overwhelming cultural contradiction and ambivalence towards motherhood, which obstructs any effort to challenge maternal deviancy discourses. Hays



(1996, in Bell, 2004, p. 48) addressed this contradiction in relation to an intensive mothering ideology as opposed to “the logic of (public) economic and political life that demands a moral commitment to the “individualistic, calculating, competitive pursuit of personal gain”. Further, Arendell (1999) argues that many women employ a ‘supermom’ identity, for which a mother is both intensive and engaged in homemaking and full-time employment; supposedly in an attempt to counteract and ameliorate their deviancy. However, their attempts at ‘doing it all’ are unattainable and bound by ‘mother blame’, a social process in which women are held accountable for their children’s perceived inadequacies. This argument points towards a tension between the traditional intensive mothering ideology and the individualistic values of modern society, which puts a disproportionate burden of responsibility on mothers for the rearing of children (Bell, 2004). This ensures that mothers remain disempowered and controlled by the discourses of hegemonic motherhood.

Investigating deviancy discourses as a product of hegemonic motherhood, Arendell (1999) drew on mother’s narrative accounts of out-of-school time, arguing that women are active participants in their own constructions of maternal deviancy. All the mothers were employed, middle class mothers with a range of income, generally referred to as ‘mainstream’. The mothers he interviewed were found to hold themselves responsible for childcare and family well-being, despite an acknowledgement of their husbands’ lack of participation and support in such matters. Importantly, he argues that these mothers were agents in the construction of such discourses which actively shape and direct their lives and how they raise and manage their children’s activities. However, he argues that these mothers are not completely free, as they are constrained by their dominant cultural context, and the values derived from an intensive mothering ideology. Overall, Arendell (1999) states that as participants of such deviancy discourse, mothers contribute and consent to its prescriptions, albeit without critical reflection for the most part.

The literature suggests that women are subject to and active agents in, the construction and use of a multitude of maternal deviancy discourses. The literature proposes a cultural ambivalence regarding maternal employment. Whether a woman is an unmarried mother who does not conform to the ideology of the nuclear family, or as a working mother who strays from the full-time motherhood ideal; hegemonic motherhood persists as a powerful and evaluative construct in patriarchal society. Maternal gatekeeping is discussed next, as

one way in which hegemonic mothering and deviancy discourses play out in parental interactions.

### **2.7.3 Maternal gatekeeping**

The concept of maternal gatekeeping exists within the framework of the social constructionism of gender and is broadly understood as the mother's ability to manage a father's involvement with children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Maternal gatekeeping relates to the uneven distribution of responsibility for child care, amongst other family related factors. Indeed, Pederson (2012) suggests that the ideology of intensive mothering may lead to gatekeeping through efforts to police the quality of care their children receive.

The concept was originally defined as:

A collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children (Allen & Hawkins, 1999, p.200).

However, more recent literature believed this definition restricted investigation of the complexity and interactive nature of such family processes. In response to such criticisms, Puhlman and Pasley (2013) drew on family systems theory and feminist research towards a redefinition of maternal gatekeeping as:

A set of complex behavioural interactions between parents, where mothers influence father involvement through their use of controlling, facilitative, and restrictive behaviours directed at fathers childrearing and interaction with children on a regular and consistent basis. (p.176)

Maternal gatekeeping and how it affects families is of relevance in a shifting context that encourages greater father involvement and mother employment (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Puhlman & Pasley (2013) propose a three dimensional model of gatekeeping: control; encouragement; and discouragement. These dimensions are thought to operate on interactive continuum, resulting in eight types of gatekeeping. It is beyond the scope of this

literature review to thoroughly address this model in detail, as it is the discourses derived from the concept of gatekeeping that were of interest in this particular study.

Despite co-parenting objectives, many parents may unknowingly adhere to an intensive mothering ideology, employ deviancy discourses, and discursively act as maternal gatekeepers, (ambivalently) both supporting and hindering gender equality. An extensive literature review indicates that little research has been conducted that gives particular reference to gatekeeping discourses in the context of gender identity formation and first time parenting. Maternal gatekeeping literature is lacking in the South African context, despite being an important step (albeit a small one) towards dismantling hegemonic motherhood, and challenging the hurtful, disempowering social processes and discourses that go along with it. To follow is an exploration of literature that tackles the relational dimension of gender identity construction in the context of parenthood.

## **2.8 Relational approach: Negotiating gender in parenthood**

Male dominant ideals were thought to be continuously reproduced and renegotiated by men, and between men at the expense of the subordinated female population and other less superior forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005 p. 837) observed that popular literature has a tendency to separate the experiences of men and women as if to presume “women were not a relevant part of the analysis”. In response to the criticism of the dichotomization of men and women’s experiences Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p.837) argued that “the cure lies in taking a consistently relational approach to gender-not in abandoning the concepts of gender or masculinity”. Further, Talbot & Quayle (2010) argued that “masculinity research is “re-excluding” women (Hearn, 2004) and positioning women as passive consumers or recipients of masculinity rather than active agents in its construction” (p. 256). There have been studies, however, which focus on woman’s constructions of masculinity. For instance, Magarragia (2010) discovered women still place little value on men’s domestic capabilities despite there being a greater “acceptance” of modern day men staying home.

Connell (2009, p.20) states that gender is predominantly about the social relations within the spaces of interaction:

The structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes.

In this sense, studies that account for women's constructions of masculinity are useful but still fail to account for the relational dynamic of gender as it is constructed and negotiated between both men and women together. In trying to explain why the division of labour at home remains inequitable Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) explored the construction of motherhood as a relational process. A sample of 50 married, heterosexual couples from various backgrounds were asked about their experiences, responsibilities and opinions on fairness when it came to their parenting roles. Cowdery and Knudson-Martin (2005) used predefined categories of motherhood types before establishing two models of mothering; a) mothering as a gendered talent and b) mothering as conscious collaboration. The mothering as gendered talent model revealed a continual resistance of inequitable motherhood practices, whilst the mothering as conscious collaboration model uncovered problematic relational dynamics between caregivers.

The researchers found a reciprocal connection between the childcare tasks a mother takes on, the relational connection between mother and child, and the degree of gender equality in the family context. Processes that maintained motherhood as a 'gendered talent' started with mothers assuming a natural connection, fathers stepping back, mothers managing their time around their children's needs, and taking on primary responsibility of care. As a result of these processes, mothers established a stronger relational connection to their young child, while fathers expressed feelings of inferiority regarding childcare. Some couples expressed conflicting idealizations of parenting, which ultimately manifested as stress in the relationship. While these findings are insightful, this research focused solely on the construction of motherhood, without addressing how fathers and mothers create themselves and each other. It is believed that the meaning and practice of motherhood and fatherhood are intrinsically related and lacking current investigation. It was therefore the humble intention of the current research to appreciate this gap in the literature.

## **2.9 Crossing over: Stay-at-home fathers, working mothers and other compromises**

Over recent years, research has started to explore the potential for alternatives to the traditional model of parenting (Nentwich, 2008; Yoshida, 2011; Solomon, 2014; Medved, 2016). Four studies are discussed below which illustrate the possibility of a shifting of gender identity in relation to parenting.

In response to the growing number of fathers today who claim to take on responsibilities traditionally seen as the 'mothers job', Yoshida (2011) set out to examine the factors affecting care of young children by married or cohabiting fathers. In a subsample of data (from the respondent files of a National Survey) he discovered multiple and varied factors that influence fathers in taking a more hands-on approach in caring for their children; economic conditions, childhood experiences, education and the current family environment all affect paternal involvement. For instance, fathers daily involvement in the physical care (for example; feeding, bathing, changing diapers) of children is much more likely if; they had received higher education; had partners who were employed; if they had a young son; and if they had been brought up by a biological father. Despite discovering some of the conditions which encourage paternal care, the results indicate whilst fathers spend more time on average with their children than in the past, mothers are still primarily responsible for their children's physical needs. These results are descriptive in nature as they are derived from multiple regression analysis of survey data. Although useful, it limits understanding of how these couples come to these arrangements.

In a study on post-gender marriages, Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) focused exclusively on couples who defined their marital relationship on gender neutral terms, with the aim to providing insight into how couples have moved beyond the reliance on gender as an organizing principle. In a longitudinal study that lasted four years, fifteen parents were interviewed and observed. Couples were categorised as "dual-career" (when both partners work either full or part-time), "dual-nurturer" (when both partners share caregiving responsibilities equally), "post-traditional couple" (when roles are not allocated based on gender norms) or "equal due to external forces" (such as work schedules). They found that the majority of these couples contain a mother who is a highly paid professional, and that each couple reported experiencing more satisfaction and emotional well-being when taking

on shared responsibility for providing, caregiving and housekeeping roles. These couples were guided by fairness and sharing. They were able to compare their contributions with each other, and consciously rejected the ideals of successful masculinity and femininity in traditional family life, referring to 'human' roles over 'gender' roles. Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) concluded that these (non-traditional) couples are redefining cultural rules about family work, and that by studying forms of egalitarian families a new social structure can be generated in society that embraces gender neutrality.

Solomon's (2014) (narrative) study on men's experiences of their role as stay-at-home-fathers (SAHF) is demonstrative of how men can conceptualise fatherhood in ways that significantly differ from traditional models. Unlike Risman and Sumerford's (1998) study with involved fathers who engage in caregiving while continuing their employment, the men in this study had 'chosen' to leave the labour force to become primary caregivers. Solomon (2014, p. 68) found that these men used different discourses to construct a father identity, based on "egalitarian beliefs about mothers and fathers, emotional closeness with children, hands-on involvement in day-to-day routine care, primary responsibility for children, a voluntary exit from the labour force, instrumental support for wife's careers, and a view of the family as having primary importance in one's life". Much like the parents in Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's (1998) study, they ascribed to 'gender-neutral' parenting discourses. But Solomon argued that the men in his study took this interchange to the next level: in that they did not prioritise their role as a provider, or take part in paid employment. Solomon (2014) proposed that the men in his sample have developed a new model of 'engaged fathering', illustrative of how fatherhood for some men has evolved. He does however admit that his sample was limited, as it only included middle to upper class white men with tertiary education.

Medved's (2016) research offers a more critical reflection of fathering discourses. This study analysed the various ways that 45 SAHFs used discourse to position themselves and their caregiving activities in relation to hegemonic masculinity. She argues that talk on SAH fathering has the potential to resist and transform hegemonic relations, but can also be found to perpetuate them (ibid.). For instance, SAHFs were found to engage in discourses of 'paternal protection' or 'hero' which matches the hegemonic masculine identity of fathers as the family protector. It was found that many SAHFs are challenging existing notions of

masculinity by prescribing to discourses embedded in talk of emotionality and natural caregiving (usually associated with mothers). She explains how dominant gendered scripts are both taken on and resisted (in complex and contradictory ways) in order for SAHFs to make sense of their lived experience of a non-traditional role.

Despite these fairly optimistic findings, there are many complex barriers to the realisation of the 'new-age' or 'engaged' father identity. For example, despite co-parenting objectives, mothers may unknowingly adhere to an intensive mothering ideology and discursively act as maternal gatekeepers, hindering gender equality (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Further, some believe that women are still the targets of mass media and popular culture which aim to mediate new ideas about maternity and are re-traditionalising gender (McRobbie, 2013). More specifically, the norms of middle-class life provide professional status to full-time motherhood, whilst creating markets of consumption through activities such as the prams which double as running machines, or the rewards promised for achieving that post-baby body. McRobbie (2013) calls this the post-feminist masquerade of maternity, arguing that old stereotypes are subtly infiltrating contemporary constructions of family life.

Women are made to believe their decision to stay at home is based on personal choice within a partnership of equals, but as McRobbie (2013, p.142) suggests: "The post-feminist masquerade of maternity re-assures the social structures of domination by constraining young mothers in a field of anxieties bought about by the promise of complete perfection". Lastly, it is important to note that literature on gender and parenting is scarce in the South African context. However, given the accessibility and interconnectedness of modern society through popular media and the internet, it is likely that (to some degree) the discourses of gender and parenting exist internationally.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The transition into parenthood is an ubiquitous experience with profoundly rewarding yet challenging consequences at the level of the couple as they adjust to the addition of a new dependent person in their life. As discussed, the gender/sex binary model has proven to be all too simplistic (Talbot, 2010; Ainsworth, 2015). It is argued here that gender is a constructed concept and cultural activity which is historically, socially and contextually specific (Burr, 1995; Ashworth, 2003; Sunderland, 2004). As such, masculinity and

femininity, motherhood and fatherhood identities are multiple, fluid and based on the norms and rules present within a society at a particular point in time. Parenthood has been shown to be a particularly important life-event in the development of a gendered identity (Connell, 1995; Kite, 2002; Talbot, 2010). Previous studies have explored how men and women construct motherhood and fatherhood (for example, Arendell, 1999; Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Magaraggia, 2012) but most of these studies almost exclusively looked at one or the other parent and not both.

Therefore, this study explores how men and women construct their gender roles within the context of parenting, attending particularly to how couple's definitions of masculinity and femininity are enmeshed and mutually constructed. The complex shift in gender identity that occurs around the birth of a baby is the primary focus of the research, whilst attention is also given to alternative discourses around parenting, as central for dissolving oppressive forms of hegemonic masculinity in favour of egalitarian gender relations.



### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The theoretical orientation of the study was informed by social constructionist ontology. Hence, the framework conceptualizes gender as produced largely by discourse within the constraints of biological difference (e.g. the ability to give birth or breastfeed). Gender is thus something that people *do* with their talk, and in their actions against a backdrop of socially situated constraints (Sunderland, 2004).

Given the topic of interest and the theoretical orientation of the study, a qualitative design was considered ideal for exploring gender identity and answering the research questions (section 1.2). Data was collected by conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two couples. Three interviews were conducted with each couple, totalling six interview transcripts, separated into two discursive cases. Discourse analysts define two versions of the discourse analytic approach; Discursive Psychology and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). However, some analysts prefer to employ a combination of the two (Potter & Wetherell, 1995; Wetherell, 1998, in Willig, 2003). The data from the individual interviews was thus analysed using principles of both.

The qualitative design used is discussed in more detail below, followed by a discussion on critical discourse analysis. After which, the issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research is addressed, followed by a detailed look at the relevant ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Qualitative research design**

In order to produce a rich exploration of gender identity within a social constructionist paradigm, this study employed a small-sample qualitative research design. Babbie and Mouton (2005) suggest that qualitative research is more appropriate when the aim is to develop comprehensive insight into topics that cannot be dealt with using straightforward quantification. Rule-based knowledge derived from more quantitative designs, are not discounted, but considered ill-equipped for the production of rich context-dependant knowledge that qualitative designs offer. Importantly, the researcher is recognised as very much part of the analysis, and in effect, the vehicle through which data was collected and interpreted (Babbie & Mouton, 2005).

To ensure that the scope of the research project remains reasonable, several qualitative research theorists suggest the inclusion of boundaries (Baxter & Jack, 2008). These boundaries perform a similar role to the inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample selection in quantitative designs (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Therefore the boundaries were as follows; a) Heterosexual couples, b) couples new to parenting, with children no older than three, and c) in a monogamous committed relationship at the time of the interviews d) absent of any serious psychological or medical conditions. The decision to focus on new parents was based on evidence which suggests that becoming a parent promotes and draws on gender ideals (such as hegemonic versions of masculinity) in a transitional and relational fashion (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; Finn & Henwood, 2009), thus making this population ideal for exploring the research questions.

### **3.2.1 Small-sample research: Discursive cases**

A small-sample research design was felt best suited for a thorough exploration into the complexity of gender identity formation in the context of first-time parenthood. Both couples were treated as discursive cases, allowing the researcher to explore gender identity construction between, within and across two different couples, providing a rich and in-depth analysis overall. In discourse analysis the aim is to sample *discourses*, not people. The aim is not to argue that all parents will respond in the same way, but to explore the particulars of how these parents construct parenting, with the expectation that what's being identified is one possible way of doing so from the available repertoire in society.

Conventional knowledge about small-sample qualitative research tells us that it is subject to bias, lacks generalizability and is only useful as a preliminary investigation in order to generate hypotheses for further research (Ruddin, 2006). However, Ruddin (2006) proposes that intimate knowledge of particular examples provides valuable context-dependant knowledge, essential if one is to progress from more general, theoretical knowledge. When deciding on how many cases is enough, Kelly (2006) makes the argument that it partly depends on how much detail is provided by each case and whether there is enough material for an in-depth understanding. Each case consisted of three interviews lasting between 40 and 65 minutes long, with five and a half hours in total. Considering the nature of the study, this was deemed an appropriate amount of material to achieve a rich and full analysis.

Purposive sampling was employed to gather participants. This method involves selecting cases that allow for in-depth study on the topic of interest (Durheim, Painter, Martin & Blanche, 2006). Further, it allows the researcher to find cases which are not only available and willing to participate, but also typical of the population of interest (ibid.). This type of non-probability sampling is appropriate when the aim is not necessarily to generalise to a larger population, but rather constructed to serve a specific purpose (Atkinson & Flint, 2004).

Advertisements for participants were put up in post-natal and paediatric clinics (appendix A) and three white middle-class, heterosexual couples responded (despite being open to all), of which all three couples appeared to qualify based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Although not ideal, the focus on middle-class white South African couples was the result of self-selection through advertising in private health care facilities frequented primarily by middle class clients. Therefore, the focus was on analysing discourses around the negotiation of work and child caring, rather than a comparative study between couples of different race or sexual orientation. The respondents were contacted and asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. Two couples remained in the study for analysis. Data was collected for a third couple but withdrawn for ethical reasons. Ethically speaking, the benefits to participating in the study must outweigh the risks to them personally. Due to the sensitive nature of the information revealed in the third couple's interview it was decided that the risk to the participants of inclusion outweighed the benefits in their case. Given the number of interviews per couple (three per couple) and amount of material generated from these cases, it was decided not to extend the sample further.

In tackling the matter of sample size within discourse analysis, Coyle (2007, p.105) contends that "it is not necessary to sample discourse from a large number of people". In the analysis of qualitative data, it is important to accumulate enough text in order to detect the various discourses that are generally employed when speaking about the topic of interest (Coyle, 2007). The aim is not to exhaust all categories, but to look at language use in detail, therefore the amount of data rather than the amount of people in the sample is of prime importance.

### **3.2.2 Data collection**

Gender identity construction is; historically relevant, negotiated collectively with others, and involves the operation of power (Edley, 2001; Connell, 2001). According to Starks and Trinidad (2007), the method of in-depth interviews produces rich data to allow the researcher to analyse discourse patterns and conflicts evident in the talk of the participants. This is in congruence with the aims of the research, which is to analyse discourses evident in the participants' negotiations, and how this contributes to a gendered identity in the context of becoming a parent. Accordingly, the data for this study was collected via transcripts of in-depth semi-structured interviews (refer to appendix B for the interview schedule, and appendix C to see extracts of the transcribed interviews).

The semi-structured interviews were presented to the participants as focused on gender and becoming a parent (appendix B). Although initially framed as an interview, the researcher felt it was important to engage personally with the participants in order to gain trust, encourage openness and promote natural expression. Therefore, the participants were encouraged to treat the interview as a conversational platform. The interviews were conducted at the couple's homes, which suited their hectic and often conflicting schedules. The home environment was ideal, as it provided each couple with a sense of ease. Time was spent showing the researcher around their homes, and family introductions were made.

The couple was initially debriefed about what to expect, and consent forms were signed (appendix D). The one-on-one interviews took place first in no specific order, after which an interview was conducted with both partners together. In other words, each participant was interviewed twice: once on their own and once with their partner. Each interview lasted between 40 and 65 minutes, totalling about five and a half hours. This structure allowed each participant to explore the topic in detail without the influence of their partner, and then gave them an opportunity to explore their experiences together. By conducting an interview separately and then together, the researcher was able to gain a deeper, more dynamic understanding of their gender identity construction. Each couple was presented with R300 as an incentive for their participation. This incentive was considered compensatory for their time and commitment to the interview process (refer to appendix E).

The interviews were recorded using a hand held recording device with the permission of the interviewees, after which the researcher systematically transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim drawing on Jefferson's (2004) simplified version of traditional transcribing conventions.

After the interviews had been transcribed and analysed, a feedback solicitation process took place. Each couple was contacted via email and asked if they would like to meet electronically/telephonically to discuss the findings of the analysis. This was also presented as an opportunity for them to give me feedback on my own analysis, and whether they confirmed my findings or felt falsely represented. Couple 1 replied and we made contact, asked a few questions about the findings and felt satisfied with the conclusions made. Couple 2 did not get back to me via email. I attempted to call the cell number provided, to no avail. I sent another email, letting them know that I am available to give them feedback if and when they would like.

### **3.2.3 Data management**

This section describes the storage and organisation of the raw data, and includes a table listing the data indexes. The interviews were all recorded using a high quality digital audio recorder. The raw data was saved on the researcher's personal computer, and backed up on an internet-based, password-protected storage facility (Dropbox).

Once transcribed, hard copies of the interview transcripts were indexed (see table 3.1) and stored in a research folder at the researcher's home. Digital copies of the transcribed interviews were stored on the researcher's personal computer and securely in cloud storage as described above. The signed consent forms, along with the researcher's notes containing observations and critical reflections were stored in the same research folder containing the interview transcripts. Analytical memos (appendix F), once printed for further analysis of the data, were filed in the research folder as above.

**Table 3.1: Data index**

<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Index</b>
Case one	C.1
Interview with Father (John)	C.1, I.1
Interview with Mother (Tess)	C.1, I.2
Combined interview (both)	C.1, I.3
Case two	C.2
Interview with mother (Susan)	C.2, I.1
Interview with Father (David)	C.2, I.2
Combined Interview (both)	C.2, I.3

### **3.3 Critical discourse analysis**

The transcribed material gathered from the semi-structured interviews was analysed using discourse analysis (DA). Unlike positivistic approaches, there exists no objective guide to conducting DA (Coyle, 2007; Edley, 2001; Silverman, 1993; Terre Blanche et. al., 2007).

Discourse analysis is influenced, and largely derived from the philosophical traditions of social constructionism and post-structuralism (Coyle, 2007), discussed in section 2.3. This approach represents the ‘turn to language’, which shifts the focus of analysis to the power that language has in constructing versions of ‘social reality’ (Willig, 2003). Further, language is seen as contestable, in flux, and as the tool to which the self is constructed (Burr, 1995). There are said to be two main versions of DA; discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, 2003; Edwards, 2005).

According to Coyle (2007 p. 102) discursive psychology “views language as a form of social action, addresses the social functions of talk and considers how these functions are achieved.” This approach conceptualizes psychological phenomena as derived from interdependent and intersubjective discursive exchanges (Harre & Gillet, 1994; Burr, 1995; Willig, 2003). Psychological concepts such as gender identity and memory are viewed as constituting ‘discursive actions’ which are practiced by individuals in order to achieve social objectives, and therefore viewed as “something people *do* rather than something people *have*” (Willig, 2003, p.163). Willig, (2003, p.164) explains that DA involves “moving beyond an understanding of its content and to trace its *action orientation*”. Throughout the process of analysis, language must be understood as performative, so that in looking at the

organization of the words used, an understanding of what is being done by the speaker can be exposed.

