WEAVING OUR WEB: MAKING MEANING OF IDENTITY, CONFLICT AND CONNECTION THROUGH COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

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p. 291, Submission Guidelines

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p. 235-261, Case Study

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‘‘Through dangers untold, and hardships unnumbered, I have fought my way here to the castle…’’

I have finally reached the centre of the Labyrinth, notwithstanding wrong turns, shifting barriers and unexpected twists that made me want to shout, ‘‘It’s not fair!’’ There are many people from my past and that I have met along the way that that have helped and supported me in my quest, some I would like to specifically thank here.

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DECLARATION

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

In this preface I will introduce the three pieces of work that comprise this portfolio and describe how they connect with one another. I will also share briefly their relevance to my development as a Counselling Psychologist throughout the Doctoral training.

The first piece you will read is my qualitative research, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis conducted to gain insight into the experience of holding multiple roles. I asked 'What is the lived experience of women holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when they have a partner who travels overnight regularly for work?' My six extremely busy participants took the time to share their experiences through verbal, written and visual mediums, enabling me to see that their process of meaning-making was continuous, complex and conflicting.

The second piece of work is a client study that explored my challenging and emotional journey with Jeremiah. Entitled 'Is love enough? A study of integration and identity conflict', it brings together the client groups I am most passionate about working with, and again highlights the existential challenges faced when one's sense of self is obscured by the way they feel they need to behave in order to survive in the world. As with the participants and the constricting context of their partner traveling for work, Jeremiah's context of being homeless impacted his process of meaning making, as his primary concern was most often with survival.

The final part of the portfolio is an article to be submitted for publication in the Journal of Applied Psychology, entitled 'Exploring expansionist theory: A counselling psychology perspective on women's experience of holding multiple roles alongside partner work-related travel'. The process of choosing this particular journal was a challenging one, as I simultaneously wanted to bring my research as an unexplored area to the attention of Counselling Psychology, to gender-focused publications as a continuation of the conversation about women's experience, and to Applied Psychology at large to add to its body of qualitative research. As my research methodology was not from a feminist standpoint, I chose the Journal of Applied Psychology which specifically welcomes qualitative research on the work-family interface and "encourages studies of human behaviour in novel situations" with direct practical applicability (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/apl/).

HOW THE PORTFOLIO FITS TOGETHER

On the surface, these pieces of work may seem completely different. However, both Jeremiah and my research participants were struggling to stay in contact with their authentic sense of self, in the face of what they experienced as a judgemental outside world. This caused conflict between who they saw themselves as being, and what the world makes of that identity. One way they reconciled the conflict was to seek validation from others and connection in close relationships despite absence. Additionally, the integrative nature of my work with Jeremiah echoes the article's integration of inductive research in relation to existing theory.

Personally, both the client study and research are exercises in using elements of myself as a reflexive instrument in order to understand my clients. My developing identity as a mother played a large part in how I experienced both Jeremiah and my participants; as did my

sense of being a woman, an LGBT ally, and a product of multiple cultural influences. I think it's crucial for Counselling Psychologists to appreciate how social roles impact one's sense of self and that there is often a tension between holding them and being authentic.

The focus of the journal article was to hold the experiences of the participants against a theory of multiple roles, highlighting similarities, but more so to demonstrate those processes in the theory that seemed most difficult to corroborate in other research. This suggests an important place for Counselling Psychology and phenomenological research. Initially, the authors of the theory felt those processes were important but failed to substantiate them. By looking at the lived experience of the individual, their relevance can be demonstrated more clearly.

Also, the choice of journal was two-fold, to offer something of Counselling Psychology and qualitative research to an applied journal, and to shift these findings into the eyesight of organisational psychology. As the findings have outlined the conflict of highly functioning women with a changing sense of self, finding a space to hold the conflicting nature of this research has also been paramount – honouring the individual experience while upholding the potential to contribute to theory. Kasket and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) discuss how Counselling Psychology also holds this conflict within its scientist-practitioner identity, something I have found to be true through the process of doing the Doctorate.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND INTEGRATION

I feel it is important to think about the world view of those presented in this portfolio. Spinelli (2005) suggests it comprises four dimensions: physical, public, intimate and ideological. For Jeremiah and the research participants, these don't necessarily sit well together, as their

ideology is not always followed by corresponding behaviour, leading to a sense of inauthenticity within themselves, and in intimate relationships.