The philosophical analysis of ideology and discourse by Michel Foucault, has largely influenced practitioners' adoption of a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Coyle, 2007; Edwards, 2005; Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Willig, 2003). In response to the political limitations of other DA techniques, this methodology deals with issues around historical ideology, social change, power relations, identity and selfhood (Coyle, 2007; Edwards, 2005). A Foucauldian analysis is concerned with the role language plays in establishing social, as well as psychological experiences of the self and the world. *Subjectivity* is a key term used in a Foucauldian discourse analysis, which explains how there are certain ways of experiencing the world, of understanding it and of being positioned within it. Parker (1992, in Willig, 2003, p.171) asserts that discourses "facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when". Considered a creation of a pre-existing structural reality, these discursive constructions regulate the way a person can talk about the world they experience (Burr, 2003). Further, these discourses produce *subject positions* which, when occupied have consequences for experience and subjectivity (Willig, 2003). These subjectivities are created by culture and society's historical institutions such as medicine, law and psychology, and account for the discourses that go along with them (Edwards, 2005).

Edwards, (2005) asserts that this approach has been primarily utilized as a critique of culturally taken for granted social processes of legitimation and power. Dominant discourses that privilege certain people over others become entrenched, legitimating particular power relations that exist, for example, between men and women (Burr, 1995; Willig, 2003; Coyle, 2007). The focus on wider social processes of power and legitimation makes this methodology particularly interesting for the current analysis.

Although both the main approaches advocated within DA are interested in language, and its significance in constituting the human experience, they differ in the kind of questions they are designed to ask, as well as their conceptualisations of agency and experience. Willig (2003, p.172) concisely explains that whilst a discursive analysis will be concerned with how a subject uses certain discursive strategies in order to manage or achieve interpersonal

objectives, in contrast a Foucauldian discourse analysis will focus on the power that a discourse has in constructing the objects and subjects they refer to, including how this relates to “how people think or feel (subjectivity), what they may do (practices) and the material conditions within which such experiences take place”. Despite these differences, a number of theorists propose a combination of the two methods and refer to this approach as *critical discursive psychology* or CDA (Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Willig 2003; Coyle, 2007). To clarify, Willig (2003) describes a situation of such a synthesis:

Studies may wish to pay attention to *both* the situated and shifting deployment of discursive constructions, as well as to the wider social and institutional frameworks within which they are produced and which shape their production. In this case, both discursive resources and discourse practices need to be explored in detail (p.183)

Explicated in their work on the negotiation and positioning of hegemonic masculinities, Edley & Wetherell (1999, p.338) explain that “this new synthetic approach to discourse analytical work in psychology best captures the paradoxical relationship between discourse and the speaking subject”, and go on to suggest that the combined approach “allows us to embrace the fact that people are, at the same time, both the products and the producers of language”.

Willig, (2013, p.131 - 133) provides a guideline, which allows a researcher to draw out some of the discursive resources and subject positions existing in a text, whilst also providing an avenue “to explore the implications for subjectivity and practice”. Willig’s six stages are considered to be a useful approach to conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis; combining the values of both discursive psychology and a Foucauldian discourse analysis.

The first stage of Willig’s (2003) approach is to decide on the discursive objects of interest to the research question. The focus then becomes one of unravelling the *discursive constructions* of the object. Key words are an unnecessary point of reference, as the search should be guided by collective meaning. Therefore, the current analysis involved searching for the object of parenting, expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the text.



Once the constructions of the discursive objects have been identified, the variance or differences between constructions of the same object is of interest. The task is to then locate them in broader *discourses* that may exist at a social or institutional level. At stage three (*action orientation*), the constructions of the discursive object organised within wider contexts become the focus of analysis. By constructing an object in a particular way, the speaker stands to gain something. The aim is to understand what the various constructions of the object are able to achieve for the speaker.

Next, the researcher is required to inspect the *subject positions* embedded in discourse, made available by the wider context they are speaking from. Discourses are believed to be responsible for constructing the subject as well as the object “and as a result, make available positions within networks of meaning that speakers can take up” (Willig, 2013, p.132). Positions are within discursive constructions of the object, and offer “discursive locations from which to speak and act rather than prescribing a particular part to be acted out” (Willig, 2003, p.175).

The fifth stage focuses the analysis on the connection between discourse and *practice*, through a systematic exploration of the ways certain discourses and the subject positions they contain either limit or enable certain types of action. Particular constructions of the world and the positioning of subjects (themselves or others) within those constructions, restrict what can be done, as well as what can be said about that aspect of the world. A cycle is then in play, in which “practices become legitimate forms of behaviour from within particular discourses. Such practices, in turn, reproduce the discourses which legitimate them in the first place” (Willig, 2003, p.175). Finally, *subjectivity* involves tracing the consequences or outcomes of adopting various subject positions by making links between discursive constructions and the speaker’s personal experiences. Delineating what can be felt, thought and experienced within different subject positions is speculative as it is largely an interpretation of the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. Whether the speaker does feel, think or experience that which has been described is a different question.

Once immersed in the data, I analysed each interview transcript (appendix C) applying Willig’s stages as a tool to guide the process and my thinking. I then labelled and colour coded both theoretically derived discourses, as well as emergent discourses within

analytical memos compiled for each interview (Appendix F). I have selected a number of discourses as an example in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Theoretically derived and emergent discourses**

Theoretically derived	Emergent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensive mothering (Arendell, 1999)</li> <li>• Mother as natural primary caregiver (Cikara et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Supermom (Arendell, 1999)</li> <li>• Mother as nurturer (Deutsh, 2001)</li> <li>• Father as breadwinner (Cikara et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Involved/new-age father (Yoshida, 2011)</li> <li>• Biological determinism/essentialism (Ainsworth, 2015)</li> <li>• Maternal gatekeeping discourses (i.e. father as incompetent or inadequate) (Magaraggia, 2012; Puhlman &amp; Pasley, 2013)</li> <li>• Maternal deviancy (Arendell, 1999; Arendell, 2000)</li> <li>• Embodied motherhood (Bailey, 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father as playmate Father</li> <li>• Secondary parent</li> <li>• Father the helper of mother</li> <li>• Irrational inequality</li> <li>• Father as sperm donor</li> <li>• Parenting equality</li> <li>• Mother as comforter</li> <li>• Mothers' spiritual bond/connection</li> <li>• Old-school/traditional parenting</li> <li>• Father inadequacy</li> <li>• Financial imperatives</li> <li>• Role flexibility</li> <li>• Mother legacy</li> <li>• Father legacy</li> <li>• Enmeshed motherhood</li> <li>• Shift/team work</li> </ul>

Analytical memos provided space for discursive constructions, discourses, as well as issues pertaining to the other stages of Willig's guideline (i.e. Action orientation, positioning, practice, and subjectivity). The memos were then printed, in order to cut and paste different clusters of extracts pertaining to emerging themes (See image 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). The data obtained from this stage, provided me with a useful framework from which to present the data, namely; fatherhood and motherhood ideals and tensions.



**Figure 3.3.1 and 3.3.2. Evidence of data analysis in process**

Finally, it is important to consider possible criticisms of such an approach. A discourse analysis approach allows the researcher to reveal unacknowledged aspects of behaviour, making relevant the taken for granted discourses which maintain marginalised positions in society (Morgan, 2010). This is applicable in gender research as it has the potential to make salient (for example) the subjugation of women (and therefore mothers) in everyday interactions, and has the ability to highlight socio-political and moral aspects within the research agenda. However, there are important critiques that should be considered when conducting such a methodology.

As a general approach it is criticized for being relativistic, in that meaning can never be known as it is always open to interpretation. This is exacerbated by the lack of any explicit technique for conducting such an analysis. The approach taken in this study can be criticized as a subjective account of the researcher's interpretations of the data, and the researcher recognises that she is not a neutral observer. However, it is hoped that Willig's guide to conducting a critical discourse analysis and the reflexive stance taken throughout allows for an identification and interpretation of discourses that encourages social change and critically challenges traditional gender practices.

### **3.4 Dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability**

Qualitative researchers argue that the modernist idea of a reality that can be known objectively is incompatible with qualitative research. Hence, there is need for a different set of criteria in determining the quality of qualitative research that does not rely on positivistic accounts of reality, and simplistic notions of validity and reliability (Maxwell, 2012). The

following section draws substantially from Maxwell (2012), and his approach to validity in qualitative research.

Constructivists reject the notion of validity, and replace it with terms such as dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability as a better representation of the standards required in evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2012). Maxwell (2012) argues that validity is not something that can be procured using particular techniques such as audit trails or member checks. Rather, “validity is like integrity, character, and quality, to be assessed relative to research purposes and circumstances” (Brinberg & McGarth, 1985, in Maxwell, 2012, p. 129). Therefore, Maxwell (2012) presents a typology of validity concerns, based on broad interrelated categories of understanding important to qualitative research designs; descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. Each category is discussed in relation to the current study, with a separate section dedicated to the issue of generalizability. Lastly, the overall importance of researcher reflexivity is explored.

*Descriptive validity* essentially speaks to the accuracy of the researchers accounts, and on which all other validity concerns are dependent. It refers to the factual description of things said and observed in the study setting. Importantly, it pertains to the acts’ of people, rather than action, which involves an element of subjective meaning making. To ensure descriptive validity, the interview data was recorded and transcribed verbatim, using the same technique across all interviews. Interpretive comments made by the researcher were bracketed, in order to demarcate what is potentially subjective from the actual act (or statement made).

*Interpretive validity* is concerned with what particular events and behaviours *mean* to those who are engaged with them. This category seeks to understand phenomena from the participants’ perspective within their particular context (Maxwell, 2012). Interpretive validity was ensured by grounding the interpretations in the particular language used by the participants (e.g. family responsibilities), rather than abstract theoretical concepts (e.g. gender roles). In addition, adequate time was spent with the participants in their home environment before commencement of the interview, which allowed for rapport to build, and observations to be made and discussed with the couples for their input. Additionally,

observational data (written in note form in a note book) was taken during and after each interview in case the need for verification arose.

The third category of understanding and validity is called *Theoretical validity*. This type of validity goes beyond the descriptive and interpretive, by explicitly addressing explanations offered by theoretical constructions used, or developed by the researcher. This category can be compared to construct validity and internal validity in positivist research. In order to legitimise the application of concepts/theories to particular constructions or behaviours it was important to establish some consensus with the community of interest. This involved giving them copies of the findings, debriefing them in a transparent manner, and asking them for feedback regarding the appropriateness of the findings in explaining their mental constructions. Unfortunately, couple two were not contactable, but couple one provided useful feedback in this process, enhancing the overall theoretical validity of the study.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative designs are not designed for systematic generalizability *per se* (Maxwell, 2012). Instead, *generalizability* in qualitative research:

Usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results (Maxwell, 2012, p.141)

Certainly, the findings from the discursive cases are meant to provide in-depth examples within a particular context: that is the two couples who took part in the study. This is valuable, for the construction of complex knowledge systems, theory development and hypothesis testing around the complexity, and often contradictory negotiations and constructions of their gender identity. Formal generalisation techniques were therefore considered ill-equipped for such an exploration.

Lastly, I consider *researcher reflexivity* as an important aspect not only to validity, but to the overall ethical quality of qualitative research. Researcher reflexivity is a process of critical self-reflection of personal biases, including theoretical alignments or predispositions. In order to practice reflexively, I was consistently writing down biases, vulnerabilities, as well as developing theories and research dilemmas in a notebook kept in the research file.

Another example of reflexive practice can be seen within the in-text bracketing of observer comments, meaning that I used brackets within the transcripts to note observations that could not be easily deciphered from the text (refer to appendix C). This served as a visual prompt, reminding me that I am inseparable from the text (Kleinsasser, 2000). This method also provided an opportunity to critically reflect on how I can subtly influence the process of producing, interpreting and analysing the data. For the purposes of reflexivity, I provide personal information, as well as my motivation and positionality in relation to the study (section 1.3).

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Adapted from Emanuel, Wendler & Grady's (2008) ethical framework for Clinical research, Wassenaar and Mamotte (2012) offered a framework on ethical issues appropriate in the field of social science. This approach highlights the importance of *professional ethics* and refers to employing professional conduct and behaviour at all stages of the research process, which will in turn improve the integrity (and validity) of the research findings.

*Collaborative Partnership and Social Value:* The researcher endeavours to promote the interests of the participants through the exploration of gender issues with the identified target population. The participants were fully informed of the aims of the research. Once the interviews were transcribed and preliminarily analysed, the participants were given an opportunity to read and comment on in a collaborative fashion and in a manner that was open and respectful of their opinions and suggestions. There are no obvious or guaranteed benefits to participating in the research. However, it could be argued that having an interview in the form of a conversation around important parenting negotiations, may provide an opportunity for couples to explore their views and opinions in a non-threatening and honest manner. The participants were provided with a compensatory Baby City voucher. This is purely to thank them for their time and is not meant as payment for their participation. Further, the results could be used to inform further interventions and research seeking to offset further gender inequality amongst the target community.

*Scientific Validity:* The researcher will ensure the methodology of the research produced valid results. In qualitative research this requires justifiable and appropriate research methodology from sample to analysis. As discussed in section 3.4, Maxwell's (2012)

typology was used to guide the research from start to finish. The researcher recognizes herself as an instrument in the research process, and therefore engaged in a process of researcher reflexivity (as described in section 3.4) in the hope of producing valid, ethically sound data.

*Fair selection of participants:* The research question applies to couples who have recently (under three years) become parents. Participants were self-selected based on meeting this criterion. This was felt fair, as they are the population most likely to benefit from the research.

*Favourable risk benefit ratio:* The possibility of distress or discord in relation to childrearing, due to (otherwise unspoken) tensions within their relationship was a risk of participation. To offset such risks, the researcher provided support for the participants in the form of information about the counselling centre located at the university from which consent was granted to refer the participants if required (appendix G) and given the opportunity to contact them for relationship and/or family counselling. Benefits of participating include having the unique opportunity to discuss particular parenting topics that are possibly taken for granted in everyday life. Overall, it was felt that the risks of the study were proportionate to the benefits for the participants. However, the benefits were considered favourable to risks, when the social value this study has to offer is factored in. Certainly, this research has the potential to contribute to the wider community of gender research seeking deeper understanding of gender identity, which may provide insight into future interventions and policy development to offset prevailing gender inequalities in South Africa and beyond.

*Independent ethical review:* The research was subject to independent ethical review before commencement of subject selection and data collection. The ethical clearance number is HSS/0328/013M and was provided by the HSSREC.

*Informed consent and respect for participants:* The participants were assured that their privacy would be protected. To ensure subject autonomy, they were debriefed on the research aims and what will be expected of them, and informed of their right to withdraw at any stage, for any reason, with no negative consequences. Their names remained anonymous (replaced with pseudonyms) and any other information remained confidential.

Potential risks and benefits of participation were explained and they were required to sign consent forms (see appendix D) before commencement of the interview. Lastly, the results of the analysis were made available to both couple once completed. Their input and suggestions were welcomed by the researcher. Unfortunately, couple 2 were not contactable (via email or cell) for this process to be fully realised.



## 4. Results

This chapter provides a detailed exploration of the data. All the data is based on the discourse analysis of six semi-structured interviews with two couples as described in chapter three. For the purposes of clarity, each couple is analysed separately as a discursive case. Both cases are analysed within the same framework addressing ideals and tensions within their constructions of gender identity and parenting. Ideals are understood as socially constructed norms and expectations that the couples relied upon in forming their identity as parents. Tensions refer to the disruptions of established ideals, norms and expectations related to the process of becoming a parent, which played out practically, emotionally and ideologically. Extracts that were used are collated into appendix H, and numbered in sequence. Extracts most critical to the argument, analysed in more detail, or making several important points are included in-text, while those analysed in less detail are in the appendices. For clarity, shorter extracts are also incorporated in the general body of this chapter.

### 4.1 Tess and John: Full-time employed couple

Tess (32) and John (33) live in Hilton with their 14 month old son. They own a successful restaurant together where John works as the head chef, whilst Tess works as the joint owner and front of house manager. They aim to share parenting equally, with the help of a part-time nanny, as they negotiate their busy work schedules.

#### 4.1.1 Ideals

The following sets out the ideals embedded within the discursive constructions between Tess and John and their identity as mother and father.

##### ***4.1.1.1 Mother bear: The nurturing, self-sacrificing, physiological bond***

The nurturing mother ideal stresses a mother's 'natural' ability to provide primary-care, and to be 'the ultimate' in relational devotion, attention, comfort, and affection (Arendell, 1999). Tess, a dual-earner, explains that "...for me I think that's what a mum really is, the essence of a mom is is is the comforter. And so if I can't comfort him it really kills me" (C.1, 1.3, 618) (**extract 1.1**). Tess is emphasizing a feeling of being morally obligated to comfort her child, which is an important aspect of the nurturing role. So intensive is this pull to

comfort him that she describes psychological and emotional pain when she explains that her child's discomfort *kills her* if she cannot assuage it. This hints at the ideal being sometimes unattainable, as there are times when she is not able to live up to her own expectations of the comforter that a mother should be.

John was found to share in and reinforce the nurturing mother ideal. In **extract 1.2** John recognises motherhood norms such as being *attentive* and *caring* as *clichés*, but nonetheless values them. His utterance *you know you want your, your wif::e (.) um to be similar* suggests a strong idealisation for his partner to conform to a mother legacy whilst referring to his mother as his *role model*. Therefore it was found that the nurturing mother ideal is very much expected and encouraged by this comparatively modern couple.

The nurturing mother ideal was found to have strong links to femininity and a woman's biological capacity to reproduce and breastfeed. Indeed, Tess constructed a physiological bond, reserved for her as a woman. In **extract 1.3** Tess describes her *joy* at seeing her child content. She discursively links this *joy*, this *incredible feeling*, she experiences with nurturing, nourishment, breastfeeding and motherhood. She distinguishes between breastfeeding and *being a mom*, with *just being a mom* the ultimate reason for her joy, but breastfeeding a strong parallel contender. Again, this separates her identity as a mother from that of a father, and links it to nurturing through breastfeeding and feeding more generally. The phrase - *I don't know and I think* suggests that the link is not direct; it leaves the door open for motherhood without breastfeeding, but somehow produces them as overlapping. This could suggest that Tess is questioning her assumptions, providing room for alternatives to this idealistic model.

Elsewhere, Tess constructs her desire to nurture as going beyond feeding: she describes a physiological-primal bond. For instance, in **extract 1.4** she says that *I feel like I can't breathe when I think about the love I have for him*. Here, she is linking her own physical well-being to that of her child. Selflessness and self-sacrifice is one of the most common and consistent themes of the motherhood rhetoric throughout the interviews, and is even emphasized as the essence of motherhood. In **extract 1.4** Tess speaks to a kind of primal instinct, much like a mother bear discourse, in that she is willing to *live and die, and kill* in order to protect her cub. The mother bear theme is also evident when work interferes with her mothering role:

*“I’m like, every time I get something else put on the plate, (.) I get so angry because I can’t spend time with more time with [P: mm] the person I should be spending time with” (C.1, I.1, 610) (extract 1.5).* This portrays her as protective and therefore angry when the outside world gets in the way of her mother-child relationship. Further, when she says that this feeling is *amazing* she is essentially saying that motherhood is such an intense experience that it hurts; it consumes you and overrides your individual will to live and die. She is also saying that motherhood is an experience that is amazing for this very reason. The self-sacrificing mother who will die for her child if necessary will also *live .. for this thing*, suggesting that identities outside of motherhood are less important, and she will in essence live for the well-being of her child.

Tess primarily resorted to constructions of an intensive motherhood ideal when making sense of her transition from non-parent to parent. In **extract 1.6** she constructs a mother legacy, left by her own mother who took on most, if not all her primary needs as a child and discursively relies on this legacy to construct and therefore understand her own identity as a mother. She uses the imperative *should* to portray the duty bound aspects of motherhood, and constructs her own identity in relation to this duty of doing it all herself. Further, she constructs her identity as lending itself to taking on more of the work at home when she describes herself as a *control freak*:

#### **Extract 1.7**

*Tess: Um, I think because I’m a control freak? So I just end up taking on all the responsibility of everything. Work. Everything.(C.1, I.1, 191)*

Posed as a question, she is rationalising as to why she would be the one to take on more work when it should be equal. Therefore, the tension around her idealisation of equality and the unequal distribution of labour at home is somewhat resolved by constructing her own identity as a *control freak* and ultimately a mother, who *should* take it all on. The responsibility for the inequality she experiences is constructed as her own; she takes it all on because she is the *control freak*, and she is the one with an old fashioned role model. This emphasizes that ultimately the control is with her as the mother.

Tess describes overseeing John when he is taking care of their child, for example:

### Extract 1.8

*Tess: ...if ((husband)) does get up and having one of those mornings where he's looking after him, I'm always shouting like, REMEMBER TO GIVE HIM HIS BISCUITS! ((Tess laughs; husband gives small laugh)) HE NEEDS A BISCUIT huh huh he can't live without the biscuit ((husband and researcher laugh)) (C.1, I.3, 176)*

In this scenario, Tess is constructing a father who is less capable when it comes to taking care of the child's needs. John laughs, and does not dispute this. So, even when John does take an active role, Tess is always there to oversee it. The subject position of father was often constructed as secondary in terms of parenting competency. Indeed, in **extract 1.9** Tess constructs her role as a mother as a far more challenging adjustment than John as the father is able to understand. In extract 1.9 she is excluding John from her experience of parenthood. For example, when she states that he will *never fully understand* she is emphasising this exclusion. She consistently relies on gender differentiation in parenting experience to portray how she as the mother experiences something special and unknowable by John. For instance, when she says:

### Extract 1.10

*Tess: just shifting as well as, you know and it's hard because mums just, can't be bothered with having to deal with the dad, [P: mm] because, it's like sorry dude you-you're second fiddle right now, I've gotta deal with this. [P: mm] Which is so much harder. [P: mm] So just, UNDERSTAND ((small laugh, P also laughs)) you know and, shame and it's hard for them because of course they wouldn't understand you know (C.1, I.2, 102)*

Tess's whole identity has shifted towards dealing with becoming a mother, and goes as far as to say that John as the father is *second fiddle* right now. Her use of "they" is othering fathers from her experience. Further, when she says *shame and it's hard for them* she is expressing sympathy for how difficult her change in identity must be for him. She is discursively minimising his ability to understand what she is going through as the mother. Her tone is one of sympathy rather than anger or frustration, supposedly because she is the one who is changing more, but also gaining more from the experience.

#### ***4.1.1.2 Father as playmate***

Both Tess and John position the father's role in the family as playmate. In **extract 1.11** John attempts to conjoin parental roles, but ends with a distinct turn towards a different meaning that he ascribes to fatherhood. He orients to the question as an implicit comparison of being a father to being a mother, and works to establish equality in parental identity when he says the identities are *very similar in most ways* and you both *have to be disciplinarian*. He contrasts these similarities when he states that *I dunno, have fun with my boy, I want experiences with him*. John is putting emphasis on an ideal of enjoyment and fun within the home, with less emphasis about the work involved in caregiving or the intensity of the parent-child bond that Tess described. Further, John mentions the importance of being *disciplinarian*, before saying *I donno*, and that he wants to have some *experiences with him*. It's as though John is struggling with the various ideas he has about fatherhood; drawing on multiple versions; the involved father, the strict father, and the fun father.

Tess discursively idealises John's role as the playmate. In **extract 1.12** she is asked about his primary role in the family, and says *it's playing I'm not gonna lie*. By saying she is not going to lie, suggests that it is important that the listener know the truth, even though it may be dissatisfying. Tess is constructing a father's *natural instinct* to play with their son. By describing this role as *cute* and *important to you*, suggests a differentiation of parental roles, and one that she might not altogether take as seriously as her own role. John (somewhat reluctantly) mentions discipline as something in which they should be equal, but neither mention caregiving nor intense bonding as something essential to fatherhood, reserving those for the mother identity.

#### **4.1.2 Tensions**

Given Tess and John's modern working arrangements, a number of tensions were present in their discursive negotiations regarding parental responsibility and equality. The following section describes significant tensions that were found to reflect the complexity involved in constructing their identity as parents.

#### 4.1.2.1 The 'good' father versus the 'good' mother

The ideals of motherhood were understood as falling under a broader idealization of the *good* mother, which sociologist Hays, (1996, in Arendell, 1999) referred to as the *intensive mothering* ideology. Indeed, Tess was found to regard a *good* mother, as one who is exclusively focused on mothering her child, is committed, affectionate and attentive to all her child's needs, rather than her own. Being a good father is constructed differently. In **extract 1.13** Tess describes her husband as a *great* father. Tess uses words like *amazing* and *great* to describe his identity as a father. She bases this on the time he spends *play*-ing with their child, rather than things such as roles and responsibilities. In **extract 1.14** she again describes John as a *great* father and describes the importance of the *bond* that John shares with his child when she says it's as if they came *from each-other's flesh*. Despite her construction of a father as just *the sperm donor*, he is still constructed as a good father.

In contrast, Tess and John place significance on a good mother being the one to take on the roles and responsibilities of traditional gendered parenting. For instance, John idealizes mothers that:

##### Extract 1.15

John: [and they spent so much money that by the time they did, she had nine months of being a, like, a housewife, [P: mm] and she's the most amazing, one of the most amazing girls that I know, like she's, [W: who] Sarah [P: oh, right] Um, that, when, she had the baby she'd read (.) e:verything and just been that sort of, you know, (.) (C.1, I.3, 376)

Here, John is referring to a mother they know who read all the books about becoming a mother. He describes her as a *housewife*, and uses the descriptor *amazing* twice in this extract. He is constructing a good mother as one who is completely committed to her role as a primary caregiver and housewife. However, in **extract 1.16** John explains how reading the books *annoyed* him personally. By stating that he *really did not need to read that shit* he is creating a double standard, where the books are not required for him to be a good father, but if a mother reads them she is constructed as an *amazing* mother. Tess agrees, by saying that she wished she read more books as it would have helped her "to be a little bit calmer in the beginning..." (C.1, I.3, 386) (**extract 1.17**).

Throughout the interviews with Tess and John, there were many examples of maternal deviancy discourses (discourses targeted at women who do not conform to the traditional script of full-time motherhood) suggesting deep seated ideas about gender normative practice. For instance, Tess would often frame herself as not good enough because of her working lifestyle. When Tess was asked about how she juggles work and parenthood she explains that she is not doing what a mother *should* do, which is *spending time* with her child rather than working (**extract 1.5**). It can be assumed that her lifestyle pulls her in two separate directions, of which being with her child is ultimately right, and any competing obligations are constructed as not good for her identity as a mother. However, at the same time her *anger* at the competing responsibilities of work and home defends her status as a good mother, again like the anger of a mother bear when something comes between her and her cub.

The discursive standards of good parenting are different between Tess as mother and John as father. Friction is caused in relation to their modern working arrangements which has much more damaging consequences for Tess's identity, who has to defend her mother identity when competing demands mean she has to spend less time with her son while John gets credit as an exceptional father when he *comes back* from work (**extract 1.13**).

Therefore, Tess is portrayed as being drawn away from childcare by competing demands (from which her mother identity requires defense), while John is portrayed as coming back from competing demands (for which he is credited as an exceptional father).

#### ***4.1.2.2 The rationality of equality***

The ideal of equal parenting is found to be fraught with tension. This is evidence of a complex and conflicting position on the topic of gender equality, one in which gender norms influences their engagement with, and response to, their experience of becoming parents. In **extract 1.18** Tess refers to her work commitments as an indication for why equality is rational within the home.

#### **Extract 1.18**

Tess: *But when you both equally have, well, sometimes, me even more, have this insane amount of work, on your plate, then it should be eq- then home needs to be equal too.*  
[Researcher: mm, mm] *Definitely. (C.1, I.1, 339)*

However, there is a sense that this *old fashioned*-ness she speaks of, is naturally within her, even if it's not all encompassing. In **extract 1.19** Tess says:

**Extract 1.19**

*Tess: I took it ((the primary caregiving)) all on in an old-fashioned sense I took it all on. And now looking at it I'm like, no, it makes so much more sense and there's no reason why it can't be equal. I work, (.) (Like a mother) ((funny tone of voice)), ((laughs)) every day of my life I work extremely extremely hard so [Researcher: mm] there's no reason why I should have all the responsibility... I-, look I think I'm old fashioned, in, you know within me somewhere because I'm naturally doing that. Even though I often feel like I work even harder. [P: mm] You know than him often at times so, it shouldn't be that way, it should, you know, but actually, I don't, I don't believe it should be like that at all I think it should be equal, (C.1 I.2, 232).*

In **extracts 1.18** and **1.19** she describes of how she *took it all on*, but on reflection the *old fashioned* style of mothering she took on does not make sense compared to equal parenting. She is not satisfied with the current arrangements at home, saying that *in an old fashioned* (and presumably gender biased) *sense [she] took it all on* but that now she is reappraising the situation and realising that *there's no reason why it can't be equal* and *no reason why [she] should have all the responsibility*. By repeating *no reason* she is making a statement about the unreasonableness of the current arrangements, particularly in that she has *all the responsibility*. She is implicitly arguing here that the person who works the hardest should have less of the responsibility, presumably for the child. Interestingly, she uses the phrase *like a mother* (as in motherfucker-presumably to avoid offending the researcher), bringing attention to the overwhelming amount of work being a mother involves, whilst also holding down a full-time job.

Tess's choice of language (in **extract 1.18**) such as *insane amount of work* and *home needs to be equal too* are clear indicators that Tess is constructing the ideal of equality as rational, and inequality (or old-fashioned-ness) as irrational or not sensible, especially considering the *insane* amount of work she does. However, as seen in **extract 1.19**, she is the one who has *taken it all on*, rather than it being imposed on her. There is a significant call to *sense*, *reason*, and sanity in Tess's statements about equality. This is contrasted with her earlier construction of a mother-child bond as a raw physiological experience (**extract 1.4** and later



in **extract 1.26**) which had nothing to do with sense or reason; almost as a type of insanity itself. This could suggest that Tess is relating the condition of motherhood to an irrationally charged *taking on* of more caregiving work. Therefore, if motherhood is experienced as a type of irrational madness (or *insanity* as in **extract 1.18**) for Tess, the inequitable responsibilities that she takes on might be her symptoms or manifestation of this condition; motherhood.

From our discussions about parenting norms, John constructs a situation in which he is open to reversing normative gender roles when it came to negotiating family and work responsibilities. Role-reversal was found to be a common rhetoric, especially for John, when trying to disassociate himself from the negativity associated with gender inequity discourse. In the **extract 1.20** John shows his willingness to take on the *feminine role*, but only if certain other conditions could be met. Despite his willingness to take on a *feminine role*, stating that he *would love to do that*, he adds a caveat regarding money; *as long as there's money to make it work*. But these conditions are constructed as unforeseeable; hence they have no choice but to remain in their current roles, inequitable though they may be. Overall, it appears as though his priorities as the father rest on finances (refer to **extract 1.20**) a typically patriarchal and therefore hegemonic construction of the 'masculine' role, rather than a natural pull towards taking on the caregiving.

In **extract 1.21** Tess externalizes her disapproval of women who make lunch for their husbands, even though they work too, when she says she is *amazed at how many people how many men, still don't, actually [P: mm] do that... and the women are still working*. This gives the impression that she may be uncomfortable discussing her views directly with or to John, possibly averting confrontation.

### **Extract 1.21**

*Tess: you can't look at this like unless you are living literally a stay at home mom, [M: ja, exactly] and the husband brings home the bread, like, it's, it has changed because of, work. Cos of careers. It has to. [And therefore I think it's like across the board*

*Researcher:*

*[and you think that's*

Tess: like I do think that the roles should be then, more equalised, between mum and dad. And, um, I'm amazed at how many people how many men, still don't, actually [P: mm] do that and the, and the women are still working and doing that rol- that last role you know the old fashioned roles as well. And making, their husbands lunch before they go to, work

John: it would be delicious though ((small laugh from P))

Tess: You live, in a restaurant ((all laugh))

Tess: But that's like, I heard that yesterday at (Top-tots) from ((woman's name)). And um she was just like, 'ja and then I have to make him lunch before he goes to work and get them thing and then go to work' and I was just like, You what?! You know that's, that just doesn't sit right for me [P: mm] it's a bit strange. Like if your roles are equal work-wise then, [P: why yeah] surely, other things should be too. If they not I understand maybe you work a half day [different story

John: [or maybe enjoy it which is also, [an aspect

Tess: [ja, sure, true, [P: mm] true. True. [ja,

John: Might, you might, [also try to portray [the role

Tess: [I probably [ja,

Tess: no exactly and, I certainly, I'm doing the feeding and the bathing and stuff cos actually I do love it you know, like if I really hated it, I would, make sure, well, I say that but I really don't love, ((small laugh)) getting up all the time ((laughs)) and I'm not forcing you into it or anything but,

(.)

John: I don't know (C.1, I.3, 778)

Tess is firmly in favour of roles and responsibilities being shared equally (like the making of lunch), yet John is somewhat dismissive. This is evidenced by his comment *it would be delicious though*. Although said in jest, his utterance uses humour to undermine agreement with the notion that making a husband's lunch is an out-dated practice and indicating that – if she chose to do this – it would be welcomed by him. His comment reflects an assumption that women who take on an uneven distribution of labour are rewarded by their partner's

satisfaction; and even the corollary; that women who do not do so have less satisfied partners. Her response is *you live in a restaurant* which counters the implicit claim that the husband should rely on his wife to provide deliciousness.

Here John does not share in his wife's surprise that a woman working full time would also make lunch for her partner, and suggests that instead of it being *strange* it could be because she might *enjoy it*. It is not strange, in other words, for a woman to nurture her husband with delicious lunch if she *enjoys* it. Tess goes to great lengths to show how uncomfortable she is with inequality in the home. Rather than supporting her view, he is disregarding it based on the assumption that women might *enjoy* an uneven distribution of family work. Although this directly contradicts the notions of equality she has repeatedly stated in the preceding minutes, Tess says *true* three times. The argument that women can (and perhaps should) take on unequal labour for *enjoyment*, or that women should *enjoy* caring for their partners, is difficult for her to counter.

This finding suggests that the valued aspects of a women's identity are so tightly bound to domestic labour, that it becomes difficult for her to negotiate equity in the home without undermining that identity. When John is suggesting that many women *may enjoy it*, Tess responds by defending her identity, listing all the things that she does enjoy like *feeding and bathing*, and some that she doesn't like *getting up all the time*. When Tess says that she's *not forcing* him, and John responds with *I don't know*, there is a sense that she is asking for his willingness to participate more equally, but John is dismissive, possibly because he doesn't believe that his identity as a father requires him to perform such aspect of care. Lastly, the responsibility for these things is communicated as primarily hers and that if Tess wants to share it she has to defend herself from the claim that she is *forcing* him, which is difficult, when he can say *I don't know*, as if he feels as though she might be *forcing him*.

#### ***4.1.2.3 The inequitable transition into parenthood***

There appeared to be an asymmetry within the constructions of the subject positions of 'mother' compared to 'father'. This was apparent as Tess and John described how their life shifted during their transition to parenthood. John describes a sense of responsibility when he says *I think there've also been stages in my life when, I was far too irresponsible to be a*

*father and it, (.) would have been a disq:ster (C.1, I.2, 55) (extract 1.22).* When asked how things changed, he said:

### **Extract 1.23**

*John: ....you obviously shit scared, when you starting off, .h um cos you have no idea and everyone says the same thing you just, sort of, get on with it and, it all works out and (a year goes), like ((son's name)), before you know it, and suddenly you just doing it. U:m:, s- ja every- everything change::s, in a way an::d, but I think (you can) still carry on to an extent with, you know your life, before that. (C1, I.2, 61)*

John has constructed parenthood as a huge life change, but at the same time he states that he *can still carry on to an extent with, you know your life, before that*. For him, becoming a parent was initially an unfamiliar, uncertain and scary period as he struggled to adjust, but essentially he describes a continual sense of self (*you just get on with it*), without much disruption to his identity as an individual. Although *everything changes*, they only change *in a way*. This allowed him to live his life as he did before and *to an extent* hold on to an identity outside of parenthood.

In comparison, Tess describes a transition fraught with panic and realignment of self. She is constructing her identity around three primary factors: her relationship with John, her changing body, and the intensive love for her child. In **extract 1.10** when discussing how her life and relationship changed, she says *it's like sorry dude you- you're second fiddle right now, I've gotta deal with this. [P: mm] Which is so much harder*. Here she is separating her unique experience from that of her husband, placing the responsibility to *deal with this* firmly on herself and constructing dads as an additional *bother* for mums that potentially distract them from their primary role. She is constructing her identity as a mother around the priority of her child when she constructs John as *second fiddle* in comparison to herself and the responsibility to her child.

Tess also uses body image discourses to construct her shift in identity. when she says:

### Extract 1.24

*Tess: ...It's, it's strange scars and stretch marks in places you did not know could even exist [P: ja] and and your, your breasts which usually were to me your like my most sort of sexual part of me, .hh [P: mm] I just don't even like any more and that's hectic you know [P: m] like all of that you can't [even look at yourself (C.1, I.1, 651)*

There is an embodiment of motherhood whereby her identity has shifted dramatically in relation to how she feels about herself as a woman. The way she describes how her breasts were the most *sexual part* of her, but they changed so much that she *just [doesn't] like [them] anymore* suggests that she is less able to view herself as a sexual being. She constructs the changes to her body as so profound that she can longer *even look at [herself]*.

Tess's transition is further typified by a shift in identity from 'womanhood' to 'motherhood'. As such, many of the changes and difficulties the couple experience in their relationship and Tess's physical appearance is somewhat dealt with by focussing on a realignment of self towards an incorporation of the child. Tess describes how her physical appearance has affected intimacy with her husband, for instance when she says:

### Extract 1.25

*Tess: ... the sex, like, element of it, kind of goes, because you feel like this, overweight, hormonal, hairy, being ((laughs quite loudly; P does not laugh)) that's just not attractive in any sense (C.1, I.2, 631)*

She has constructed her image as *not attractive*, highlighting how she valued this aspect of her identity before becoming a mother. In **extract 1.26** Tess focuses on how her identity has dramatically changed in relation to the physical and biological aspects of taking care of her child. She is constructing this new mother identity as both selfless in relation to her child and selfish in relation to any other relationship, particularly with John. In a sense she is telling the listener how drastically her identity shifted towards motherhood, a change she constructs as distinct from her husband's experience of becoming a father. She focuses on her change in identity as *hard* for both parents, as though his difficulties are primarily in relation to her and not their child when she says that her change is *what's hard for you, this*

*is what's hard for me.* Tess is therefore discursively resolving tension during this transitional period by putting emphasis on her own shifting identity into motherhood.

Again, in **extract 1.10** Tess constructs John as lacking insight into her experience as a parent, arguing that a father can't understand what mothers go through because they just *wouldn't understand*. Tess is excluding John as the father from her experience as a mother, purely because he is a father. A circular argument, but it resolves the issue as to why her change in identity was more dramatic than his. It also lets him off the hook, and excludes him from attempting to understand. In relating these physiological changes to the body, and to Tess's relationship with her own body was a reconstructed self, a more intense experience compared to John, whose identity shifts were less dramatic or embodied.

***4.1.2.4 ....the sperm donor ... is ...so bonded it's an amazing thing because they did not come from each other's flesh.***

Tess was found to discursively construct her identity as a parent in gender normative and idealistic ways despite her conflicting rhetoric in favour of equal parenting. This contradiction is played out discursively in numerous ways in relation to her prescribed role as nurturer. In extract 1.27 Tess is explaining her overwhelming need to comfort her child, she describes the complex and difficult subjective experience she has when her child favours John over her:

**Extract 1.27**

*Tess: ...at the moment he's got a- separation anxiety with: ((husb-)) for ((husband)) not for me, which is like it was hard to take, in the last few days I've been like wow that hurts you know (C.1, I.1, 114)*

Here, she is explicating her desire to be preferred as a source of comfort. This is also evident when Tess says "*...you get so scared they gonna love him more*" (C.1, I.1, 441) (**extract 1.28**). Tess expresses hurt that her child has *separation anxiety* for her husband, not her. It is therefore understood that her motherhood identity is firmly constructed around the bond she is supposed to share with her child, and any deviation is constructed as something to be *scared of, hard to take* and ultimately *hurt-ful*.

Tess often relies on a discourse of equality, and how childcare responsibilities should be equal too. But there is an obvious tension between equality and the discourses used to describe a mother's love, for example, that it *hurts* and is *hard to take* when the child expresses primary attachment to the father (implicitly in preference over the mother). This represents an emphasised femininity discourse that has repercussions on how the subject position of 'father' is constructed, and highlights how they often become the *secondary* parent – indicated in this case by the separation anxiety with the father (but not mother) being constructed as unexpected and hurtful.

The positioning of John as secondary also links to **extract 1.18** where Tess tells the listener that she has all the responsibility, supposedly because she is the primary parent. In extract 1.29 Tess's compares the nature of their responsibilities:

#### **Extract 1.29**

*Tess: Mine is more it's it's the physical it's the sleeping it's the bathing it's the sleeping it's the waking it's the sleeping, [P: mm] you know it's all that sort of stuff, [P: mm] but um, whereas, him being there for him because the nanny's gone I mean that's like vital. [P: mm] I don't know what I'd do if I did not [P: mm] have ((husband)) to do that [P: mm, mm] like I actually don't know what I would do. [P: mm] So, you must understand responsibility-wise he's happy to do it, [P: mm] but um (C.1, l.3, 501)*

In the interview conducted with the couple together, there were many instances where work load in terms of caregiving was disputed. In the extract above, Tess is explaining how she values him *being there for her*, helping her out, which is often how his role is constructed. By saying that his importance comes in when the *nanny's gone* and how she doesn't know *what I'd do if I did not have ((husband))* to take over in those instances, she is positioning him as the back-up, as someone who is there when she and the child-carer are unavailable. Other examples show how Tess constructs herself as primary, and any input from John is therefore appreciated, for instance when she says:

### Extract 1.30

Tess: ...I mean I am so grateful that he can spend that time with ((son)) [P: m] it's like every time he's like ja no I'm home it's fine, I'll be there, I'm like my whole heart just goes [P: mm] .hhh hhhh thank God (C.1, l.3, 548).

Tess is expressing her relief and gratitude for his role as caregiver in her absence. When John is able to say *I'm home its fine, I'll be there* it hints that if he had something else on, the responsibility would be back on Tess. It could then be assumed that when the couple are together, she remains the primary caregiver; it is only when she is unavailable that he takes over as caregiver, and in no uncertain terms the second parent and helper of mother in her role as primary caregiver. This would also explain why she finds it difficult when her child expresses a stronger attachment to John as the father. Another example of how this plays out discursively can be seen when Tess positions the father as a reluctant caregiver, which conflicts with her earlier comment about John being *happy to do it* because he takes responsibility *only if he has to*. In **extract 1.31** Tess positions John as reluctant when she states that *he doesn't want to have to do it you know*. She is commenting here on his level of motivation to take part in caregiving routines. For Tess, it is not about choice but an expectation. Being the secondary parent however, had little consequence on his identity as a good father (section 4.1.2.1).

As previously discussed, the bond that the father shares with child is highly praised, in spite of less involvement with the child's daily physical needs, such as feeding, bathing and waking up at night. A good example of this is when Tess responds to a question about the meaning of fatherhood (**extract 1.14** in appendix H), referring to John's *amazing connection and bond* when really fathers are *just y'know, they're the sperm donor*. She is surprised by this because she feels like the baby doesn't come from *his flesh* and she does *all the work and stuff*. Therefore, despite being designated a secondary position in the parenting hierarchy; John is constructed as a great father.

It is also worth highlighting the competitive nature of these constructions. It is as though there is a competition for attachment and affection taking place. Tess competes using the physical aspects of her identity as a mother, the view that she works harder at parenting and her increased workload as ammunition in this discursively competitive parenting



dynamic. This is further emphasized when Tess labels men and fathers as just *sperm donors* in the parenting experience.

#### ***4.1.2.5 That maternal side, has carried through so I can maybe sleep***

It became apparent through the couple's negotiations that John had resolved to taking on a secondary parental identity when it came to the physical caregiving needs of their child. They both placed emphasis on the time he spends *playing* with and sharing *experiences* with their child (refer to **extract 1.11**) but his position as a caregiver was not granted the same prominence as Tess and her role as primary caregiver. Indeed, in **extract 1.32** when discussing their reasons why the distribution of labour is swayed in John's favour, he constructs Tess's identity around a *maternal* veracity that can't be denied because it *does follow through* from being a *mother from day one*. Tess as the mother is assumed more naturally inclined towards such nurturing tasks by the construction of a nurturing, caregiving mother identity, but also hints at the patterns and habits that once founded are hard to change. This construction allows John to negate equal involvement in caregiving purely because he is not a mother. His identity as a parent is therefore not primarily concerned with such things as a *crying* baby, and he is able to take part in satisfying his needs, such as *sleep-ing*.

Interestingly, this is an agreed upon discourse between the couple, as Tess acknowledges a maternal quality that disallows her to stand back from nurturing a crying baby, even when she thinks it should be more equal. Indeed, John's comment that Tess has always been the *mother from day one* hints that this outcome could have been different. Tess responds by saying that *I don't know how to, I can't even bear it*, suggesting that even if it is related to her behaviour it is beyond her control. Her response also suggests that he knows how to and he can bear it even though she cannot, suggesting deep-seated differences in care between a mother whose identity is tied to her child, compared to a father who is not.