Spinelli (2005) also speaks to my sense of how I see myself as a Counselling Psychologist: that the aim is always to explore what is blocking someone from their authentic being-in-the-world. Approaches such as Phenomenological Psychotherapy, Gay Affirmative Therapy, and the expansionist theory to a degree, suggest there is an overall ideology which honours the individual experience as a complex and dynamic entity. They also recognise that the external world impacts how we relate to ourselves, but do not try to claim a one-size-fits-all answer. This allows the practitioner and the person to use whatever 'techniques' help this exploration, be they claimed by the disciplines of cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic, humanistic or otherwise.

DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION

Gilligan (1982) used the analogy of a web to counter the assumed hierarchical nature of how men and women stay safe in relationship. The title of my portfolio – 'Weaving Our Web' – was the original title of my research proposal, as I wondered how women in this situation managed all their roles and stayed safe, in a psychological sense. As the project evolved and became more phenomenological, about their experience rather than their coping, the phrase was left behind. However, as it takes its place on the title page, I feel it links to Jeremiah's and my experience of trying to create a sense of safety for him, as well as relating to the participants' experiential process of safely holding multiple roles alongside their sense of self.

Phenomenological psychology's rule of horizontalisation (Spinelli, 2005), the antithesis of hierarchical structures, could also be seen as represented by a flat, web-like arrangement. The act of weaving a web symbolises constant movement between 'states': of uncertainty and empowerment, internal and external, connection and separation – seen by those in this portfolio weaving experience into meaning.

Major life transitions such as becoming a mother or experiencing a change in health status can expose or challenge one's own sense of self. It can be hard to isolate problems once they are seen, for example the way one works and how (unhealthy) work practices mask self-worth; or how contracting HIV can unseat one's internalised homophobia that was previously obscured by living in an LGBT community. New, rigid boundaries imposed by an external circumstance such as partner absence or being homeless can expose these vulnerabilities and bring internal conflict closer to the surface.

The person's relationships and ability to cope are often impacted. Blame, conflict or lack of intimacy may result when stress, drug use or disconnection from feelings increases. However, ways of staying connected or grounded are also employed while their sense of self feels fragmented. For example, Jeremiah continues to engage with services despite the chaos in his world, and the participants in the research hold their roles regardless of how much pressure they feel. The journal article shows in a more theoretical way how multiple roles can be held to a certain extent but there is a limit to which it can be beneficial. And personally, my dream of becoming a Counselling Psychologist kept me grounded throughout the fragmenting process of Doctoral training, while life continued to happen, regardless.

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RESEARCH THESIS:

A COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES ALONGSIDE PARTNER WORK-RELATED TRAVEL

ABSTRACT

Family structures and career paths have changed significantly in the last 50 years, yet women still seem to shoulder the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities, often alongside pursuing their own career. If women also have a partner who travels regularly overnight for work, research shows that roles and relationships are impacted. Very little UK research has focused on the experience of individuals and families affected by work-related travel (WRT), despite its increased prevalence in recent years.

A multi-perspectival Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was conducted to qualitatively explore a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional, and partner. Six women with preschool-age children, careers and a partner who travels regularly overnight for work participated in the study. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews incorporating open-ended questions and a visual prompt, and journals kept during one period when each participant's partner was traveling. Three master themes emerged from the analysis, each with two to four subordinate themes describing the women's experience of ongoing movement between engaging with uncertainties of their context and active choice-making, influenced by and influencing a conflicted self as it interacts with the external world.