#### ***4.1.2.6 The work of parenting***

There was a significant tension within Tess and John's negotiations around the work of parenting. Throughout the interview, Tess gives the listener the impression that she is taking on more of the work of parenting than John is, for instance when she says:

### Extract 1.33

*Tess.....he knows I'm gonna end up doing it. [P: mm] Like if I was to lea:ve or go away or whatever he'd be absolutely fine doing it and I think he knows that [P: mm] too. But um, ja. I think he's just choosing kind of ((starts laughing slightly)) not to do those certain things. ((laughs)). (C.1, I.1, 351)*

While acknowledging her partner as a reliable secondary parent, she is also constructing herself as someone who is taken advantage of by saying that he *knows I'm gonna end up doing it* and then saying he is just *choosing* not to. However, John wants to portray himself as more equally involved in the work of parenting when (in his individual interview) he says that "*I think it's, I think it's::: pretty equal, to be honest over all fronts, u:m:*" (C.1, I.2, 310) (**extract 1.34**). But there is a constant tension here, between what Tess and John regard as parenting work. When the couple are negotiating parenting roles, Tess constructs her role as more demanding than John's, evident in **extract 1.35** (from their joint interview). In **extract 1.35** Tess constructs parenting work as the physically intensive aspects of caring for a child, like *feeding*, *bathing* and *waking up* during the night. In comparison, John's role is one of spending time and having *experiences* with their child (**extract 1.11**).

In **extract 1.36** John defends his parenting role as just as important as Tess. He diverts and hence frames the specific differences in their roles as insignificant in comparison to the outcome – a shared experience with their child. Despite this being a negotiation of what is fair, John's insistence that *every individual experience could be an experience* suggests that it does not matter what the specific roles are, as long as time and energy is spent with their child. Tess constructs this differently, because she finds certain aspects of care more difficult than others, like *waking up all the time*. John's conflation of experiences with the work of parenting diverts Tess's constructed differentiation of parenting roles and negates her argument regarding an unequal distribution of labour. John, in other words, equates parental investment with parental labour; disregarding Tess's argument that his engagement is essentially leisure time while hers is domestic labour.

This tension around parenting work is strikingly apparent in their negotiations regarding 'time off'. In **extract 1.37**, John is asked about his willingness to take on the roles typically assigned to mothers and John gives the impression that he would do more at home, but

that *it's not always that easy*. In this extract, he constructs a fictional narrative of the past; and not that he *would* take on more labour if he had time but that he would be *willing* to. This constructs his involvement as optional; something he has a choice about. This is not the same for the mother. Further, he constructs the idea of taking on more caregiving roles as difficult when he says that *it's not always easy* for him but the *opposite* for his wife, implying that it is easier for a mother to take on caregiving work, despite the fact that they both work full-time outside of the home. This suggests that he constructs the mother as having some quality that allows her to take on these caregiving roles without the extra time needed for him to be able to do the same. When John says *cos she'd love to have a full night's sleep* suggests that he would do things differently only to do something nice for his wife; there is no sense that he is violating any expectations or norms by leaving these aspects of childcare to her.

Despite John's insistence that he doesn't have enough time, in **extract 1.38** Tess argues that any free time John does have is spent on himself. John does not disagree, and constructs this time he has to himself as *fine* because it's the only time he does have to himself. However, this time is not seen as available to Tess when she states that she doesn't *have any of that day* because when she is not at work she is taking care of her child. This extra time he has to himself could be used to conduct the work of parenting, but is constructed as a choice and as one that would be done *for [her]* and in exceptional circumstances (*one of these days*) rather than as something required of him as a parent.

Tess does not construct a situation where she has the same luxury to decide for instance when she says that she *doesn't have any of that day* (referring to free time for herself) and *I do those things* suggesting that she doesn't have a choice. This indicates a discursive negotiation that places mothers as obligated by her role to a child, compared to a father who has time to himself without significant consequence to his identity as a father.

#### **4.2 Susan and David: Contract working father and part-time employed mother**

The second discursive case concerns Susan (30) and David (31), a recently engaged couple with an 18 month old son. They are staying with David's elderly mother temporarily until they get married. David, a building contractor, is considered the main earner whilst Susan supplements their income by working as a part-time teacher. David's work has him based in

other African countries for periods of up to three months, but when at home he is mostly on leave. Based on their working arrangements, they represent another type of couple who challenge the patriarchal organisation of a traditional family.

#### **4.2.1 Ideals**

The ideals most significant in David and Susan's constructions of parenting are presented below. Although it was found that these constructions of parenting formed the basis of their identity through the gendered subject position of mother and father, it also was found that talk on becoming a parent involved many tense discursive contradictions between the preferred ideals of one compared to the other.

##### ***4.2.1.1 The iconic-mother identity.***

As previously explored in the literature, despite an acceptable contemporary alternative women are still under pressure to fulfil the iconic-mother identity with all the self-sacrificing and nurturing roles that this invariably entails. Intensive mothering and primary caregiving discourses were primarily indicative of Susan constructing an identity as idealistically enmeshed with that of her child. In **extract 2.1** Susan describes how her child in some way possesses a part of who she feels she truly is (*he has...part of my soul*). By constructing her experience of becoming a mother in this particular way, she is discursively creating an identity shared between mother and child at a visceral level.

Mothers that sway from the dominant ideology of full-time motherhood might be employed full-time, or they may not believe that their sole value rests on being the primary nurturer of their children (Arendell, 1999). Susan and David appeared to undervalue and judge such characteristics in a mother. To be an ideal mother, is to be a *good* mother, and to be a good mother is constructed as one who focuses exclusively on taking care of her children. Susan seeks to explain what motherhood means to her by referring to a mother who sacrifices her own needs when she says:

#### **Extract 2.2**

*Susan: Er. Being completely unselfish. And always putting, putting that other person's- Putting that child's needs before your own and always being concerned*

*about their well-being rather than your own, whatever you need doesn't matter.*  
*What- Only- It's only what they need that's important. Ja (C.2, I.3, 322).*

For this couple, deviating from the iconic-mother identity was an indication that Susan might not be good-enough. One example of how this played out can be seen in David's response to Susan's statement above, saying "*I I I was going, she probably hit the nail on the head er although I was probably going to comment she should put some of that into practice. Um*" (C.2, I.3, 322) (**extract 2.3**). In **extract 2.4** Susan constructs herself as somewhat of a deviant mother; one that is falling short of the ideal. Susan talks about leaving her child to play and is clearly defensive about her mother-in-law's accusation that she wasn't *mothering him properly*. But her response (*I'm a lot better now*) suggests that she too, took on such sacrificial qualities as an ideal she ultimately aspires to. However, it is ambiguous as to whether she means that she's taken on the values, or has got better at withstanding pressure from her mother-in-law.

Through discourses such as these, this couple position Susan in relation to idealistic standards. The construction of the good and iconic mother suggests that women should be able to take care of their child without assistance, and be a perfect caregiver if they are to qualify as a *good* mother. Deviancy discourses ultimately target mothers that do not conform to the dictates of full-time motherhood, and are often used in order to define and promote standards by which other women and mothers are judged, as seen in the following:

#### **Extract 2.5**

*Susan: I had a- a- my friend- my best friend had a child of six, but she had to make a decision and she had to move away, and I – I always said- I said to her I don't think I could do that. I- I don't think I could be away- Just being away from #C [ for a couple of hours I'm thinking of him constantly, what's #C doing, what- I must [ phone and*

*David: [ ((grunt)) [ I I I think #F's a little bit too emotional for that.*

*Susan: Yeah. I don't think I would handle it (C.2, I.3, 1169)*

This highlights how Susan and David are actively negotiating the mother's role as the home-maker and child-raiser in line with the ideal of an intensive mother, whilst ultimately stigmatising or punishing those that violate these norms when she compares her friend who moved away to work, whereas, for her *just being away from #C for a couple of hours I'm thinking of him constantly... I don't think I could handle it...*

Further, Susan (as the mother) is often constructed as the one who knows best. Susan describes how she understands her child's needs by referring to her identity as *the mom* in **extract 2.6**. This constructs a mother identity that presupposes an inherent connection to her child, and resolves tension in relation to the division of caregiving tasks. Susan's role as primary caregiver is based on her identity as *the mom* who knows and understands her child, *more than he does* (referring to David). This communicates an identity that is privileged with a special mother-child bond, a connection that David is at a disadvantage of achieving according to this motherhood rhetoric. By constructing an identity based on knowing and understanding more than the father, presupposes an identity that is bound by greater responsibility for caregiving. Susan often refers to this visceral mother-child bond to construct her new identity as a parent.

In **extract 2.7** it is clear that fulfilling the role of primary caregiver is really important to Susan's maternal identity, evident when she say that it (motherhood) and makes her feel *quite important...something to live for*. She places significance and value on her life in relation to her new identity as a mother. Her reason for living is to *protect that other person* (child). It can be assumed that such discourses shape how she engages with all other areas of her life, in particular with David, who is ultimately excluded from understanding by the very nature of this motherhood rhetoric. In one extract, David says: *"Now he only wants mommy. Er Just ignores daddy, so I'm sort of happy with that."* (C.2, I.3, 1048) (**extract 2.8**). It appears as though David is not concerned by his child's apparent rejection. However, given the intensive motherhood and patriarchal discourses apparent in this interview, his identity and ultimately his success at becoming a parent, is not constructed in relation to this type of nurturing behaviour or to the child's affection. Further, the couple construct a situation whereby Susan's role as the mother is prioritised during the early years of development.

In **extract 2.9** Susan is attempting to resolve why she is currently a preferred source of comfort for their child, suggesting that when he gets older *he's gonna want daddy*. This a common rhetoric, whereby the couple construct a shifting importance towards fatherhood as their child grows. This presupposes a mother who gives primary care during the early days of parenthood, and a father who may provide experiential, playful interaction or something else like wisdom or discipline as the child matures.

#### **4.2.1.2 The father's way: Old school German**

David argues strongly in favour of a traditionally organised family structure. Noticeably, his identity as a father is constructed by his use of masculinity discourses quite patriarchal in nature as he aligns himself with traditional (*old school*) family values. David's allegiance to traditional normative practice was unashamedly idealised as the foundation for many, if not all of his characteristics as a father. Furthermore, his patriarchal rhetoric provides evidence of how talk of becoming a father allowed David to utilise discourses unavailable to him before in constructing his identity.

This patriarchal ideal is captured and given relevance by the couple when they refer to David's *German* heritage. In **extract 2.10** David is differentiating between the typical responsibilities of a mother and a father, by drawing on gender normative discourses. He quite deliberately refers to the physical act of caregiving in describing the meaning of motherhood such as *taking care of the child, feeding him, bathing him* thereby relying on age old motherhood discourses that position her as a primary caregiver. He speaks of how a fathers role *swings a lot towards* that of a mother, but only refers to such things as *playing with him, um interacting* and adds that he is a *bit more old-school German* which suggests he is positioning himself as a traditional father, with corresponding values. David discursively constructs this type of family organisation as a legacy from his parents, thereby allowing him to attach a sense of pride to his identification with it, and therefore superiority to an alternative (as in **extract 2.13**).

Indeed, David expresses an aversion to, or dissatisfaction with taking on some of the responsibilities he believes to be within a woman's or mother's domain. In **extract 2.11** David wants the listener to know that he is making an effort to take on some of the caregiving tasks that are usually a *mother's job* and his role *takes a little bit more of the old*

*fifties style*. He seems to acknowledge that his *help* is beneficial for Susan, but David's position on equality is constructed as not normative; *got to* constructs this as an obligation, not a choice, but premised on what Susan *thinks*, not on any moral imperative or norm – just on the personal thoughts of his partner. The phrase *Got to* is repeated further on and in conjunction with the word *help* constructing her as the one with primary responsibility who is delegating to him. The word *now* constructs a 'before' where this obligation did not apply. Getting *riled up* constructs this as something unjust that he can justifiably be annoyed by. Although Susan doesn't explicitly idealise the traditional division of labour, she does contribute to the construction of David's gender normative identity, for example when she says:

#### **Extract 2.12**

*Susan: ... Sometimes I feel overwhelmed especially if I'm (.3) Ja because I try and help his mom in the house (.1) doing the wifely thing with cleaning and all of that (.) as much as I can, she obviously does the cooking so that's .hhh um I don't have to do that but (.2) just to him- for him to just help me [ it makes me feel wanted and (.) ] that I'm feeling appreciated for what I do do (C.2, 1.3, 448)*

She is constructing her own identity in relation to his idealisation of traditional gender norms within the family, by referring to what she does as *the wifely thing*. His help is not required by norm or any kind of moral standard, but because it's a *help* to her and it makes her feel *wanted* and *appreciated*. It is, in other words, a gesture like buying flowers rather than an on-going obligation of care for one's child and family. Susan is co-constructing an idealisation of David's old fifties style division of labour that involves *cleaning and all of that*, whilst also constructing her own identity as an unappreciated mother and wife in response.

#### **4.2.2 Tensions**

Certain aspects of Susan and David's parenting discourses caused tension in relation to competing and alternative constructions of becoming a parent in a societal context with changing gender norms and rules.



#### **4.2.2.1 Old school German versus new age whiney woman**

A father's identity is constructed by way of power laden discourses that position David as the breadwinner, and Susan as the housewife, despite her part-time employment and pull towards equality. In their joint interview, the couple go as far as to compare their parenting styles as new versus old, observed in the **extract 2.13** where Susan is explaining how David is influenced by his mother's *different parenting styles*. Susan is attempting to construct her identity in opposition with David's traditional (*old school German*) parenting ideal. Susan's laugh as she says *new school* seems to be a way of expressing disagreement with *old school*, whatever that entails. This exchange indicates that her view on new school parenting is not taken all that seriously by David, especially evident upon his response (*new age whiney woman*). This links back to **extract 2.12** where David says he's *got to* sometimes help, again suggesting that he will not take on any childcare or housekeeping tasks without pressure from Susan.

Despite Susan's frequent attempts to pursue equality driven discourses, she was nonetheless found jointly constructing David's identity in the family as the breadwinner, whilst also drawing on his independence as an important consideration in his role as father. In **extract 2.14** any contribution that David does give towards family work is regarding as *help*. Further, his help is recognized as him *trying*, as though she has to provide David with acknowledgement for his efforts in helping her to care for their child. His input is not just *help* (which puts the primary responsibility on the mother) but *as much as he can*, which limits his involvement to what he thinks he can give compared to the mother, who simply has to do what needs to be done. Susan is also constructing David's identity as a man and a father as one who needs separation from the family when she says *he needs to just unwind and have his own time*, a traditionally orientated view of family structures whereby a mother becomes the primary caregiver, allowing a father to come and go of his own accord. This tension is not altogether subtle, as the couple is aware of their different opinions on the matter of parenting style, but the less overt construction of a gender driven differentiation between mother and father ensures that the more patriarchal and therefore hegemonic construction of parenting endures.

When trying to resolve the difficulties and challenges they face as new parents, the couple tended to rely on gender norms that excused particular behaviour, whilst also endorsing it to some degree. In **extract 2.15** Susan aims to explicate her desire for David to be more involved in childcare, but then excuses his lack of involvement based purely on his gender as *a man*. This shows how Susan is constructing men to be somewhat challenged in their ability to take an active and meaningful role in childcare tasks. She is essentially excusing David from interacting with their child, by stating that *he's trying his best but (.) ja, he (.) he's a man so ((laugh))*. Therefore, David's identity as a man means he is intrinsically flawed as a parent, allowing Susan to excuse his absence from particular parenting tasks that involve nurturance and communicative interaction, traits typically associated with women and mothers.

#### ***4.2.2.2 The construction of a disproportionate transitional experience***

Susan and David construct a very different experience in relation to becoming parents. Susan discursively constructs her transitional identity in relation to becoming a nurturer and the spiritual-physiological connection she now shares with her child. In comparison, David's identity as a new parent is discursively constructed as a provider, whilst his identity is still focused on his individual needs and independence. This differentiation creates a disproportionate transitional experience between Susan whose whole identity shifts to that of her caregiving role, compared to David whose experience is much less affected by the new subject position of father. To a large degree, David can hold on to his independence, without much realignment of self. In this case, his identity as a masculine, logical man with old fashioned German values remains to be a consistent construction of self.

During one discussion (**extract 2.16**), the couple reflected on how easily and naturally the transitory period to parenthood came to David compared to Susan. In this extract Susan's experience of becoming a mother is constructed as provoking anxiety, whilst David describes taking his transition *day by day*. For Susan, her whole life and future was in question, evidenced when she says that she *was still thinking of what's going to happen in the end*. In **extract 2.17**, when asked to elaborate, Susan says *it's instinct*. Further, she again constructs her change as full of *nervous-ness* and anxiety.

David's identity as a father is constructed as coming *more instinctually*. As the interview progresses, it becomes apparent that there is a significant disparity between them in terms of the consequences that parenthood has on their identity. For David, it is not inappropriate for him to distance himself from the home environment. The couple relied on a patriarchal gender normed rhetoric to construct his role as a good father, without the need to be an involved caregiver. Below, Susan tells how David will avoid family chores by using his position (as the father) outside of the home as reasoning:

### **Extract 2.18**

*Susan: [ Well a- He at times says he's just the sperm donor. ((laugh)) ... (.) he'll say "Ah I'm not supposed to be home." [ Like he, if he mean- was meant to be away and he came home early. He uses things like that but (.) he loves his son to bits. [ And um (.) He was more ready when we found out I was pregnant, I wa- It was a big shock for me. He was more re- (.) calm and collected about it than I was. [ (.) Um. I think he's wanted a child for a long time. (.) Um and ja he (.) he'll do anything for #C. [ (.) Ja whatever whatever #C needs he's willing to do.(C.2, I.1, 349)*

This extract provides insight into how gender normed discourses, such as the (providing father and caregiving mother) play out in this couples daily interactions and routines. So pervasive are these normative constructions, that their respective roles and identities are judged according to these norms. This means that David can be constructed as a loving father who will *do anything* for his son, whilst also constructed as the *sperm donor* and positioning himself outside of the family and home context ("*Ah I'm not supposed to be home*"). Meanwhile, Susan who attempts to construct her identity as a working mother who prefers equality now finds her whole being has shifted to the home and her role as primary caregiver.

David uses his role outside of the home to distance himself from taking on a caregiving role when he says that "*I come home from work, um, I'm tired, I'm annoyed, the last thing I want to do is ((clears throat)) sit there having a child jumping all over me...*" (C.2, I.3, 759) (**Extract 2.19**). Using discourses that position him as the provider, he is able to validate his preference for personal space and time as meaningfully significant. When Susan responds with:

### Extract 2.20

*Susan: ( ) sometimes I want him to realize that at times I also don't want #C climbing all over me, but I just have to deal with it because I've got to put his needs before my own. Sometimes even I'm- I'm like in the WORST mood possible I want him to just – you know sometimes you just LEAVE ME ALONE, but I just I I can't I can't let those feelings come forward.... (C.2, I.3, 812)*

Unlike David, Susan doesn't have the discursive resources to validate the same behaviours or beliefs that David does (*I can't I can't let those feelings come forward*). Her maternal identity and roles thereof involves putting her child's *needs before her own* which doesn't allow her the same potential to distance or remove herself, as it does for David (*the last thing I want...is...a child jumping all over me*).

To extend this observation, there appeared to be a prevailing disjuncture between the ideological discourse of parenthood and talk of real experiences, especially in relation to Susan's reflections on motherhood. On the one hand, she describes motherhood as an experience of personal fulfilment and joy, yet on the other hand, an experience replete with distress, low *self-esteem*, anxiety and loneliness. This is evident when comparing her positive description of motherhood and how it makes her *feel so important* (refer to extract 2.7) compared to her more distressing self-reflections in **extract 2.21**. In extract 2.7 she portrays motherhood as meaningful and fulfilling, yet extract 2.21 her experience is depicted as *overwhelm-ing*, unappreciated (*I'm looking for validation from him*) and self-depleting (*I lose confidence in myself as a mother*). She continues to construct her shift in identity along these lines:

### Extract 2.22

*Susan: ((pause)) It's just you (.) you get to be a lot less (.) Their needs always come fir-, or before your own. [ And, ja even like (.) getting ready for work in the morning or (.) or making sure you look pretty for the day is often not, not possible. [ And um (.) obviously having a child also (.) changes your self-esteem and body image as well.*

*Researcher: [Mm [Mm*

*Susan: Um because your body changes a lot; (.2) pregnancy and birth, childbirth. [ And that (.) also changes things and that lowered my self-esteem a lot which is just getting better now [ but at first it was a big- (.1) a big shock*

Susan talks here about how much her *pregnancy and birth* impacted her *self-esteem and body image*. She constructs this as a big adjustment as she got over the *shock* of how much her appearance *changed*, and how she no longer prioritises her looks (*or making sure you look pretty for the day*). This embodied aspect of becoming a parent is not present in David's constructions, and highlights how significantly a woman's identity changes in relation to motherhood.

To conclude, Susan constructs an extremely anxious time of uncertainty and change in identity, whilst for David it was constructed as *instinctual* and *natural*. However, David's *natural* transition into fatherhood involved minimal turbulence to his identity in comparison to Susan. This reflects a more profound tension between the broader discourses available to the subject position of mother, with all the responsibilities and *changes* that this implies, compared to the subject position of father.

#### ***4.2.2.3 I'm ...more modern thinking...and sometimes I just need that bit of help.***

A related tension to the one explored above, involves Susan's conflicting constructions of self as a modern women. The ways in which Susan's identity has changed to incorporate the primary needs of her child has already been explored. This tension becomes apparent when exploring her paradoxical constructions of self as a modern woman who works and values equality, yet still relying on intensive mothering and primary caregiving discourses in constructing her mother identity. One example of this can be seen in the following response to a question regarding outdated parenting norms:

#### **Extract 2.23**

*Susan: Er To a certain par- certain degree I don't agree with it. I'm a more modern (.) more modern thinking, where um I feel the father should be just (.) just as involved with their children as the wi- as the mother. Because we also we- it's not like (.3) I mean I did stay at home for a year but I'm back at work now and I work (.) just- Okay is, but um (.) I work and (.) sometimes I just need that bit of help. (C.2, I.1, 448)*

Susan describes herself as *more modern thinking* and states how she believes *the father should be just (.) just as involved with their children*, especially because she *works* too. She then constructs excuses for why David doesn't help more (*he always says that his work is a lot more physically and mentally exhausting than mine*) but then repeats that she *also works* three times in this extract. She explains how she *just need(s) that bit of help*; a low bar for a *modern thinking* mother. Her paradoxical plea for *help* as opposed to equality at the end of this extract highlights this constructive tension between her identity as a modern woman and that of a traditional wife and mother. Further, when she spoke about her *modern thinking*, she used the phrase *involved with*. Involvement doesn't necessarily equate to care and could imply that the pervasiveness of her gender normed parenting identities have infiltrated her constructions of modern parenthood.

In a modern society (that values independence and gender equality in the work place), there are women like Susan who are grappling with conflicting discourses about their identity as a mother, which continues to be constructed in relation to the child's primary needs. Fathers like David have to negotiate a pull towards modern thinking, which in this case equates to more involvement. Therefore, competing and ambiguous constructions of modern fatherhood and motherhood are very much present with this couple.

#### **4.2.2.4 I ...might only...turn the machine on and somebody else will finish the load ...but you know what at least I've started everything**

David relied on gender normative rhetoric to communicate his need for acknowledgement, especially with regards to atypical parenting practice within the family environment. **In extract 2.24** David implies that he wants to be acknowledged for taking on tasks typically assigned to Susan, like *on occasion* helping in some way with the laundry, for example turning the *washing machine on*. Even though *somebody else will finish* doing the load, he wants to be recognized for taking the initiative for having *started everything*, be it only *on occasion and stuff*. This is an example of how David's identity as a man influences his input in the home. He positions himself as the provider, a patriarchal construction, and not a home maker. Therefore when he does participate in the home, he requires positive acknowledgement that a women (or mother) in comparison would not receive, indeed it is expected.

Susan also constructs David's input at home as something that is out of the ordinary, yet appreciated considering his identity as the working father, evident in the following:

**Extract 2.25**

*Susan: And his work is physically, he's up ladders and he's drilling and he's – (.) All that ( ) that manual (.) that manual labor. (.) Um (.) Some- sometimes which he goes through a dry spell of work where he'll be stuck at home for a couple of months [ and then – (.) I did not realize it but he was playing with #C (.) while his mom needed (.) maybe she needed to take a nap or something, he was there, [ and I did not realize because I wasn't there [ , I was at work. (C.2, l.1, 556)*

Describing David as *stuck at home* normalizes his identity as the provider, whose place is outside of the home. In this example, Susan acknowledges David's effort in *playing with #C*, albeit in relation to an absent mother and grandmother. However, this involvement only occurs when both the mother and grandmother are off-duty. This acknowledgement adds impetus to the construction of a father who takes on a secondary parenting position, and is therefore owed praise for atypical parenting behaviour.

In comparison, Susan is often criticized for any atypical behaviour related to her identity as a mother, for example: for needing space and time to herself; not attending to all the house chores; or failing to wake at night to attend to their child. In **extract 2.26** David speaks about aspects of Susan's behaviour, saying that *she'll come home, and she'll have time to (.) chat to her friends ...on Facebook ... but she doesn't have time to... put the sheet back on the bed*. Here, *chat-ting to her friends* on social media is seen as deviant behaviour, as it takes her away from her role of housewife and mother. This is evident in his tone, and the way he suggests that time she spent on herself takes away from time she could be spending doing housework like *straightening the bed*, even if it is not *perfect*. It is implied that Susan's behaviour (talking on social media) is deviant, or against the best interests of their child. For instance in extract 2.3 where David says Susan should *put more of that into practice*-referring to Susan's ability as a mother to put her child's needs before her own.

This rhetorical imbalance becomes even starker, when such priorities are normalized and in some instances encouraged in relation to David. His personal time and space is prioritized.. In the extract 2.14, David's personal time spent taking part in a social hobby is perceived

positively (*It actually helps things*). David's identity as a father is therefore unimpeded by his social life and need for space and personal time. Indeed, his hobby is credited for reducing tension between them when she says that his hobby makes things *a lot better because I was always nagging him*. Although in another extract she admits that it's not ideal: *"I do sometimes feel that his time is now taken away from the home a lot, from by his hobby, but I just- that's just me, I'll just have to deal with it."* (C.2, I.3, 1575) (**extract 2.27**). However, saying that she just has *to deal with it* insinuates that his time to himself is somewhat outside the realm of compromise. Susan, on the other hand is not credited for needing space and having a social life outside of the family unit. Meanwhile David's time spent on his hobby is constructed as for the best, even though his *time is taken away from the home*. David's absence from the home is constructed as purely her problem, and not something that is negotiable.

### 4.3 A comparison

The discursive cases were not part of a comparative analysis *per se*- nor is there enough space to discuss the many variations between them. However, comparisons between the discursive cases are worth further elaboration, if only to provide a nuanced location from which to understand the data overall.

Both John and David construct a (hypothetical) situation in which they would be willing, or even *happy* to take on the *feminine* role of caregiving full-time. For example, John in **extract 1.21** says that he; *would love to do that* (the feminine role). *Y'know as long as there's the money*. In **extract 2.18** Susan says; *whatever #C needs he's (David) willing to do*. However, both fathers are presented as (practically) un-willing to take care of everyday needs like waking up at night. There is a sense that men are willing to express hypothetical extremes of care, potentially deflecting attention from any inequities in their current practical arrangements.

Another similarity between John and David is in the organisation of parenting roles. Both fathers construct and are constructed as coming home to care when the mother goes out to work. That is, both fathers are constructed as being available (and highly appreciated) caregivers, but only when no one else is around to do so. For example, Tess in **extract 1.30** explains that having David there; *because the nanny's gone I mean that's like vital*. [P: mm] I



*don't know what I'd do if I did not [P: mm] have ((husband))*). Likewise, in **extract 2.25** Susan tells of how David was playing with their child *while his mom... needed to take a nap or something, he was there, [and I did not realize because...I was at work*. Again, constructing David as the stand in, as the one who cares for the child, but only when mom (nanny or gran) is not available. It is also interesting that both Tess and Susan use the term *sperm donor* (**extract 1.14 and 2.18**), albeit in slightly different contexts, but the discourse of fathers as donors still stands as both mothers and fathers grapple with differing parenting roles.

There are also comparisons between the mother's experiences. Both women construct the experience of losing an aspect of their physical attractiveness. For example, in **extract 1.24** Tess tells of how her; *breasts which... were ... like my most sort of sexual part of me... I just don't even like any more* and that she *can't [even look at [herself]]* as a consequence. Susan reasons that her change in appearance changed the way she felt about herself when she says; *obviously having a child also changes your self-esteem and body image as well* (**extract 2.22**). These women appear to be describing the difficulties they faced as they adjusted to their altered appearance. That women struggle with this indicates a significant relationship between womanhood and attractiveness in a culture that puts pressure on women to look slim and beautiful in order to feel good.

Finally, Tess and John's discourses about the work of parenting were at times quite distinct from that of Susan and David. There was a sense that Susan and David constructed their parenting identity much like shift work, where one would take over from the other when one is at work, or when the child is older and is *going to want daddy all the time*, to which David says he will *deal with that then* (**extract 2.9**). In comparison, Tess and John are both working full-time, and seem to discursively value the importance of quality time with their son in-between their 'shifts' at work, as if work gets in the way. They talk about *experiences* and *having fun* with their child as priorities for their identity as a parent (i.e. **extract 1.11**). There is a sense that Tess and John share this valued aspect of their identity, even though it still amounts to similar tensions regarding the parental division of labour. This is not to say that Susan and David do not value quality time, but rather that the work of parenting is constructed differently. Having explored the discursive cases, and discussed and compared

the couple's discursive constructions, the following chapter will present the main findings of the study.

## 5. Findings

This chapter offers an exploration of the overall findings in relation to gender identity in the context of first-time parenting as it relates to the transitional and dynamic nature of gender. Findings pertinent to the two case studies and identified through the data generated and reported on (in chapter 4) are presented here and discussed separately. However, it will become clear that the content of each is not clearly demarcated, but rather emerge in a complex and interrelated fashion.

### 5.1 Competing ideologies endure amongst heterosexual first time parents

The literature suggests that the transition into parenthood is a life event that historically speaking creates and perpetuates the polarisation of gender roles, with the institution of family being described as a 'gender factory' (Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998; Katz-Wise, et al., 2010). Indeed, the couples experienced their transition into parenthood as a challenge to realising any form of gender equality in the home. It has been argued that socially constructed stereotypes about men and women are a part of a much broader belief system influencing people's gender identity and their perceptions of appropriate gender roles (Kite, 2002; Cikara et al., 2009). Both couples seem to recognise the archaic and somewhat unfair ideals of gender normative practices, but nonetheless continue to show a strong tendency to compare a mother's identity against iconic maternal stereotypes, and the father's identity in relation to established patriarchal norms. This leads to a significant ambiguity within the constructions of new parents as they grapple with a new family member.

Tess constructed her identity as a mother around the influential legacy left by her own mother, a mother who *did it all* (extract 1.6). Both mothers also constructed an *overwhelming* bond with their child; a bond which tied them to their role as a caregiver (for example extract 1.3 and 2.7). David (from case 2) constructed a strong preference for his parent's *old school German* and therefore gender normative values (extract 2.10). The fathers are constructed (partly) in relation to the role of providing financially (for example extract 1.20 and 2.14) even though both Tess and Susan shared this responsibility (to varying extents). The fathers did construct a hypothetical willingness to reverse the roles or to parent equally, but felt this was not possible given time and financial constraints (extract

1.20 and 2.11 for example). It is argued then, that both couples constructed an identity along traditional gender lines (often unintentionally) as the demands and activities involved in becoming a parent transpired.

Although there was very little overt rejection of gender stereotypes, both women interviewed were found to regard the traditional model of parenting as unreasonable, based on (for example) their active participation in paid employment. For instance, Tess expresses her dissatisfaction with taken on all the caregiving responsibility at home (extract 1.18). She explains that there *is no reason* why she should have all the responsibility, given that she *works every day of [her] life*. In extract 2.23 Susan argues that a father *should be just as involved with their children* given that she is *back at work*. These women's discourses of equality, speak towards the rationality of such parenting arrangements, as opposed to the inequitable and therefore nonsensical *old-fashioned* arrangements of the past (extract 1.18). Tess and Susan's discourses can be said to reflect new models of parenthood, such as the 'involved' or 'engaged' father, whereby men take on roles traditionally confined to mothers (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013; Medved, 2016), as well as representing a new model of modern-motherhood in which women combine employment and family care work (Arendell, 2000; Pederson, 2012). It is argued, however, that these new models of parenting exist in a cultural context that values hegemonic versions of masculinity and idealises the intensive mother, hindering any realisation of equitable family arrangements (Arendell, 2000; Pederson, 2012).

David's discursive idealisation of traditional gender norms is constructed as an important part of his heritage, thereby adding value to his traditionalised beliefs and devaluing a more modern approach (which is constructed as fairly irritating). Indeed, Susan's pull towards *modern* parenting is met with hostility when David refers to her as a *new age whiney woman* (extract 2.13). Overall, this suggests that David is constructing his preference for traditional parenting as valuable and important. Further, it was found that mothers are positioning themselves and others using maternal deviancy discourses; discourses which negatively evaluate untraditional mothers. (Arendell, 1999; Arendell, 2000; Bell, 2004). The concept of maternal deviancy discourse was proposed by Arendell (1999) to explain how women are tied to their role as child-raisers and nurturers in a patriarchal society. Hegemonic motherhood precedes and perpetuates such deviancy discourses, by providing

avenues from which to judge mothers according to the standards of the iconic mother identity (Arendell, 1999; Bell, 2004; Pederson, 2012).

To be a *good* mother, is to focus exclusively on taking care of one's children (Bell, 2001, Pederson, 2012). For example, for Susan motherhood is; *Being completely unselfish. And ...Putting that child's needs before your own ...-It's only what they need that's important* (extract 2.2). Further, deviating from the iconic-mother identity was an indication that they might not be good-enough at mothering. For instance, Susan explains how her mother-in-law accused her of not mothering her child properly, because she left him to *play* when arriving home from work, after which she explained that she *is a lot better now* (extract 2.4). Susan is suggesting that her actions were deviant, followed by a sense of guilt and need for reparation. For Susan to be constructed as *better*, she has to be more intensive in her *mothering* approach. To compare, David does not express the same guilt when he explains that; when he comes home from work *the last thing I want to do ... is have a child jumping all over me* (extract 2.19). Susan responds that she feels the same but she just can't *let those feelings come forward* (extract 2.20). This constructs a situation in which it's not acceptable for a mother to behave this way, but it is 'normal' or acceptable for a father to feel and behave this way.

Bell (2004) argues that there is a tension between the traditional intensive mothering ideology and the individualistic values of modern society, which puts a disproportionate burden of responsibility on mothers for the rearing of children. A father experiences less pressure, supposedly because of the hegemonic norms that justify his secondary role in caregiving. These discourses are often used in order to define and promote standards by which other women and mothers are judged, with positive evaluations given to mothers who conform to traditional roles, and negative judgements offered in response to mothers who, for whatever reason, negate iconic mother stereotypes. Indeed, Arendell (1999) states that both men and women are participants of such deviancy discourses, meaning that mothers contribute and consent to its prescriptions, mostly without critical reflection. For example, in extract 1.15 John evaluates one mother he knows as *amazing* (a descriptor used twice) because she had *spent so much money and read all the books* before her baby was even born. By comparing his and Tess's lack of commitment to reading baby books to a woman/mother in particular, he is making a subtle but all the same evaluative judgement

on Tess as a mother, which Tess ultimately concedes to when she states that she wished she read the books because it would have helped her to be *calmer in the beginning* (extract 1.17). In general, the women from the case study constructed their experience of becoming a parent as intertwined with feelings of guilt that they aren't doing enough, despite feeling *overwhelmed* and *losing control* in relation to their work as a mother (for example extract 2.12). Indeed, Pederson (2012) asserts that experiences of mother-guilt and being overburdened reflects the uneven pressure mothers feel compared to fathers in a society that evaluates mothers based on these all-to-often unrealistic ideals.

In terms of child-rearing, the fathers in the study expressed more conservative opinions in response to equality rhetoric. Without rejecting the importance of equality *per se*, fathers positioned themselves as more critical of its realisation. For instance, John shares his openness to taking on the *more feminine role*, but adds the caveat that *as long as there's the money to make it work* (extract 1.20). Here, John is critical about the realisation of equality, presumably based partly on his alliance to hegemonic constructions of parental roles and responsibilities, and the idealisation of the provider role. As Deutsh (2001) points out, men are traditionally found to fulfil the role of breadwinner, a norm that represents the powerful image of fatherhood in a patriarchal society. Interestingly, although David is more explicitly in favour of traditional gender norms when it comes to his identity as a father, both recognise the pull towards what David refers as more *mutually beneficial* family arrangements; a possible acknowledgement of how current arrangements benefit him favourably in comparison to Susan (extract 2.11). This perhaps corresponds to Johansson and Klinth's (2008, p. 58) finding; that today, it is not enough for men to be rational and career-orientated to qualify for hegemonic masculinity, they "must also show a readiness to engage in child care" and the ideal of gender equality.

Despite the father's willingness to express hypothetical extremes of care, they revealed reluctance in taking on everyday needs of their child, such as bathing their child or waking up at night. For instance, Susan constructs David as *willing to do* anything for their son, yet David consistently expresses his dislike for, or reluctance in taking on the caregiving and other physical child-care responsibilities. For example, David describes feeling *riled up* when having to take on caregiving tasks, thereby constructing such input from him as a father as unjustified (extract 2.11). Overall, both couples constructed men's involvement in care as

emergency rather than routine, something to be called on in a time of need. For instance, Tess talks about John *being there for* their child when she is at work and the *nanny's gone*, and how she *doesn't know what she'd do* without him for those exact reasons (extract 1.29). Likewise, Susan talks about David taking care of their son, when she is at work and her mother-in-law is napping in extract 2.20.

When traditional masculinity is the configuration of gender practice, taken to guarantee the subordination of women in a patriarchal society, then the constructions of fatherhood (as only hypothetically *willing*) and motherhood (as ultimately tied to their role as caregiver) are considered hegemonic in nature. Further, when traditional constructions of masculinity value such characteristics as financial responsibility (e.g. Morrell et al., 2012) then fatherhood is necessarily characterised by an elevated status and identity that is outside of the sphere of caregiving. Therefore, these couples use idealistic discourses which legitimates the subordination of a woman's identity as mothers who are not praised for their independence and work orientated endeavours, but rather pressurised (either by self or other) towards fulfilling their primary role at home.

As part of a critical discourse analysis, it was important to pay attention to the action orientation and the connection between discourse and practice (Willig, 2003). If Kite's (2002) argument holds; that gender constructions are not only descriptive, but also prescriptive in nature, then the construction of gender stereotypes not only describe who these parents can be as a mother or father, but also how they should behave. Indeed, the couple's practices were strongly influenced by their gender constructions, in that the mothers took on more of the physical aspects of care, whilst the fathers remained somewhat secondary in comparison. It was then understood that various constructions of parenthood were able to achieve something for the speaker, whilst also enabling or restricting what can be done and said about this aspect of their identity as a mother or father. A cycle is then in play, in which inequitable parenting practices become appropriate forms of behaviour within traditional parenting discourses. In turn, such inequitable practices reproduced the same discourses that legitimated them to begin with. Although I only had access to what the participants' said about their practices, they were to some extent bound by their partners readings of their practices. That is, Tess's parenting behaviour is interpreted and constructed in a particular way by John and *vice versa*. For

example, when John defends himself for not getting up during the night with *that maternal side* (supposedly of her identity as a mother) *that has carried through so I can maybe sleep*, to which Tess agrees (extract 1.32). In this example, the couple constructed the mother identity along traditional maternal (or feminine) lines, normalising that behaviour. In turn, the interpretation of the behaviour (getting up at night instead of the father) reproduces the same maternal discourses that legitimated the behaviour (and the inequitable practice) to begin with.

In conclusion, their discourses point towards a significant ambivalence; in that men and women agree with egalitarian ideals in principle (to some extent), but in practice enact and defend traditional versions of masculinity and femininity (fatherhood and motherhood). Although inequitable practices are challenged to some degree, deep-seated gender constructions, formed on the basis of normative ideals about being a mother or father, remain powerful forces within the parenting context. That is, a mother identity continued to be powerfully judged against the same oppressive normative ideals that are referred to as unreasonable and out-dated. Men were able to reject the traditional father ideal in order to embrace undifferentiated parenting, yet their talk was conjoined with uncomfortable references to masculine traits when discussing their on-going experiences and ideas about equal parenting roles. For example, John places financial imperatives above his willingness to take on an equal amount of care work. This brings attention to the hardness and salience of hegemonic masculinity within people's daily experiences, and how conflicting it may be given the competing idealisations of gender equality and involved fatherhood.

## **5.2 Equality is a disruption to gender identity**

The transition into parenting hypothesis acknowledges the different forces acting on women compared to men and how different opportunities at the level of society leads to a gendered division of labour (Eagly & Wood, 1999). However, the problem with this view rests on the lack of agency and negotiation at the level of the couple. It is argued here that the case study couples actively constructed their identity in ways that conformed to gender norms. That is; both men and women are somewhat attached to their gendered position as mother or father. Parenting equality is found to be a disruption to constructing a gender identity, and is therefore subtly resisted. In particular, this finding explores the couple's



discursive recourse to traditional gender norms that restricted father involvement (maintaining his primary identity outside the home), whilst enabling a primary connection between mother and child.

When a woman's identity is evaluated against the ideals of intensive motherhood, the speaker is also positioned to gain something within a particular context (Willig, 2003). For fathers, discourses associated with the ideal of intensive motherhood, reduce their obligations towards care-related aspects of their child's upbringing, whilst securing his primary role outside of the home. Indeed, the fathers were able to absolve themselves from having to make difficult changes in relation to an egalitarian parenting style, and (often unconsciously, or without reflection) put pressure on their partners to make sure their child is cared for in the best possible way. For example, even though David constructs parenting equality as more *mutually beneficial* (extract 2.11), he quite strongly constructs a preference for *old school* gender roles, where a mother takes *care of the child, feeding and bathing [him] and sorting [him] out* (extract 2.10). Although the fathers offered their openness for egalitarian practices, their constructions of motherhood and the maternal identity as the ultimate in child care capabilities prevailed.

Both women in the study engaged in similar rhetoric; placing primary responsibility for child-care onto themselves based on their (primary) identity as the mother. Connell's (1987) theory of emphasized femininity holds weight here, by its definition around women's 'compliance' to their own subordination and orientation towards obliging to the interests and desires of men. Indeed, the case study mothers were found to position themselves as better equipped to provide child-care, purely because of their identity as a woman and mother. For instance, when Susan states that *he leaves it more to me to do. Because I understand, because I'm the mom...* (extract 2.6). Here, she is complying with her own subordination, and inadvertently agreeing to an inequitable division of labour around child-care routines. But much like the fathers, the mothers in the study also stand to gain something by positioning themselves as better equipped at child-care.

Magaraggia (2012) argued that hegemonic representations of the work-family binary repudiate the process of developing an intimate and nurturing bond between father and child because such relationships are built on typically normative characteristics of mothers.

Further, he proposed that women would need to let go of their idealisation of the primary caregiving role in order to allow fathers the space to explore parental dimensions of care. It is argued that the women in this study are reluctant to let go of the iconic standards of motherhood in constructing their identity, at the risk of losing the status that a special mother-child bond provides to a mother identity. The discursive significance given to the mother-child bond can be understood as benevolently sexist, in that such constructions favour the mother with a relationship that belongs to her (Cikara et al. 2009). The threat of losing or missing out on this bond can be observed in Tess's approach to her child's separation anxiety for John, when she says; *at the moment he's got a- separation anxiety with: ((husb-)) for ((husband)) not for me, which is like it was hard to take... I've been like wow that hurts you know* (extract 1.28). Both women took pride in their special mother-child bond, like Susan when she explains *It makes me feel (.) quite important like I have (.) some some- such- so ((stammers)) so important that I need to live for* (extract 2.7). This highlights how primary caregiving and the bond between mother and child is intimately tied to a maternal identity; so much so that they are complying with their own subordination in order to achieve an identity in line with the intensive mother ideal. That is, the mother's may come across as though they want equality, but they appear unwilling let go of that maternal bond.

These women's subtle compliance to their own subordination was in direct tension with pleas for rational parenting. Both mothers construct a special bond that is both irrational and self-affirming. For example when Tess says she cannot believe how much you can love something (extract 1.4) and when Susan says that being a mother makes [her] feel... important like [she] has... some[thing]... to live for (extract 2.7). It would appear that the mother's subordination is in some ways (domestic labour; freedom to work) related to dominance in other ways (being the primary parent) which would explain Tess's reaction to the belief that her child has more separation anxiety for her partner than for her (extract 1.27). Tess states that she is scared they gonna love [the father] more), and that his separation anxiety for John hurts, as though she is reluctant to let go of this dominant parenting role (extract 1.28). This remains the case, despite her discursive recall to the irrationality of an inequitable division of labour in terms of childcare. Like how Tess as a mother could not bear it (leaving her child to cry) whilst her partner is able to, because it

would be letting go of something central to her identity (extract 1.32). Further, these women used maternal gatekeeping discourses (in relation to their primary parent identity) as a means to policing father involvement in child care (Allen & Hawkin, 1999).

Maternal gatekeeping has been defined as “a set of complex behavioural interactions between parents” where mothers influence a father’s involvement in child care (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013 p. 176) and is thought to stem from the idealisation of the intensive mother identity (Pederson, 2012). The women in this study appeared to engage in such construction, like Tess who tells of how *she is always shouting [at John] like, REMEMBER TO GIVE HIM HIS BISCUIT [that is] on one of the mornings where he’s looking after their son* (extract 1.8). Likewise, Susan talks about *always nagging* her partner to “*please do this do this do this*” *all the time* (extract 2.14). These women are subtly managing and/or overseeing father involvement, discursively constructing them as (perhaps) insufficiently skilled or unwilling caretakers. This ultimately places them (the mothers) as the primary parent, something they appear to value significantly.

Traditional masculinity is thought to be constructed in relation to the feminine identity, which values kind, submissive and emotional characteristics (Kite, 2002; Connell, 2005). The women in this study subtly conform as such, whilst constructing a father as secondary in comparison and in relation to the mother. For instance, Tess describes John as *second fiddle* in relation to her new role and identity as a mother (extract 1.10). John does talk about how her *maternal side* has carried over, taking the pressure of him to fulfil certain care-giving roles (extract 1.32). This shows how a mother’s construction of her identity can influence a father’s identity in relation to, restricting or prescribing how he is able to understand his role.