Findings from the study have been considered alongside literature pertaining to WRT, holding multiple roles (for example Barnett and Hyde's 2001 expansionist theory), and theories of gender, transition and development. Implications for Counselling Psychology and ready applicability of the findings are also discussed. In the spirit of IPA, my impact on the research has been held in mind reflexively throughout.

ABBREVIATIONS KEY

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	IPA
Partner working away overnight	PWA
Work-related travel	WRT

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

"It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve – a story which shows, among other things, that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble."

(Gilligan, 1982, p. 6)

1.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN'S ROLES

1.1.1 A feminist roars

Germaine Greer, ever controversial, published a commentary that was to significantly change the perception of women's roles and sexuality at the end of the 1960s. The Female Eunuch (Greer, 1970) explored the challenges women faced in their attempts to hold an employment role as well as that of mother and wife. Unmarried unions producing children were frowned upon and it was expected that women would give up their work once they were married and, at the very latest, once they had children. The type of work they did, despite job adverts finally being desegregated, was generally not considered to be a career, and both female and male employers continued to prefer employing men over women.

Regardless of whether they had attained a university degree, women were paid much less than men to do the same work. Towards the end of the 1960s, they were beginning to take some control of their employment options, for example becoming bank staff for clerical agencies rather than taking permanent roles with few benefits. This, however, was the story for middle class women. In Britain, working class and poor women had always worked. The gender divide in employment was brought into existence by the 19th century English upper middle class and stuck (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Greer (1970) goes onto discuss how difficult childrearing had become as the family culture shifted from stem to nuclear configurations. This impacted women as they found themselves isolated from their families and their community, at home alone and unprepared for the lack of stimulation in running a household or raising a young family. This was very possibly exacerbated by the loss of work once marriage took place. Socio-biologists and evolutionary psychologists, as summarised by Barnett and Hyde (2001), have claimed that this development of multiple role holding is going against the evolutionary system of childrearing, and believe that it has caused psychological distress to women.

At that time, increasing pressure on women to show the world how happy and successful they were as a family unit was encouraged by media and a growing consumer culture. That these women were often miserable at home alone and relying more and more on antidepressants and other tonics went unrecognised by society as a whole (Greer, 1970). Greer also believed that the increased attention placed on the relatively small number of children compared to previous generations played a part in how those children grew up to raise their own children. This in turn, Greer says, placed undue pressure on the women and the children to display a 'perfect picture'. More than ever before there was an expectation on mothers to perform and the feeling that others were watching and judging.

Greer concludes her book with a call to women to lead a revolution towards freedom of choice and a drive for opportunity. She was not interested in 'equality' (which she felt was a genderless concept), but in the fight for women to be unapologetic and genuine in their female-ness. Only fifty years ago, the idea of women having a career, pursuing it through their lifetime and being valued on par with men in professional fields seemed like a dream to fight for.

1.1.2 Finding a voice

During an era of change and development from the 1970s to 2000, Carol Gilligan (1982), in her ground-breaking unveiling of a new way to look at human development, spoke further of this new freedom women had achieved, but of the challenges still faced: "while society may affirm publicly the woman's right to choose for herself, the exercise of such choice brings her privately into conflict with the conventions of femininity" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 70).

A poignant reflection and reiteration of Greer and Gilligan's call to arms is found in Linstead and Thomas' (2002) management research conducted through a post structural feminist lens. Greer's argument can be seen playing out through the authors' interpretations as Jackie, a female middle manager, is described hiding her feminine difference in order to be viewed the same as the men at her level and make herself appear gender neutral. Doing so, she lost sight of the fact that what she claimed as a strength – developing people – was often seen as particularly female.

Echoing through the literature on gender roles are Freud and Erikson's theories on development (for example in Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Gilligan, 1982; Greer, 1970; Miller, 1986; and Shields & Dicicccio, 2011) and, more importantly, what was omitted from the theories was the representation of women, by women. It was assumed by people like Freud and Erikson that men's role development was suitable to account for all people and that, whatever was different for women, was a deficiency of their gender. Until Horney questioned this in the 1960s, the possibility of an alternative had not been considered (Shields & Dicicccio, 2011). Her challenges slowly opened the door for a more psychologically informed and balanced understanding of gender.