The women’s attempts to secure their primary parenting status (by constructing an elusive, ethereal connection) somewhat alienated the fathers in the process. This in turn restricted opportunities for fathers to take on primary caregiving roles/responsibilities, and reaffirmed their place outside of the home. This finding does support Beck’s argument that; the institution of family acts as a ‘gender factory’ which legitimates the polarisation of gender roles (1985, in Risman & Johnson-Summerford, 1998). However, this finding enriches the theory by uncovering some of the discursive processes of reproducing gender norms which

involves active negotiations between parents, and not just the outcome of social and biological pressures. Whether these women are able to retain a mother identity, whilst letting go of this dominant parenting position is unclear. But the findings do emphasize the significance of constructing an identity in relation to gender norms, and how equality and what it potentially stands for, threatens and disrupts these norms.

### **5.3 The construction and positioning of motherhood compared to fatherhood is asymmetrically evaluative**

As previously explored, men are constructing their identity as a father in relation to hegemonic masculinity whilst women are still under pressure to fulfil the iconic-mother identity, with all the self-sacrifice and nurturing that this invariably entails (Arendell, 2000). This sets the foundation for the following argument (with reference to the transitional space from non-parent to parent); Firstly, in comparison to the men in the study, it was more challenging for the women to construct an identity as a good parent, due to the culturally imposed ideal of good mothering. This finding can be understood as further evidence of Pederson's (2011) proposition; that of the uneven pressures on women to fulfil unrealistic ideals. Secondly, this finding provides insight into how these uneven pressures play out relationally, in reference to particular parenting practices that further construct and legitimate asymmetrical experiences of becoming a parent.

To be constructed and positioned as a 'good' father did not necessarily require the men in the study to take on roles and responsibilities of caregiving (traditionally given to mothers). Both women in the study referred to their partners as good fathers despite their lack of participation in many of the physical day-to-day needs of their child. For instance, Tess describes her husband as an *amazing father*, despite feeling like he is *just the sperm donor* because *she does all the work* (extract 1.14). Likewise, Susan calls David a *sperm donor* and explains that he does not take on many roles associated with child-care in general, but nonetheless constructs him as a good father who is *willing to do anything* for their son (extract 2.18). Research by Pederson (2012) found that fathers' defined 'good' parenting and 'good' fathering along the same lines; being present and available in between work commitments, asking *to help* (rather than *for help*) their partners when they felt the desire to be involved. Although Pederson (2012) did not explore how mothers define good

fathering, Susan and Tess appear to position John and David as good fathers under similar conditions, that is; without necessarily taking part in the primary caregiving of their child.

Significantly, the two fathers in this study received approval for their relationship or ability to form a bond with their child. Indeed, the literature suggests that there is a move towards the construction of a new-age father, in which fathers are able to establish a close personal bond with their children (Jahanson & Klinth, 2008; Magaraggia, 2012); albeit in tension with socially pervasive ideals of hegemonic masculinity (and emphasized femininity) that primarily value men's affiliation with work rather than the home. This bond tends to be constructed as; surprising, out of the ordinary, and not to be taken for granted. Tess describes how her husband is *so connected and so bonded it's an amazing thing because they did not come from each other's flesh, actually* (extract 1.14). Tess also expresses her gratitude for the quality time that John spends with their son when she says that *he's so good in the daytime and stuff [P: mm] he'll come back or play with ((son))... and then he'll hand him over... he's a gr::eat great father* (extract 1.14). Susan also acknowledges David's effort in *playing with #C*, albeit in relation to an absent mother and grandmother (extract 2.25). Such approval for minimal paternal involvement adds impetus to the construction of an identity as a 'good' father that doesn't necessarily require performances of childcare, but nonetheless involves the realization of an intimate bond. Further, the fathers in the case studies constructed no negativity regarding their absences relating to their role as provider and/or dual-earner.

Willig's (2003) stage-based method of analysis speaks to the connection between discourses and practice, arguing that certain ways of constructing the world (parenting) and the subjects (fathers or mothers) within them, restrict or enable what can be done and said. As such it can be argued that the construction of a father as a good parent absent of the need to take on the physical aspects of care enables an inequitable division of labour. In other words; if fathers are not required to perform the physical aspects of care (feeding; bathing; waking up at night) in order to construct an identity as a good father who is intimately bonded with their child, then the obligation to realize equality in the home is absent, or at least lacking in the couples' daily discursive negotiations.

As discussed in section 5.1, these couples relied on idealistic notions of intensive motherhood from which Tess and Susan's identities were constructed and positioned against (Arendell, 1999). Susan goes as far as to say that her needs are unimportant in comparison when she says that motherhood is *always being concerned about their well-being rather than you own, whatever you need doesn't matter* (extract 2.2). As such, it is argued that they construct their identity as a good or bad mother based on an ability to put their child's needs before their own. The intense social pressure of parenthood experienced by Tess and Susan was particularly apparent in their use of maternal deviancy discourses; discourses which target women who do not fit the script of full-time motherhood (Arendell, 1999). The men in the study are active participants in this process, comparing their partners against these intensive mothering ideals, echoed (for instance) when David reacts with *I was probably going to comment she should put some of that into practice* (extract 2.3) in response to her comment about the importance of selfless motherhood. In comparison, fathers are not up against the same punishing discourses around child rearing and caregiving, and in some instances request reward or praise for any efforts that go above or beyond the normative (patriarchal) practice of men and fathers.

When David defends his input at home stating that he *might only turn the machine on and somebody else will finish loa- finish doing the load, but you know what at least I've started everything* (extract 2.24) he is making the point that his input should not go unnoticed. This finding could reflect what Johansson and Klinth's (2008) describe as the complex identifications men have with hegemonic and alternative masculinities as they adapt to the various discourses and practices of fatherhood. That is, the case study fathers' construct conflicting identifications with masculinity (and fatherhood) in relation to their lived experiences of fatherhood, holding on to hegemonic versions whilst integrating alternative identifications, sometimes simultaneously. However, it also points towards differentiated gender identity construction between men and women, with a fundamentally inequitable assumption that results in fathers receiving praise whilst women are criticized, often for the same action, behaviour, personality trait or parenting perspective. Underlying this is an asymmetrical evaluation of parenting, with regards to the construction of a 'good' mother compared to a 'good' father identity.

The asymmetry of parenthood is also significantly embodied in nature. That is, new mothers were found to construct a dramatic embodiment of change in relation to motherhood that challenged their fundamental sense of self. This is discussed in the following section.

#### **5.4 For mothers, the transition from non-parent to parent is constructed as a more embodied experience**

The culturally imposed ideation of motherhood (intensive motherhood) has been explored, but the embodiment of constructing a mother identity deserves further attention. It is argued that Tess and Susan's transition from non-parent to parent involved a more intense experience of embodied metamorphosis compared to fathers. This is not to say that men don't change physically during parenthood, as they may (for example) pick up weight, lose their hair or go grey. However, men in the study did not describe or construct any significant physical changes in relation to their transitioning identity.

It's important to re-examine Connell's (1987) concept of emphasised femininity, defined around women's compliance to their own subordination. She proposed that particular aspects of a woman's identity are given social privilege depending on where they are in their life cycle. As discussed, femininity is organised around sexuality and attractiveness in relation to young women, but organised around the experience of motherhood in older women (ibid.). Indeed, these women focused their constructions of self in relation to their role as a mother, drawing comparisons with their identity as a non-parent. Importantly, their discursive constructions placed significance on the embodiment that this transition into motherhood entailed. For example, Tess refers to the changes in her appearance, directly related to her new identity as a mother when she says that *the sex, like, element of it, kind of goes, because you feel like this, overweight, hormonal, hairy, being ... that's just not attractive in any sense* (extract 1.25). Both women talk about a low self-esteem that comes with a significant shift in priorities. For example, Susan speaks to the embodied experience of becoming a mother, describing how her *body change[d] a lot* and how *pregnancy and birth, [and] childbirth also changes things [which] lowered [her] self-esteem a lot* (extracts 2.22). These women are constructing their identity as a mother in relation to the significant and tangible changes to their body, and how this negatively impacts on their self-esteem.

Bailey (2001) was particularly interested in the significance of the embodied self, arguing that women's bodies go through multiple changes that can either facilitate traditional social positioning or provide an opportunity to renegotiate a more contemporary account of femininity. It would appear the former is true of Tess and Susan's discourses, as they position themselves as physically worse off than before or *broken* as Tess poignantly constructs of her change in identity (extract 1.26). In comparison, John and David did not construct such an embodied experience, nor reflect on any self-esteem issues when discussing their experiences. It is worth noting that traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinities include characteristics like emotional constraint and toughness (Morrell et al, 2012) which may prevent fathers such as John and David from expressing such vulnerability around issues of self-esteem. Further, these fathers may have experienced and constructed things differently if they participated more in care work (for example; waking up at night or carrying the baby). Whether or not this is true is speculation, but does shed light on how circular discourse and practice can become.

Susan states that motherhood means putting a *a lot less* effort into self, because her child's needs come first and relating how she no longer had time to *look pretty for the day* (extract 2.22). This speaks to the grand social ideals and expectations about womanhood, and how women have to grapple with their new identity as a mother whilst trying to hold on to their femininity outside of motherhood which is often (constructed as) difficult. The women in this study appear to be grappling with these competing aspects of their identity as they adjust to parenthood.

It could be argued that womanhood, motherhood and femininity is not as straightforwardly demarcated in a modern society that idealises 'supermoms' constructed as women who do it all and have it all (Arendell, 1999; McRobbie, 2013). This also highlights how these women are up against the competing discourses of modernity, that is; on the one hand they are attempting to take on the characteristics of an idealised version of the intensive mother, whilst on the other trying to establish themselves as modern thinking women who can work, take care of their child and hold on to their physical attractiveness. This cultural contradiction of contemporary motherhood requires profound adjustments to women's sense of self-worth in a society that values slim, unblemished female bodies (Arendell, 1999; Bell, 2004; McRobbie, 2013). Observed when Tess and Susan constructed their experience



of becoming a parent in relation to or in conflict with broad ideals about beauty. In so doing, they start retreating from their identity as an attractive self-confident woman, and align instead with motherhood. This leads to a subtle conformity to subordinated ways of being a woman; that is, they as mothers cannot attain status through looks, but can achieve status in their role as a primary or dominant caregiver, paradoxically conforming to their own subordination in a patriarchal system nonetheless.

The last finding speaks of the how becoming a parent can both reinforce constructions of inequity, whilst also providing important opportunities in which to renegotiate taken-for-granted gender normative identification and practice.

### **5.5 The transitional period of becoming a parent provides an opportunity to renegotiate gender identity, whilst contradictorily reinforcing idealistic versions of motherhood and fatherhood.**

Central to Connell's (2001; 2005; 2009) theorisation of hegemonic masculinity is the notion that constructions of masculinity are not static, but historically and contextually fluid, multidimensional and hierarchical (Connell, 2005; Talbot, 2010). Indeed, research on the stay at home father (SAHF) has shown how people are challenging traditional gender normative structures. Consciously rejecting notions of femininity and masculinity provided an opportunity for constructing and negotiating a different identity (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998 Yoshida, 2011; Solomon, 2014; Medved, 2016). Therefore, it was important to explore some of the ways in which alternative gender constructions are made available through discourse that challenge inequity. From the analysis of the interviews, such examples of this occurring were minimal and at times contradictory. However, there are a few examples in the data that highlight the mutability that is afforded to contemporary couples as they transition from non-parent to parent.

When these couples are able to construct their partner's willingness in taking on aspects of caregiving, they are challenging the norms of fatherhood. For instance, John says that he would be willing to take on more caregiving if there was more *time* and *money*, but also says that it is not that *easy* (extracts 1.20 & 1.37). Although spoken hypothetically, it points towards the mutability of gender, parenting norms, and the possibility that these couples are positively evaluating fatherhood that goes beyond the breadwinning, emotionally

distant masculine stereotype. Tess constructs John as a *great* and *amazing* father that is so *bonded* (extract 1.13). The construction of a loving father bond is important to this study as it demonstrates a disruption of traditional hegemonic discourses that construct men as unemotional, uncaring and not natural nurturers. Further, it discursively resolves some of tension associated with parental inequity by focussing on a special and loving bond, rather than the uneven distribution of physical caregiving tasks.

However, the construction of the mother bond as flesh-of-her-flesh (and the work of care and nurturing) is significantly contrasted here with the father bond as somehow undeserved and unearned, evident by Tess's comment regarding his role as *just the sperm donor* (extract 1.14). It's worth noting that John and David don't refer to this bond *per se*, which could suggest some difficulty in expressing emotionality, and/or could suggest that it is a mother's prerogative to construct this bond in order to dissolve tension. For example, Tess constructs this loving father bond, possibly in order to dissolve tension associated with their son's *separation anxiety* for John over her (extract 1.27).

There was a distinctive recall to the irrationality of inequitable parenting practices (extract 1.18 & 2.23). By constructing parenting norms as unequal and therefore irrational in a context where mothers are working (and fathers are no longer the sole earner) the speakers (participants) are able to achieve a dialogue where alternatives are possible. David also constructs equality as being more *mutually beneficial* (extract 2.11), indicating that there is a certain dialogue taking place; a negotiation between mother and father about what is fair in terms of parenting roles and responsibilities. However, no alternatives appear to be fully realised, as mothers continue to be evaluated against traditional versions of gender and idealised versions of motherhood.

Despite these opportunities, there seems to be an expectation for women to negotiate a new supermom identity which incorporates traditional aspects of motherhood, whilst embracing contemporary womanhood. The post-feminist masquerade of maternity is one way in which stereotypes about motherhood (mothers are nurturers) infiltrate contemporary constructions of family life. This is achieved under the guise that women's decision to stay home (for example) is based on personal choice (McRobbie, 2013). This was observed in Tess's talk when she constructed herself as the one to blame for the uneven

burden of responsibility, stating that she's just taken it (caregiving) all on, because she is a *control freak* (extract 1.7) and not in relation to any taken-for-granted stereotypes. As discussed in section 5.4, these women pull towards the perceived status of being a dominant parent, thereby reinforcing idealistic and traditional versions of motherhood compared to fatherhood.

Additionally, barriers to equality were related to ambivalent sexism (AST) existing within the couple's discursive negotiations (Cikara et al., 2009). Benevolently sexist discourses praise mothers for their unwavering commitment to their children. For instance, Tess idealises her own mother for being completely committed to her primary caregiving role, again giving status to intensive motherhood (extract 1.6). Further, a mother's bond is idealised and something confined to only mothers (extract 1.26 & 2.6). They are discursively rewarded for their own subordination. When mothers attempt to construct an alternative identity, one which sways from patriarchal notions of family, they are met with hostility. For instance, Susan is labelled the *new age whiney woman* because she wants to share roles more equally (extract 2.13). These competing discourses ultimately justify and maintain a gender hierarchy, where mothers are rewarded for conforming and punished if they do not. Fathers, although discursively encouraged by the mothers to fulfil more caregiving roles, constructed an identity that did not require fulfilment of such aspects of caregiving, outside of helping the primary parent.

Therefore, constructing an identity as a parent involves both opportunity and resistance towards contemporary and equitable parenting practices. Given these discursive constructions of motherhood certain practices are made available to them, whilst others are evaded. The subject position of mother is spoken from a context where they are held primarily responsible for their children, whilst fathers are positioned as secondary caregivers. Practices of parenting are then subtly controlled and policed, in a context which values equality, but does not realise equality due to reliance on traditionalistic gender and parenting discourses used by both men and women in interaction. Their talk did suggest a discursive avenue for change, but it is argued that this will not happen easily until co-parenting and equality discourses become more powerfully endorsed within contemporary society, from the level of policy development down to the individual.

## **6. Conclusions, critical reflections and recommendations**

The institutionalisation of gender differentiation exists within a patriarchal society, associating femininity with that of motherhood, and masculinity with fatherhood. Indeed, gender within the family context has traditionally and primarily linked women with primary caregiving discourses and men with discourses that place them outside of the home as the family breadwinner. It was argued that the romanticized stereotypes about men and women are not isolated to the family context, but infiltrate broader societal structures, leading to a gender disparity with regards to education, employment opportunities and career development. Although deeply entrenched, these stereotypes are being challenged, with growing awareness and recognition of the fluidity and diversity of gender identity, as well as the hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity which hinder real equitable change.

This study explored the construction of gender identity in the context of first-time parenting. As indicated in section 1.2, the overarching aim was divided into three central objectives and broken down into six specific questions thereafter. This study assumed a reality which is constructed, fluctuating and mutable; hence the epistemological stance of this study was grounded by social constructionism and the principles of critical discourse analysis. There were five interconnected conclusions derived overall. These are that; competing ideologies persist in comparatively modern couples; equality is a disruption to gender identity; the construction of motherhood compared to fatherhood is asymmetrically evaluative; for mothers, the transition from non-parent to parent is a more embodied experience; and the transitional period of becoming a parent provides both opportunity and resistance towards new versions of gender identity.

### **6.1 Revisiting the research questions**

This section sets out to answer the specific research questions set out in section 1.2, followed by a critical reflection of the study with recommendations for future research.

*What grand social ideals are discursively constructed (challenged or negotiated) within the personal experience of becoming a parent?* Emphasis was on the relational and dynamic nature of gender identity construction, providing insight into the complex web of

negotiations. Both couples negotiated roles and responsibilities by relying on dominant life narratives or discourses of the social context in which they live to construct their identity. Indeed, the findings show how competing ideologies of gender and parenting endure. That is, parents were found to draw on maternal (nurturing) and paternal (provider) stereotypes in constructing an identity as a parent. But their negotiations were rife with tensions and conflict of a desired equality. The mothers constructed an inequitable division of labour (in terms of childcare) as irrational, unfair and out-dated. However, these constructions were underscored by prevailing normative discourses. The different constructions of what it takes to be a 'good' father compared to a 'good' mother also represent how social ideals infiltrate parental negotiations (discussed below). Overall, there was a sense that the mothers would lose credit by shifting towards equality, while the fathers would gain it. That is, equality undermines a woman's claims to being a good mother while disproportionately heaping praise on the father.

*How are gendered identities negotiated between couples in relation to parenting roles, responsibilities and parenting styles?* The significant idealisation of the physiological and primal nature of the mother-child bond meant that the mothers' constructed an identity that incorporated and prioritised the primary needs of their child. For mothers, being constructed as a 'good' mother required taking on and succeeding in their parental roles and responsibilities as primary caregiver. This remained to be the case despite their constructions of the irrationality of inequitable practices in the home. The idealisation and construction of the mother as the ultimate in care and nurturance inhibited father involvement to some degree. Fathers were found to accept their position as the secondary parent, which allowed the mothers to monitor or manage their involvement. The valued aspects of a woman's identity were tightly bound to domestic labour, so much so that it is difficult for these women to negotiate equity in the home without undermining that identity. There was a sense that women held on to the dominant parenting position, a status highly valued by them. However, this was partly in relation to a subordinate status as a woman, evident in the constructions of a dwindling sense of self-esteem, bodily attractiveness and independence.

The father-child bond was also idealised, but constructed differently. That is; a good father did not require the same level of involvement and sacrifice. Rather, paternal involvement

was premised as helping the mother and primary caregiver. The mother's acceptance for minimal paternal involvement adds impetus to the construction of an identity as a 'good' father that doesn't necessarily require performances of childcare, but nonetheless involves the realization of an intimate bond. Importantly, both fathers were constructed as willing to take on hypothetical extremes of care, but appeared reluctant to take on actual care activities (like waking up at night) supposedly because this wasn't necessary for their identity as a good father. Therefore, a father's identity seemed less to do with the work of parenting and more to do with establishing a close bond with their child whilst fulfilling patriarchal norms of providing for the family.

*How are gendered identities negotiated in relation to transitioning into parenthood?* During the transition from non-parent to parent, the couples' drew on legacies left by their own parents, as well as deviancy discourses to construct what mothers should not be. Their positive experiences of being nurtured by their own mothers influenced their constructions of what parenthood, particularly motherhood should be like. As discussed, the couples also relied on traditional ideologies about good motherhood (for example the intensive, self-sacrificing mother) and good fatherhood (the bonded, providing, secondary caregiver). Significantly, the mothers constructed an embodiment of change that impacted on their self-esteem. This included a shift in identity as their physical bodies changed during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding. The men in comparison did not draw on such changes in their constructions of fatherhood.

*Do mothers and fathers construct their parenting identities and subjectivities differently?* Yes and no. Mothers constructed their identities with ambiguity around relinquishing their role as primary caregiver. They feel pressured from two competing discourses; one which values equality, the other which values their status as the dominant or primary caregiver. For fathers, they are aware of the more contemporary versions of fatherhood, but their constructions are infiltrated by hegemonic aspects of their masculine identity. Overall, Tess and Susan were found to construct their transitioning identity and their sense of making it as a mother or not around the incorporation of the child's needs and in terms of their embodied experiences, which the men in comparison did not. Fathers constructed their identity in relation to financial imperatives and retaining a sense of independence whilst the

mothers also emphasized the importance of establishing a close bond between father and child.

*How do experiences or definitions of motherhood or fatherhood impact on how the other partner is able to define and construct their own gender identities?* This finding speaks to the interrelatedness of gender identity constructions. How a mother constructed her maternal identity affected how the father was able to construct his own identity and *vice versa*. For example, when the mothers prioritised their bond and position as the ultimate in care and devotion, the father was constructed as the secondary parent needing guidance and encouragement to participate in care work. Likewise, when the fathers used mother legacy discourses and positively evaluated characteristics associated with conforming mothers, they constrained and influenced how their partners were able to construct an identity as a good mother.

*What, if any, are some of the discourses and narratives around parenting that challenge traditional gender roles?* Traditional models of parenting necessarily lead to a division of labour practiced within the family context, based on gender stereotypes. These couples are not altogether traditional as they represent contemporary family arrangements whereby both partners are employed. This in itself has allowed the couples to address the inequity of their family arrangements. For example, the working mother narrative and the discourses associated with it are powerfully challenging norms about normal and fair family work. Fathers also used discourses which speak to the importance of the father-child relationship and a willingness to take on aspects of care work usually confined to mothers. However, these movements are often contradictorily countered by pervasive gender norms which hinder progressive change in this regard.

Even so, there is an adaptability of gender identity evident in the construction of a loving father bond, representing a disruption to hegemonic discourses that construct men as unemotional, uncaring, and unnatural nurturers. Likewise, discourses about the irrationality of inequality, challenge these parents to think beyond their taken-for-granted knowledge about appropriate roles for men and women.

## **6.2 Critical reflections and recommendations for future study**

Research focussing on gender and parenting is scarce in the South African context. It is noted that many of the mainstream gender theories available at present were developed some years ago by theorists from the Western world and may not adequately apply to the context of this study. Although the findings provide insight into the way couples negotiate their gender identities through interactions as parents, they are not necessarily generalizable to the South African population; a dynamic and diverse mix of cultures, with vastly different contextual circumstances.

The lack of context specific literature points towards the need for further investigation and exploration into gender identity construction in the South African context. Future research into gender identity would do well to fill this gap by developing contemporary gender theories and research that take into account multicultural settings. This is not unique to South Africa as many societies are now a mix of ethnicities, racial groups and cultural backgrounds.