The ability of women to constantly adapt and change has generally been overlooked in history because, as Miller (1986) says, their rearing of children generation after generation does not have the same ring to it as 'formal' discoveries of science. However, parenting does show how innovative women can be and what can be learnt from them. In their review of gender research to 2011, Shields and Dicicco echo Miller and others, encouraging the further use of innovation such as neurological and qualitative methodologies to unseat the power dynamic hidden behind a gendered system.

Readers may ask what relevance this history has to the research question my project seeks to answer. I feel it is important to consider how the women I met may have been influenced by this back story. It is their mothers who lived through this time and raised their daughters through the changing attitudes of the 1970s and '80s, to become the professionals, parents and partners they are today. I wonder what impact, if any, this has had on my participant's experiences. The roles may have the same names, but expectations of what is to be achieved within those roles may now be very different. This will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

Despite these shifts, some reports suggest that we are still at least fifty years away from removing the gendered gap in wages. Businesses first need to look beyond a perceived issue with women taking career breaks for caring responsibilities and instead, and make the most of their skills and experiences (Allen, 2016a, 2016b). With legislation such as shared parental leave and gender pay gap reporting being introduced, it is hoped that the UK will more swiftly begin to address the imbalance that continues to penalise women who hold multiple roles.

Organisations such as the Fawcett Society (http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/) have campaigned for women's equality for 150 years. It is recognised that we have come a long way, but still have some way to go. With this in mind, the next section will explore the psychological findings that have helped us make sense of our gendered roles, to date.

1.2 IS THERE A GENDERED DIFFERENCE IN HOLDING ROLES?

1.2.1 Challenging 'tradition'

When talking about the experience of holding roles and how people do it, why is it that women and men are treated differently in psychological literature? Historically, when looking at Freud and Erikson's theories (Gilligan, 1982), it was assumed that the development of males spoke for the entire population but now, and for the last 30 years, it has become clearer that men and women are not naturally so different, and it is culture and society that have enforced this belief.

In the years since Gilligan's (1982) research suggested that there is a different voice to be heard in terms of development (whilst stressing that this does not necessarily mean that these voices are exclusively divided by gender), further studies have been conducted in an attempt to determine how gender influences the way roles are held. Studies citing categorical role differences due to gender, for example psychological research by Abele and Spurk (2011) and Roehling and Bultman (2002) or sociological papers (Casinowsky, 2013; Gustafson, 2006), have been challenged in recent years by further studies which, when controlling for particular elements, find little or no psychological gender-related difference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hyde, 2016).

Walker, Rozee-Koker and Wallston (1987) demonstrated a gradual shift in attitude by many families, embracing dual careers and attempting to become more egalitarian in running their homes. However, social policy has remained inextricably linked with the traditional view of family structure. It is this policy, they say, that has made it difficult for families to engage in a more even distribution of responsibilities as wider support was lacking.

Smith McCracken and Weitzman (1997) take a different approach and have attempted to determine the elements men and women needed for successful planning in anticipation of holding multiple roles. They suggest that, if someone is 'developmentally ready', with the appropriate attitude toward planning, then they would find holding multiple roles less stressful. This approach includes assumptions about traditionalism, meaning 'male-dominated' careers, being a psychological characteristic and agency a masculine trait.

The authors found it surprising that those persons high on the 'independence' attitude towards multiple role planning were not as realistic with their planning, compared to those assessed as lower in agency, who were observed to ask more questions and rely on advice. Their overall results also suggested that understanding attitudes and planning in relation to multiple roles was more complex than first thought, especially in terms of independence and commitment (Smith McCracken & Weitzman, 1997).

Rao, Apte and Subbakrishna (2003), Berrington, Hu, Smith and Sturgis (2008) and then Schober and Scott in 2012 also published research in which traditional attitudes were compared to non-traditional, even if that wasn't the main aim of their investigations. Although advances of the last fifty years have been significant, as Hyde (2016) illuminates with updated statistics on work-family situations in the US, the focus remains on the status quo (traditional) and the other (non-traditional).

This language, as part of the research discourse, is neither neutral as Weber (1999) valiantly tried to uphold in her exploration of working women's experiential meanings of wellbeing, acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Shields & Dicicco, 2011) or honouring the individual as Greer (1970) and Gilligan (1982) raised many years ago. Rao et al (2003) go as far as to say that their participants' wellbeing while holding multiple roles is maintained because women understand "the realities of their life situation and have accordingly made compromises" so as not to challenge traditional Indian family roles (Rao et al, 2003, p. 182).

Gil Sola's 2016 research into how Swedish families negotiate work and childcare commutes found that those in the study fell into one of three different forms of 'gender contracts' as far as their negotiations went. Even with Sweden's progressive policies on family and work and the dominant culture being one of equality, the contracts were still named as being 'traditional' (male work takes priority over other roles), 'gender equal' and 'mixed gender' (where traditional and equal structures alternate as relevant).

Gil Sola did suggest the addition of a fourth contract – 'gender reverse' – which would counter the 'traditional' contract with a female dominant structure, however their research found no families to fall into this group (Gil Sola, 2016). This suggests that, underneath the stance of equality, assumptions of male dominance remain. In this study, it was found that these contracts had a reciprocal effect on each parent's access to work opportunities depending on how the contract impacted their commuting arrangement.

Extending this idea to work-related travel (WRT) in Sweden, Casinowsky (2013) found that "a traditional division of domestic responsibility was more pronounced among couples where the man travels frequently on business" (p. 322), regardless of whether the woman also travels for work.

Roehling and Bultman (2002) explored marital satisfaction in relation to WRT and gender ideology. This research from the US also focused on the influence of traditional and non-traditional roles in a relationship. Given that these studies have been published in the last 15 years, at what point will tradition as a term for 'male-dominated' stop being required as a marker for understanding roles within relationships?

In 2011, Abele and Spurk published a paper which tested Abele's (Abele & Spurk, 2011) recently developed 'Dual Impact Model' of social and psychological perspectives on gender and career-related processes over time. Their previous research had identified the 'masculine' trait of agency and the 'feminine' trait of communion as influences over one's 'gender-related self-concept', where how 'traditional' a person's view was related to a social attitude. Their interest was in how these might change after parenthood, from a social psychology perspective.

Although Abele and Spurk found 'weak' gendered differences in self-concept and social perspectives, they were in line with 'stereotypical expectations', discussing at length gender-related self-concept as a predictor of career-related behaviour. The finding that agency and communion influenced male and female participants to the same extent was not explored further (Abele & Spurk, 2011). The focus in the literature on traditional versus non-traditional roles and career choices continues.

1.2.2 Using gender to divide traits

Other publications have focused on the idea that women and men have different traits, in their attempts to understand how roles are held. Jean Baker Miller initially questioned this idea in her book, *Toward a New Psychology for Women* which was updated for a new generation in 1986. In the years between the first and second editions, Gilligan (1982) outlined a new voice to be honoured alongside existing theories of development, which had been, by default, assumed to be male. She went to great lengths to explain that, although she had heard this other voice through listening to women's experiences as part of her research, the overarching point was not to highlight a gender divide, but that there was another valid mode of thought to consider in our interpretations of people's stories.

Miller's slightly different take on this was that, throughout history, men had projected what they saw as more 'feminine' traits into women and then disowned them. Having done this, they then became unable to reclaim them and so, although they do exist in men, there became an impasse in the status quo of the dominant male and subordinate female, among many other power imbalances in society (Miller, 1986).

In a similar vein to Abele and Spurk (2011), Smith McCracken and Weitzman (1997) earlier referred to 'agency' being a masculine trait but without a corresponding 'feminine' trait. Other traits they discuss are not gendered. It is unclear what they were suggesting by singling this out in terms of attitudes to planning for multiple roles. They also linked agency to psychological wellbeing, a more relevant connection, given their research question. It does suggest though, that they assumed women to need a strong presence of a masculine trait in order to have better psychological wellbeing.