One of the main concerns regarding methodology was selection of a small sample size. It is argued here that the sample is somewhat limited as it includes only white middle-class heterosexual parents, who do not necessarily experience discrimination based on race, class or sexual orientation; factors which may or may not have impacted on the gender identity and experiences of parenthood. Further investigation would be necessary to determine whether these particular gender negotiations and/or constructions can be applied to other couples; across class, culture, between race groups, and sexual orientations. Single headed or extended family structures were also omitted from this study. Such family organisation would involve interestingly diverse gender identity constructions, and is a recommended consideration for research that is interested in a variety of forms of contemporary family life.

The likelihood that parenting identities change over the course of a child's life was not excluded from a focus on first-time parents. Indeed, social constructionism contends that a person's reality is contextually and historically specific. The participants themselves were also within a particular age group (all in their 30s), which is likely to impact on their sense of self as a parent. It was not within the scope of this research to investigate such variables.



However, gender identity development, as it relates to different age groups (of both parents and children) would be worth further investigation. Further, the impact that a child's gender has on the parent's constructions and experiences was not investigated, but considered to be an important factor for future gender and parenting research.

Importantly, the accounts offered by the participants may have been influenced by some of the features of the researcher and the interview situation. Social constructionist research encourages the researcher to stay reflexive throughout the research process, making their context explicit in order to present to the reader a clear indication of their position in relation to the study, and how that might have influenced the analysis. For this reason, I felt obliged to state my personal rationale at the beginning of the study (refer to section 1.3). This does not exclude bias altogether. As a woman, the female participants came across as much more open and talkative, something that may have differed if I was a male researcher. The men in the study may have felt uncomfortable talking to me about their parenting identity is a possibility and something that I tried to avoid by adopting an open and friendly approach. Whether this helped is unclear, but worth considering for researchers looking to employ interview based investigations into such personally profound aspects of people's lives, such as gender identity and becoming a parent.

Lastly, some of the more subtle ethical issues concern the sensitive nature of the research topic and the intimate rapport between researcher and participants. This may have heightened the tensions between interviewees, especially if the space was experienced as a therapeutic exchange by the participants. Indeed, care was taken to ensure that the participants were aware of the nature of the interview, but greater care could have been taken to ensure that the boundaries of the interview were made directly explicit.

Finally, as a researcher and female who somewhat rejects gender normative stereotypes it was both intriguing and frustratingly clear that pervasive gender norms prevail. The ideology of motherhood and fatherhood are pervasive, multifaceted and complex. That people are reconstructing old norms under the guise of modern parenting identities (often without reflection) is a challenging yet exciting obstacle for our society to overcome.

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## Appendix A



# Parenting Research

**Parents please help a student conduct research on parenting for her Masters dissertation.**

Do you fit the below criteria for the research?

1. Participants must be parents of a child or children that are no more than three years old.
2. Participants must be in a secure and stable relationship.
3. Participants must not be suffering from any serious medical or psychological conditions.

### What do you have to gain from the research?

- The opportunity to contribute to the knowledge of parenting in the academic world.
- A chance to talk openly about your shared experiences as parents and the different roles you have each taken on in a confidential environment.
- Participants will be compensated for their time in the form of a **R300** Liberty Midlands Mall or BabyCity gift voucher.
- Caretakers will be provided for children during the interview if necessary.

Please contact Poppy Bruce-Eagles on:

084 912 7112 or [eaglespoppy@gmail.com](mailto:eaglespoppy@gmail.com)



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## Appendix B

### Gender and Parenting: The (re)production and (re)negotiation of gender identity in the context of first time parenting.

#### Interview Schedule

*These questions are for the purpose of guiding the interview process only, as the interview will be completely open-ended.*

#### Individual interview (mother)

- 1. What do you think changed after the birth of your child, in terms of your life, relationship, outlook on life?*
- 2. How easy or hard was it to adjust after having a baby?*
- 3. How would you describe your role at home? How would you describe your partner's role at home?*
- 4. What does being a mother mean to you?*
- 5. What does being a father mean to you?*
- 6. Consider the commonly held belief that women should be the primary care-givers of their children. What do you think this means?*
- 7. What are your responsibilities at home? What are your partner's responsibilities?*
- 8. Do you know any parents who look after their child completely equally? How do you feel about that?*
- 9. What do you consider to be 'normal' in terms of parenting roles? In what ways does this perspective differ from your experience?*
- 10. Do you ever feel like you would like to do things differently at home?*

#### (Father)

- 1. What do you think changed after the birth of your child, in terms of your life, relationship, outlook on life?*
- 2. Having a baby is a huge life change. How easy or hard was it to adjust?*
- 3. How would you describe your role at home? How would you describe your partner's role at home?*
- 4. What does being a mother mean to you?*
- 5. What does being a father mean to you?*
- 6. Consider the commonly held belief that women should be the primary care-givers of their children. What do you think this means?*
- 7. What are your responsibilities at home? What are your partners responsibilities*
- 8. Do you know any parents who look after their child completely equally? How do you feel about that?*
- 9. What do you consider to be 'normal' in terms of parenting roles? In what ways does this perspective differ from your experience*
- 10. Do you ever feel like you would like to do things differently at home?*

#### (Couple interview)

- 1. Describe your relationship before you had your baby? And after?*
- 2. What does being a good mother/father mean to you both?*
- 3. What do you think is the biggest challenge in being a parent for the first time?*
- 4. Who does what at home?*
- 5. Did you speak about your parenting roles and responsibilities before your baby was born? After? Why/why not? How did you discuss this?*
- 6. Would you consider yourselves equal in terms of your division of labour at home with your child? Why?*

7. *Describe a typical day at home with each other before your baby was born. Describe a typical day since you had your baby.*
8. *If your wife/partner wanted to work away from home, how would this affect the relationship with each other and your baby regarding responsibilities?*
9. *What does division of labour mean to the both of you?*
10. *Consider the statement "Traditional roles of motherhood and fatherhood are outdated". What is your understanding of this statement?*

## Appendix C

### Extracts from discursive cases: transcriptions

#### Discursive case 1 (Tess and John)

##### a. Interview with Tess (C.1, I.2)

RESEARCHER: [mm]

TESS: just shifting as well as, you know and it's hard because mums just, can't be bothered with having to deal with the dad, [RESEARCHER: mm] because, it's like sorry dude you- you're second fiddle right now, I've gotta deal with this. [RESEARCHER: mm] Which is so much harder. [RESEARCHER: mm] So just, UNDERSTAND ((small laugh, P also laughs)) you know and, shame and it's hard for them because of course they wouldn't understand you know [RESEARCHER: yeah, mm] So I think, but like now like I've noticed he's much more, (.) I think he's just confident with the fact that he can look after ((son)) by himself he's okay. [RESEARCHER: ja] So things aren't gonna fall apart [RESEARCHER: ja] whereas before it was like in the beginning and everything it was ridiculous like I'd get a ph- phone call every five minutes, ((puts on a panicky husband voice)) 'he's just he's crying and he won't go down and he this' whereas now he actually just deals with it [RESEARCHER: ja] and it's quite amazing. And they have an amazing relationship [RESEARCHER: mm] the two of them.

RESEARCHER: mm and what do you think in terms of their relationship and your relationship with ((son)), what's the difference between your relationships. With, with ((son)) [( )]

TESS: [ah ((small laugh)) it changes week to week but, um, at the moment he's got a- separation anxiety with: ((husb-)) for ((husband)) not for me, which is like it was hard to take, in the last few days I've been like wow that hurts you know [RESEARCHER: m hm] but, then I realise it's gonna be different next week, get over it [RESEARCHER: ja] d'you know what I mean [RESEARCHER: ja] I think he's gonna go through different stages his whole life.hh with us but um, what I'm noticing specifically is, cos our li- our, hours are different ((husband)) and I actually, [RESEARCHER: mm] he'll always, hands down, come home in the afternoon for a sleep before dinner shift. So he has kind of mostly his afternoons to himself which is like amazing [RESEARCHER: mm] I wish I had that and I get quite jealous and irritated about it. [RESEARCHER: mm] So he comes home and he actually spends time with ((son)). [RESEARCHER: mm] and I don't get to, you know, [RESEARCHER: mm] so it's like it's very difficult for me that side of it, he um, (.) therefore I think what is happening is, uh ((slight stammer)), dad is like daytime dad, and mom is like nighttime mom, and that's why I'm almost convinced why my baby doesn't sleep well. [RESEARCHER: mm] Cos he wants to see me and he thinks that's mom time ((laughs)) [RESEARCHER: mm] D'you know what I mean [RESEARCHER: mm] so um, like he'll start waking from like midnight and just continue to wake every hour and it, it's so intense for me obviously but it's like I really do think he's, thinking oh but this is when I see mom. [RESEARCHER: ja. mm] And he's kind of like when dad's around during the day in the afternoons and stuff he definitely wants to be with him rather. So I think he's associated day with dad and, night with mom. [RESEARCHER: mm] Which is quite weird. [RESEARCHER: mm] but I think that's what's happening.

RESEARCHER: and before, I mean I don't know how your shifts were before but, in terms of, putting him to bed, was it either of you that would do that [or is it only

TESS: [no it's only me. It's always been me.

RESEARCHER: mm. .hh ((coughs/clears throat)) okay. So, let's go on then to (.) talking about, your roles and responsibilities at home

**b. Interview with John (C.1, I.1)**

JOHN: and attentive, and, all of the usually clichés of, of a mother, um (.) and I was very close to my mother so you sort of look at role model::, as was # with he:rs, um, (.) a:n:d, you wanna be I think ac- s- you know you want your, your, wif::e (.) um to be similar t- with certain characteristics to those people that, you had in your life.

RESEARCHER: mm. So your mother was obviously:: quite a, .hh a good, hh role model or mother to you so you wanted that to [kind of carry on ( )

JOHN: [absolutely and our mothers are, very different and they, both amazing people, and my mother's also a fa::rm woman she's been on, sort of she's quite hard core she doesn't, um::, but she's an amazing mother

RESEARCHER: mm

JOHN: and she gives amazing advi:ce, and you know, and ((wife's mother))'s very gentle and very loving and very caring [and uh, and it's interesting to see:, you know it's it's a different dynamic but they

RESEARCHER: [mm

JOHN: both sort of, incredible (.) peo[ple, y'know.

RESEARCHER: [mm

RESEARCHER: mm. So you think you compa:red, or you compare ((name)), to::, the mothers (.)

RESEARCHER: You do ((M must have indicated 'yes' in the pause))

JOHN: Absolutely [ja she's definitely there certain things that, and, again going back to, you know going

RESEARCHER: [mm

**c. Interview with both Tess and John (C.1, I.3)**

RESEARCHER: mm and do you have that special time with him in mornings, and,

TESS: you have the afternoons where you come home and spend time with him and that's, (.) they have really, you know, I think that's been really special for y- for you two. That ((husband)) is able to get home in the afternoons they have their special time together they do they go like onto the farm and look at the cows, and like every afternoon, it's been really [great that you can do that. Ja. And I

JOHN: [mm it has been fun

TESS: think like, I've just seen how, how it's, you've bonded like through having that time together.

JOHN: ja

TESS: and how you've realised, (.) you're fine alone with him. Do you know what I mean in the beginning it's [terrible ( ) (man) ( )

JOHN: [it's also as he grows up, he, he develops more of a little character and you can- and you see him learning like=

TESS: =ja I mean that's ex[( )

JOHN: [things from your little excursions [RESEARCHER: mm] it's very cute. [RESEARCHER: ja] And that's always exciting ja

TESS: it must be exciting for you cos ((husband))'s all about like about how things work. ((small laugh from M and W)) Like he loves machines and stuff so, for him to see this little being, like growing and copying and, like it's just blowing ((husband))'s mind I think in that way I've seen it, that's what's so exciting for you almost you know? ((smiling)) Like he even said to me yesterday he's like 'ok what can we teach him next' ((both laugh)) like, 'what have we done we've done tapping, we've done the (nose), we've done the ( ), we've done things, ((both laugh)) [RESEARCHER: ja] you know it's so sweet ((P and W laugh))

### **Extracts from discursive case 2 (Susan and David)**

#### **a) Interview with Susan (C.2, I.1)**

RESEARCHER: Okay (.) Um. We'll move on a little. Okay so (.2) We've already discussed this a little bit, but consider the belief that women should be the primary care-givers of their children, um, (.2) how do you feel about that (.) statement?

SUSAN: Er To a certain par- certain degree I don't agree with it. I'm a more modern (.) more modern thinking, where um I feel the father should be just (.) just as involved with their children as the wi- as the mother. Because we also we- it's not like (.3) I mean I did stay at home for a year but I'm back at work now and I work (.) just- Okay he always says that his work is a lot more physically and mentally exhausting than mine is, but um (.) I work and (.) sometimes I just need that bit of help. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed especially if I'm (.3) Ja because I try and help his mom in the house (.1) doing the wifely thing with cleaning and all of that (.) as much as I can, she obviously does the cooking so that's .hhh um I don't have to do that but (.2) just to him- for him to just help me [ it makes me feel wanted and (.) [ that I'm feeling appreciated for what I do do.

RESEARCHER: [Mm [Mm

SUSAN: 'Cause sometimes it's easy for you to feel unappreciated if you're constantly doing everything and (.) [ you just feel like why are you doing it, you know, [ if you're not getting anything from it. ((sniff))

#### **b) Interview with David (C.2, I.2)**

DAVID: The essence of a mother hhh. .Probably getting slandered from the- for this one

RESEARCHER: ((chuckle))

DAVID: but it's – er – you know what, taking care of- taking care of the child, feeding him and bathing him and sorting him out (.2) um (.) playing with him, making sure he's healthy, making sure he's fed, he's happy,

RESEARCHER: Hm-mm

DAVID: Um (.2) Which also swings a lot towards the father role as well, er keeping him- keeping the child happy, playing with him, um interacting (.2) um (.1) Although from (.) my side of things, because I'm little bit more old-school German

RESEARCHER: Hm-mm

DAVID: Um (.) The father role is- (.1) takes a little bit more of the old fifties style, where the mother's job is, you know what, to feed the baby, clothe the baby, bath the baby, that kind of thing, where #F thinks no, it should be more (.) mutually beneficial so I've now got to bath the baby now and again, and (.) I've got help her with this and help him with that. [ Which I do, I do try a lot with (.) Ah (.) Just every now and again I sorta – get a little bit riled up about it.

Researcher: [Mm

**c) Interview with Susan and David (C.2, I.3)**

RESEARCHER: And when he's sick, does he go to – When when he's not feeling well who would he run to [ ( )?

DAVID: [ Well when he's sick- when he's sick or not feeling well, all he wants-[ all he wants is mommy.

SUSAN: [ Is me

RESEARCHER: Mm

DAVID: He wants to be sitting on mommy's hip 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and then mommy must take care of him do everything for him.

RESEARCHER: And and- You're okay with that?

DAVID: Yep

RESEARCHER: Would you prefer him- or would you like it if he relied on you for for comfort?

DAVID: Noeeuuuh.

RESEARCHER: You don't-

SUSAN: Sometimes you've said that when he's been in bed with us and he doesn't want to give you a cuddle then you say "Ah he doesn't give me a cuddle". ( )



**Information sheet and Consent Form**

**Gender and Parenting: The (re)production and (re)negotiation of gender identity in the context of first time parenting.**

The aim of this research project is to explore how new parents negotiate gender roles and norms.

You will participate in an in-depth interview which will last approximately one hour for the individual interview and one hour for the interview you will do together with your partner. Any information you provide during the interview will be treated as confidential. You will be assigned a code name which will protect your identity. All data will be kept in secured files, in accord with the standards of the University.

The policy of the School of Applied Human Sciences at UKZN is that all research participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time, without prejudice, should you object to the nature of the research. You are entitled to ask questions and to receive an explanation after your participation.

You will receive a R300 voucher for Baby City as a reimbursement of your time and effort. We will also provide refreshments during the interview, and a baby sitter should you require one.

Should you require any more information or clarification, feel free to contact the principle investigator:

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UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

## **Consent Form**

### **Gender and Parenting: The (re)production and (re)negotiation of gender identity in the context of first time parenting.**

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understood the information provided regarding the research. I agree to participate in the interview process, and I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that the interview can be stopped at any time should I not want to continue and that this decision will not affect me negatively in any way.

The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand what is expected of my participation.

I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to have any questions or clarifications regarding the study.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I agree that research data may be published provided that my name and any identifying information is omitted.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Participant expense reimbursement

The researcher has agreed to reimburse all participants to cover the cost of travel and other expenses incurred due to the time needed to participate in the consented interviews. This form is an acknowledgement of receipt for the above mentioned reimbursement.

We have received a reimbursement for travel costs and other expenses incurred to the sum of R150 each, totalling R300. The reimbursement was given to us in the form of cash from researcher Poppy Bruce-Eagles.

Signature one

Date

---

---

Signature Two

Date

---

---

**Appendix F**  
**Analytical memo (extract from Discursive Case 1)**

Src	Interview 3 (mother/W and father/M)			
//	Extracts	Discursive constructions	Possible broader discourses	Positioning's, action orientation, practice subjectivities,
441	<p>John: ((laughs)) I don't know, it's uh, (.) ((longish pause during which no one interrupts)) I think if you, again going back to like if you had more free time to::, decide between it it would maybe be a little bit more equal. (.) But, (.) you've always also been the mother from, day o::ne, you know and spent-like the first few months you spending with ((son)) or whatever and that does follow that through, later like I think you <u>have</u> that maternal side that, <u>has</u> carried through so I can m::aybe sleep, when he's crying, for a</p> <p>Tess: I don't know how to, I can't even bear it</p> <p>John: and ((wife)) <u>will</u> stand up and go, [so, that that</p>	<p>Expected that mother deal with the primary needs e.g. getting up during the night – because it's a maternal duty. This gives him allowance to sleep through the night.</p> <p>He would consider being more equal but there is not enough time... and even then it's constructed as maternal duty.</p>	<p>Mother as primary caregiver</p> <p>Part-time father/ Father as helper</p> <p>Maternal duty/intensive mothering</p>	<p>Hypothetically willing but practically unwilling to take on caregiving roles</p> <p>Mother wants father to take on tasks more equally, but is not able to stand back when child is crying – duty bound</p>
449	<p>Tess: [He could probably actually you're right, like at the end of the day if I was a different person maybe who could let my baby cry, ((P clears throat)) believe me I think there's nothing wrong with it I just physically can't do it it makes me wanna vomit, he, he, you could probably, <u>deal</u> with that and [be like, no, ( ) cry. You <u>know</u> he's fine.</p>	<p>There is an physical response when hearing a baby cry that the father doesn't share</p> <p>Mother is physiologically bonded/attached to their child.</p> <p>Connotation that she is judging women who let their baby cry</p>	<p>Maternal duty</p> <p>Intensive mothering</p> <p>Physiological determinism</p> <p>Good mother</p>	<p>Mother should never allow her child to cry. Its terrible/sickening thing to do. Whereas a father could without moral obligation.</p> <p>She is taking on the responsibility by saying that she can't, but maybe could if she was a different person.</p> <p>Tension between a mothers obligation to tend to child's every need compared to father who is not attached in such a way.</p>

## Appendix G



Dear Poppy,

Thank you for contacting The Child and Family Centre (CFC). The Centre is happy to take on any clients you wish to refer during your research endeavors. This letter serves to outline the procedures at the CFC, and provide information that we hope you will find useful.

As you probably are aware, we have a client waiting list and the cases are usually seen in referral date order. It is difficult to know how long it might take for your case to be allocated to a therapist, but as soon as one becomes available, you will be phoned by the therapist or myself and offered an appointment. If the case is urgent, please be advised that you could contact state services, such as Town Hill Hospital, Fort Napier Hospital, Northdale Hospital, and Pietermaritzburg Assessment and Therapy Centre (Ghandi Road).

Our fee is R150 per session, although it is negotiable with the therapist, who will first obtain authorization from the Head of the CFC. We are not contracted to medical aid societies as we offer reduced rates. If a client does belong to a medical aid, they may claim back the fees paid to us, provided of course that this is permitted by the medical aid and they have the funds available. We require all of our clients to pay cash on a weekly basis. We do not run account systems as this would push up our costs to our clients.

**Kindly note that clients will be charged for any appointment not kept or not cancelled timeously.** If two consecutive appointments are missed without being cancelled, the place on the therapist's case workload will automatically lapse, as we need to be able to offer our services to others on the waiting list.

There are two stages to our interventions with people seeking psychological assistance: the first stage involves an assessment during which we endeavor to understand the nature and cause of any difficulties; for child clients, this will include an interview with the child's parent(s) or caregivers. The second stage is the intervention phase in which the client may be offered one or other form of psychotherapy to alleviate difficulties. The number of sessions that's required for the two phases will be discussed with the therapist.

We look forward to being of service to you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Ms Nontobeka Buthelezi  
Coordinator: Child and Family Centre

**Child and Family Centre**

**School of Applied Human Sciences**

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## Appendix H

### Extracts from discursive case 1 (Tess and John)

#### Extract 1.1

*...for me I think that's what a mum really is, the essence of a mom is is is the comforter. And so if I can't comfort him it really kills me (C.1, I.3, 618)*

#### Extract 1.2

*John: ....but uh, ja you want someone to be caring*

*Researcher: ((smiling)) [it's okay*

*John: and attentive, and, all of the usually clichés of, of a mother, um (.) and I was very close to my mother so you sort of look at role model::, as was # with he:rs, um, (.) a:n:d, you wanna be I think ac- s- you know you want your, your, wif::e (.) um to be similar t- with certain characteristics to those people that, you had in your life. (C.1, I.2, 116)*

#### Extract 1.3

*Tess:..... it's like it fills you with joy to see your little child going (.) 'mm' ((miming)) [Researcher: mm] It's like, it's like the most incredible feeling I don't know why it's that, that he's accepting it, he's being nurtured he's being nourished, [Researcher: mm] a- I don't know and I think that might come from a breastfeeding thing or it might just come from being a mom you know [Researcher: mm] I don't know. [Researcher: mm] But I adore, I do adore feeding him. [Like (C.1, I.3, 225)*

#### Extract 1.4

*Tess: Meaning, the, the m- meaning of the essence of being a mother, is, I don't I wouldn't even know how to put it in words but I c- I can- I cannot believe how much you can love something there's no, .hh it rea::lly hurts me like it hurts like hell, still like it pulls at my windpipe where I feel like I can't breathe [Researcher: mm] when I think about the love for him. [Researcher: mm] And immediately, like as he was born, you know, you will live and die, and kill for this thing. [Researcher: mm, mm] (.) You will kill. [Researcher: mm] You know, it's amazing. (C.1, I.1, 314)*

#### Extract 1.5

*Tess: I'm like, every time I get something else put on the plate, (.) I get so angry because I can't spend time with more time with [P: mm] the person I should be spending time with (C.1, I.1, 610)*

### Extract 1.6

Tess: ...just speaking to you now I've kind of, realised a bit, that it's it has contributed to kind of how I've tried to do it all myself. .h Um, because in many senses I s'pose that's how I think a mother should be. Because I guess that's what I grew up with, you know (C.1 I.1, 571)

### Extract 1.7

Tess: Um, I think because I'm a control freak? So I just end up taking on all the responsibility of everything. Work. Everything.(C.1, I.1, 191)

### Extract 1.8

Tess: ...if ((husband)) does get up and having one of those mornings where he's looking after him, I'm always shouting like, REMEMBER TO GIVE HIM HIS BISCUITS! ((Tess laughs; husband gives small laugh)) HE NEEDS A BISCUIT huh huh he can't live without the biscuit ((husband and researcher laugh)) (C.1, I.3, 176)

### Extract 1.9

Tess: ...you do I did definitely feel like he did not understand

Researcher: [mm

Tess: because you know, in every sense of the word, a man can never u- fully understand. They never gonna go through it.

Tess: much of it i- your, .hh your being is is is kind of like, my husband doesn't understand this and therefore he doesn't empathise and he doesn't, you know (C.1 I.2, 33)

### Extract 1.10

Tess: just shifting as well as, you know and it's hard because mums just, can't be bothered with having to deal with the dad, [P: mm] because, it's like sorry dude you- you're second fiddle right now, I've gotta deal with this. [P: mm] Which is so much harder. [P: mm] So just, UNDERSTAND ((small laugh, P also laughs)) you know and, shame and it's hard for them because of course they wouldn't understand you know (C.1, I.2, 102)

### Extract 1.11

Researcher: being a father, what does that mean. (.) In your opinion.

John: (.) It's hard I probably should have said this with the mother as well, but it's not really, maybe not the first thing that comes to mind but you both have to be disciplinarian, like like, with quite a lot of, (.) hh I think very similar in the in in most ways and I think it can work either way depending on, n- the relationship I suppose, .hh um, (.) I dunno, have fun with my boy, I want some experiences with him, (C1, I.2, 158)

### Extract 1.12

Tess: *I would say it's playing I'm not gonna lie [Researcher: okay] you you were so cute with him like from when he couldn't even move you were like on the bed like this, and ((husband)) would be like peeping up from behind the bed and stuff ((small laugh from P)) like you have this natural instinct to play with, and I think, it looks hugely important to you. (C.1, I.3, 241)*

### Extract 1.13

Tess: *...I feel bad about it because he's so good in the daytime and stuff [P: mm] he'll come back or play with ((son)) the whole afternoon, and then he'll hand her- him over to, to to ((name)) or whatever::r but he, he generally he spends so much time with him he's a gr::eat great father like he's an amazing father (C.1, I.1,175)*

### Extract 1.14

Tess: *...But in terms of fatherhood and what I think it means, having seen with ((husband)) is just, (.) it's like, it's like he actually did, (.) bear him. As well. [P: mm] And I never thought, I would feel that way because he did not bear him. [P: mm] But it's like he did. [P: mm] Like that's how much like the love is there [P: mm] and like it's just so incredible it's amazing thing to see. I don't know if, ((small laugh)) everyone's like that or anything but that's what I see with ((husband)) and with his baby and .hh it's so incredible because all it is is really just y'know, they're the sperm donor and that's it. Kind of thing. ((P: small laugh)) And you do kind of feel like that cos you do all the work and stuff. But they are, so, connected. They're so connected and so bonded it's an amazing thing because they did not come from each other's flesh, actually. [P: mm] So, I don't know [P: mm] I don't know where it comes from ((P: small laugh)) it's amazing. Ja it must be something, something energetically or spiritually (C.1, I.1, 301)*

### Extract 1.15

John: *[and they spent so much money that by the time they did, she had nine months of being a, like, a housewife, [P: mm] and she's the most amazing, one of the most amazing girls that I know, like she's, [W: who] Sarah [P: oh, right] Um, that, when, she had the baby she'd read (.) e:verything and just been that sortof, you know, (.) (C.1, I.3, 376)*

### Extract 1.16

John: *[hhh but those books were like, like it almost had a bit of a religious element [which annoyed me] I don't know I can't*

Tess: *[Oh did it? ]*

John: *really remember I dunno, I got put off by like the personality [quite quickly, and some of ] that*

Tess: *[something put you off (that)]*

John: *stuff I was like, [hh I really don't need to read that shit] (C.1, I.3, 356)*



### Extract 1.17

Tess: ...to be a little bit calmer in the beginning... (C.1, I.3, 386)

### Extract 1.18

Tess: But when you both equally have, well, sometimes, me even more, have this insane amount of work, on your plate, then it should be eq- then home needs to be equal too. [Researcher: mm, mm] Definitely. (C.1, I.1, 339)

### Extract 1.19

Tess: I took it ((the primary caregiving)) all on in an old-fashioned sense I took it all on. And now looking at it I'm like, no, it makes so much more sense and there's no reason why it can't be equal. I work, (.) (like a mother) ((funny tone of voice)), ((laughs)) every day of my life I work extremely extremely hard so [Researcher: mm] there's no reason why I should have all the responsibility... I-, look I think I'm old fashioned, in, you know within me somewhere because I'm naturally doing that. Even though I often feel like I work even harder. [P: mm] You know than him often at times so, it shouldn't be that way, it should, you know, but actually, I don't, I don't believe it should be like that at all I think it should be equal, (C.1 I.2, 232).

### Extract 1.20

John: you know I wouldn't have any hassles with looking after ((son)) all da:y, and being the .hh feminin:e, role, in the sortof,

Researcher: m

John: in the family and I would, I would love to do that. [Y'know as long as there's the money to make it

Researcher: [ja

John: work (C.1, I.1, 298)

### Extract 1.21

Tess: you can't look at this like unless you are living literally a stay at home mom, [M: ja, exactly] and the husband brings home the bread, like, it's, it has changed because of, work. Cos of careers. It has to. [And therefore I think it's like across the board

Researcher: [and you think that's

Tess: like I do think that the roles should be then, more equalised, between mum and dad. And, um, I'm amazed at how many people how many men, still don't, actually [P: mm] do that and the, and the women are still working and doing that rol- that last role you know the old fashioned roles as well. And making, their husbands lunch before they go to, work

John: *it would be delicious though ((small laugh from P))*

Tess: *You live, in a restaurant ((all laugh))*

Tess: *But that's like, I heard that yesterday at (Top-tots) from ((woman's name)). And um she was just like, 'ja and then I have to make him lunch before he goes to work and get them thing and then I go to work' and I was just like, You what?! You know that's, that just doesn't sit right for me [P: mm] it's a bit strange. Like if your roles are equal work-wise then, [P: why yeah] surely, other things should be too. If they not I understand maybe you work a half day [different story*

John: *[or maybe enjoy it which is also, [an aspect*

Tess: *[ja, sure, true, [P: mm] true. True.*

John: *Might, you might, [also try to portray [the role*

Tess: *[I probably [ja,*

Tess: *no exactly and, I certainly, I'm doing the feeding and the bathing and stuff cos actually I do love it you know, like if I really hated it, I would, make sure, well, I say that but I really don't love, ((small laugh)) getting up all the time ((laughs)) and I'm not forcing you into it or anything but,*

(.)

John: *I don't know (C.1, l.3, 778)*

#### Extract 1.22

*I think there've also been stages in my life when, I was far too irresponsible to be a father and it, (.) would have been a disa:ster (C.1, l.2, 55)*

#### Extract 1.23

John: *....you obviously shit scared, when you starting off, .h um cos you have no idea and everyone says the same thing you just, sortof, get on with it and, it all works out and (a year goes), like ((son's name)), before you know it, and suddenly you just doing it. U:m:, s- ja every- everything change::s, in a way an::d, but I think (you can) still carry on to an extent with, you know your life, before that. (C1, l.2, 61)*

#### Extract 1.24

Tess: *...It's, it's strange scars and stretch marks in places you did not know could exi- even exist [P: ja] and and your, your breasts which usually were to me your like my most sort of sexual part of me, .hh [P: mm] I just don't even like any more and that's hectic you know [P: m] like all of that you can't [even look at yourself (C.1, l.1, 651)*

### Extract 1.25

Tess: ... *the sex, like, element of it, kind of goes, because you feel like this, overweight, hormonal, hairy, being ((laughs quite loudly; P does not laugh)) that's just not attractive in any sense (C.1, I.2, 631)*

### Extract 1.26

Tess: ... *well it's, was very hard because it, because although I was giving my whole self over to a new little being, but in in so doing was being very selfish ((small laugh)) because::e because you have to be. Because you're that broken. And th- I was very badly affected by the hormones so, um ... because of the hormones it was of how much and how intensely I loved this little being, [and so thank goodness it went that (.) route and not like, I hated him (((laughs))) which it can go obviously. So um, because of that I think it must have been very hard on ((husband's name)) and, and to be honest it was like the first time in my life where I was just like well, I don't really care, you've got to deal with this this is, that's, what's hard for you, [P: mm] this is what's hard for me.(C.1, I.2, 13)*

### Extract 1.27

Tess: ...*at the moment he's got a- separation anxiety with: ((husb-)) for ((husband)) not for me, which is like it was hard to take, in the last few days I've been like wow that hurts you know (C.1, I.1, 114)*

### Extract 1.28

...*you get so scared they gonna love him more" (C.1, I.1, 441)*

### Extract 1.29

Tess: *Mine is more it's it's the physical it's the sleeping it's the bathing it's the sleeping it's the waking it's the sleeping, [P: mm] you know it's all that sort of stuff, [P: mm] but um, whereas, him being there for him because the nanny's gone I mean that's like vital. [P: mm] I don't know what I'd do if I did not [P: mm] have ((husband)) to do that [P: mm, mm] like I actually don't know what I would do. [P: mm] So, you must understand responsibility-wise he's happy to do it, [P: mm] but um (C.1, I.3, 501)*

### Extract 1.30

Tess: ...*I mean I am so grateful that he can spend that time with ((son)) [P: m] it's like every time he's like ja no I'm home it's fine, I'll be there, I'm like my whole heart just goes [P: mm] .hhh hhhh thank God (C.1, I.3, 548).*

### Extract 1.31

Tess: *Well he plays with him and loves him and all that sort of stuff but in terms of actually, like he'll, he'll change a nappy if he has to [P: mm] kind of thing but if ((domestic worker's name))'s here he'll definitely hand him to ((name)) cos he doesn't wanna have to do it you know (C.1, I.1, 243)*

### Extract 1.32

John: ((laughs)) I don't know, it's uh, (.) ((longish pause during which no one interrupts)) I think if you, again going back to like if you had more free time to::, decide between it it would maybe be a little bit more equal. (.) But, (.) you've always also been the mother from, day o::ne, you know and spent- like the first few months you spending with ((son)) or whatever and that does follow that through, later like I think you have that maternal side that, has carried through so I can m::aybe sleep, when he's crying, for a

Tess: I don't know how to, I can't even bear it

John: and ((wife)) will stand up and go, [so, that that (C.1, I.3, 441)

### Extract 1.33

Tess.....he knows I'm gonna end up doing it. [P: mm] Like if I was to lea:ve or go away or whatever he'd be absolutely fine doing it and I think he knows that [P: mm] too. But um, ja. I think he's just choosing kind of ((starts laughing slightly)) not to do those certain things. ((laughs)). (C.1, I.1, 351)

### Extract 1.34

I think it's, I think it's::: pretty equal, to be honest over all fronts, u:m: (C.1, I.2, 310)

### Extract 1.35

Tess: to look at the flowers and stuff and and learning and teaching [P: mm] .h um that's the thing I think like, you know when you, when you said when you said now oh I'm ninety percent, it's like that's a bit silly like, don't don't think [of it like that ever because,

John: [No but I know you do but

Tess: Ja but it's only because it's those normal things like the feeding and all that stuff. [P: mm] The hardest part for me really is that I'm, I'm now waking all the time with him. I'm, that really is. The other stuff I don't think of as responsibility versus what [((husband))]'s doing (C.1, I.3, 531)

### Extract 1.36

John: [I- I think you's, I think I spend a lot of, a lot of time with him during [every day

Researcher: [mm So you don't you don't think you miss [out on ( )

Tess: [so ( )

John: no and I think there're certain experiences like I said earlier [W: mm] with the bathing and certain things that like, every individual experience could be an experience you know [W: mm] we sit in the, in

the swing and he does something new for the first time it's an experience. [W: mm] And you really appreciate that a lot (C.1, 1.3, 510)

### Extract 1.37

John: ...I think again going back to if you had more ti::me you'd be willing to, but it's not always, it's not always easy. [You know ((wife)) would probly be the opposite] ((laughs)) cos P:

[.hh what would be your ideal ]

John: that would be shew hoo hoo ((laugh))

Researcher: ja

John: cos she'd love to have a full night's sleep ((laughs)) (C.1, 1.2, 380)

### Extract 1.38

Tess: Ja but also you'll come home and sit up until two in the morning [watching something

John: [because it's the only time of the day that you actually have to yourself which is fine. (.) You know what I mean like that, that is the part of your day, that you have.

(.) ((longish pause))

Tess ((quiet)): [I don't know but I don't have any of that day, so I, do those things (.) whereas (.) I don't

John: [(hello)

Tess: know like maybe some, sometimes you could think well, it would be easier if you go, you do go to bed a bit earlier and then, you would be able to get up (for me) (.) ((goes quiet)) one, one of the days (C.1, 1.3, 839)

## Extracts from discursive case 2 (Susan and David)

### Extract 2.1

Susan: But I (.3) It's been the most amazing (.1) I never knew could feel such (.) unconditional love for a little person the minute that I (.) that he was born.

Researcher: Mm

Susan: It's just like he's – ja, he's got a part of my soul (C.2, 1.1, 330)

### Extract 2.2

Susan: Er. Being completely unselfish. And always putting, putting that other person's- Putting that child's needs before your own and always being concerned about their well-being rather than you own,

whatever you need doesn't matter. What- Only- It's only what they need that's important. Ja (C.2, I.3, 322).

### Extract 2.3

I I I was going, she probably hit the nail on the head er although I was probably going to comment she should put some of that into practice. Um (C.2, I.3, 322)

### Extract 2.4

Susan: [I don't- I probably don't get a much time as I would like. (.1) Like there was quite a (.) an issue when we first moved in where (.)um (.2) his mother said that I did- I just left #C (.) and I did not (.1) When I got home from work I (.2) I went and did my own thing and I le- I allowed #C to just play on his own, [ and that I wasn't being (.3) I wasn't mothering him properly. (.2) So that caused a bit of strain [ . (.2) Um But I'm I'm I'm a lot better now.. (C.2, I.3, 529)

### Extract 2.5

Susan: I had a- a- my friend- my best friend had a child of six, but she had to make a decision and she had to move away, and I - I always said- I said to her I don't think I could do that. I- I don't think I could be away- Just being away from #C [ for a couple of hours I'm thinking of him constantly, what's #C doing, what- I must [ phone and

David: [ ((grunt)) [ I I I think #F's a little bit too emotional for that.

Susan: Yeah. I don't think I would handle it (C.2, I.3, 1169)

### Extract 2.6

Susan: And [ then he leaves it more to me to do. [ Because I understand, because I'm the mom, I (.) I seem to understand what #C needs more than he does. [ Sometimes. (C.2, I.1 369)

### Extract 2.7

Susan: But um- (.) it's also that (.) that bond and that love that you feel and your need-- your want- your need to protect that other person.

Researcher: Mm

Susan: It makes me feel (.) quite important like I have (.) some some- such- so ((stammers)) so important that I need to live for (C.2, I.1 714)

### Extract 2.8

David: ...Now he only wants mommy. Er Just ignores daddy, so I'm sort of happy with that." (C.2, I.3, 1048)

### **Extract 2.9**

*Susan: I know that he's he's still young now. When he gets to 2, 3, he's going to want going to want daddy all the time. [ He's gonna want daddy to play soccer with him he's want gonna want daddy to*

*David: [ Er*

*David: Well let's deal with that then when we get there (C.2, I.3, 1096)*

### **Extract 2.10**

*David: The essence of a mother hhh. .Probably getting slandered from the- for this one*

*Researcher: ((chuckle))*

*David: but it's – er – you know what, taking care of- taking care of the child, feeding him and bathing him and sorting him out (.2) um (.) playing with him, making sure he's healthy, making sure he's fed, he's happy,*

*Researcher: Hm-mm*

*David: Um (.) Which also swings a lot towards the father role as well, er keeping him- keeping the child happy, playing with him, um interacting (.) um (.) Although from (.) my side of things, because I'm little bit more old-school German (C.2, I.2, 475)*

### **Extract 2.11**

*David: Um (.) The father role is- (.) takes a little bit more of the old fifties style, where the mother's job is, you know what, to feed the baby, clothe the baby, bath the baby, that kind of thing, where #F thinks no, it should be more (.) mutually beneficial so I've now got to bath the baby now and again, and (.) I've got help her with this and help him with that. [ Which I do, I do try a lot with (.) Ah (.) Just every now and again I sorta – get a little bit riled up about it. (C.2, I.2, 492)*

### **Extract 2.12**

*Susan: ... Sometimes I feel overwhelmed especially if I'm (.3) Ja because I try and help his mom in the house (.1) doing the wifely thing with cleaning and all of that (.) as much as I can, she obviously does the cooking so that's .hhh um I don't have to do that but (.2) just to him- for him to just help me [ it makes me feel wanted and (.) [ that I'm feeling appreciated for what I do do (C.2, I.3, 448)*

### **Extract 2.13**

*Susan: Mainly the- obviously I've said to you um – your mom's different parent- She's got different parenting styles than I do. Different ideas ( )*

*David: My mom's old school German; #F's I dunno*

*Susan: New school ((laughs aloud))*

David: *New age new age whiney woman. (C.2, I.3, 558)*

**Extract 2.14**

Susan: *He (.) He brings the bread- he ba- he ba- ((giggle)) Ja, he brings in the bread. [ He brings in the money. I also work (.) um so I feel that he should help as much as he can and he (.) he is trying (.) um Obviously his job is very stressful, at times he (.) he needs to just unwind and have his own time [ that's why he started this hobby now, which actually helps things a lot better because I was always nagging him "Please do this do this do this" all the time and [ that was causing conflict [ in our relationship.(C.2, I.3, 265)*

**Extract 2.15**

Susan: *Because I I I just feel that the father (.) It's important for him to (.) to experience everything that his child does, and to (.) Ja to (.) It's all about the playing and the interacting like I get on the floor with #C and (.) He needs, he loves that interaction and I - I just want his (.) his daddy to do that with him as well.*

Researcher: *Yeah. (.) And have you spoken to him (.) about that?*

Susan: *I have. Hhhh. On, ja, many occasions. And he's trying his best but (.) ja, he (.) he's a man so ((laugh)) (C.2, I.1, 605)*

**Extract 2.16**

Susan: *I was- I was a lot - I was a bit more overwhelmed than he was because he kind of knew what was – He did – I was sitting reading books, and, I had to read every- up everything and Google everything and*

David: *And I was still just [er*

Susan: *[I was anxious, and*

David: *I was still just going day by day. [ Take every day as it comes, work it from*

Susan: *[Ja I was still thinking of what's going to happen in the end... (C.2, I.3, 96)*

**Extract 2.17**

Susan: *It's instinct*

Researcher: *Mm*

David: *It actually, it actually came I think- In the beginning it came more instinctually to me than it did to #F.*

*[Susan: cough]*

Researcher: *Mm*

David: *It took her- it took her a bit longer.*



Susan: *I was a bit more fumbly, and nervous (C.2, I.3, 140)*

#### **Extract 2.18**

Susan: *[ Well a- He at times says he's just the sperm donor. ((laugh)) ... (.1) he'll say "Ah I'm not supposed to be home." [ Like he, if he mean- was meant to be away and he came home early. He uses things like that but (.) he loves his son to bits. [ And um (.4) He was more ready when we found out I was pregnant, I wa- It was a big shock for me. He was more re- (.1) calm and collected about it than I was. [ (.) Um. I think he's wanted a child for a long time. (.3) Um and ja he (.) he'll do anything for #C. [ (.3) Ja whatever whatever #C needs he's willing to do.(C.2, I.1, 349)*

#### **Extract 2.19**

*I come home from work, um, I'm tired, I'm annoyed, the last thing I want to do is ((clears throat)) sit there having a child jumping all over me... (C.2, I.3, 759)*

#### **Extract 2.20**

Susan: *( ) sometimes I want him to realize that at times I also don't want #C climbing all over me, but I just have to deal with it because I've got to put his needs before my own. Sometimes even I'm- I'm like in the WORST mood possible I want him to just – you know sometimes you just LEAVE ME ALONE, but I just I can't I can't let those feelings come forward.... (C.2, I.3, 812)*

#### **Extract 2.21**

Susan: *It's a lot to do with hormones. I think. It's also- ja often feeling- feeling that you've losing control, that you're feeling overwhelmed or- with the situation*

Researcher: *Mm*

Susan: *Um, A lot of the times I'm- I'm looking for validation from him, and then sometimes I feel like I'm not – I've- I've- I lose confidence in myself as a mother (C.2, I.3, 469)*

#### **Extract 2.22**

Susan: *((pause)) It's just you (.) you get to be a lot less (.) Their needs always come fir-, or before your own. [ And, ja even like (.) getting ready for work in the morning or (.) or making sure you look pretty for the day is often not, not possible. [ And um (.) obviously having a child also (.) changes your self-esteem and body image as well.*

Researcher: *[Mm [Mm*

Susan: *Um because your body changes a lot; (.2) pregnancy and birth, childbirth. [ And that (.) also changes things and that lowered my self-esteem a lot which is just getting better now [ but at first it was a big- (.1) a big shock*

**Extract 2.23**

*Susan: Er To a certain par- certain degree I don't agree with it. I'm a more modern (.) more modern thinking, where um I feel the father should be just (.) just as involved with their children as the wi- as the mother. Because we also we- it's not like (.3) I mean I did stay at home for a year but I'm back at work now and I work (.) just- Okay is, but um (.) I work and (.) sometimes I just need that bit of help. (C.2, l.1, 448)*

**Extract 2.24**

*David: Um. But at stages and everything it doesn't because, okay fine, #F might do all the washing, but on occasion and stuff I'll take the washing the washing outside and I'll do a load.*

*Researcher: Mm Mm*

*David: Um I might put might only might only turn the machine on and somebody else will finish loa- finish doing the load, but you know what at least I've started everything um. (C.2, l.3, 923)*

**Extract 2.25**

*Susan: And his work is physically, he's up ladders and he's drilling and he's – (.) All that ( ) that manual (.) that manual labour. (.) Um (.) Some- sometimes which he goes through a dry spell of work where he'll be stuck at home for a couple of months [ and then – (.) I did not realize it but he was playing with #C (.) while his mom needed (.) maybe she needed to take a nap or something, he was there, [ and I did not realize because I wasn't there [ , I was at work. (C.2, l.1, 556)*

**Extract 2.26**

*David: her job is more mentally tiring. [ (.) um (.) but yet she'll come home, and she'll have time to (.) chat to her friends on Fa- on Facebook and BBM [but she doesn't have time to (.) I dunno, put the sheet back on the bed [ and (.1) even straighten the bed slightly. [ She doesn't have to make it pristine and perfect (C.2, l.3, 768)*

**Extract 2.27**

*I do sometimes feel that his time is now taken away from the home a lot, from by his hobby, but I just- that's just me, I'll just have to deal with it. (C.2, l.3, 1575)*