Conversely, Berrington et al (2008) revert to Fishbein and Ajzen's 1975 definitions of female traits to describe potential causal links between attitudes and behaviour. This choice could surely be considered outdated and there is also the question as to why women are considered to have their attitudes (and therefore behaviour) changed by traits such as 'active participation' and 'persuasive communication', more so than men.

In a more balanced recognition of how men and women interact, Schober and Scott (2012) investigated the possibility that women taking more responsibility for 'emotion work', would influence their partners and therefore their gender role attitudes after childbirth. This suggests that men also have the capacity for emotion work but, due to context (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), they may not demonstrate it as readily.

1.2.3 Bridging the divide in gender roles

Other researchers have not found such definitive differences between genders when holding multiple roles, nor have they sought to place men and women in opposing experiential categories. Marshall and Barnett (1993), Barnett and Hyde (2001) and then Hyde (2016) all discuss at length how theories to date assume an unsubstantiated, significant gender difference in personality, ability and social behaviour. They highlight the possibility that any differences found may be contextual and not innate.

Barnett and Hyde (2001) developed the expansionist theory through many years of research into families, multiple roles and role conflict. The theory outlines four principles of holding multiple roles, including that "psychological gender roles are not, in general, large or immutable" and people do not need to be forced into "highly differentiated roles" (p. 784).

They offer this with the caveat that these principles are relevant only to this point in history and may change over time.

We will return to this theory further on. As Barnett and Hyde offer such a caveat regarding their theory, so it is important to consider that other theories including 'stereotypical' and gendered explanations were a product of their time, working within societal constructs. Insights relevant to the time that we live in are needed so we can support our clients in the most appropriate way.

In 2002, Roehling and Bultman proposed a 'gender role congruence theory', drawing on Barnett and Hyde's (2001) paper. This theory suggested that a person's wellbeing could be increased or decreased by how well their gender role ideology (i.e. what they feel a gender role should be for them) matched their behaviours. Looking at it in relation to WRT, their initial findings were mixed, possibly due to the small sample size, or complex moderating factors.

Research like this seems to depend on an assumption that the constructs they are measuring remain relatively constant over time. If it is actually the case, as Linstead and Thomas (2002) believe, that elements of identity is not stable or predictable and can change focus at any moment, then developing a measure to determine how gender, identity and roles interact will be more difficult than researchers such as Abele and Spurk (2011), Smith McCracken and Weitzman (1997) and others anticipated.

Linstead and Thomas refer to Knights and Vurdubakis' (1994, cited in Linstead & Thomas, 2002) understanding of identity as a "project, not an achievement", suggesting that identity is

an ever-developing concept, constantly influenced by other factors. This idea bears a similarity to Sartre's description of the self, as discussed by Spinelli (2005) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). This view challenges historical definitions of identity from the fields of social and personality psychology (Stets & Burke, 2000). An alternative psychological approach such as this is worth considering, given society's changing understanding of gender and identity.

West and Zimmerman's oft-cited paper from 1987 presents an understanding of gender that challenges the assumptions of differences being 'essential'. It instead suggests that society has created a closed system that use descriptions of man and woman based on observed differences in the absence of understanding what confirms their sex category. These have then been used to reinforce those differences, and been taken as the normal and natural way to 'do gender'.

They (West & Zimmerman, 1987) argue that the act of being gendered is socially constructed and, as such, its focus can be changed, just as Linstead and Thomas (2002) say identity can. If this is the case, where does that leave gender roles and their associated attitudes? West and Zimmerman (1987) cite the example of Agnes the transgender woman as a challenge to the fixedness of gender. Today, with the increase in people questioning the gender binary concept, this investigation into the social construction of gender roles becomes even more pertinent.

1.3 GENDER AND HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES

Historically, gender roles have been much more segregated than they may be considered today. As women have become more involved in paid work outside the home, it has been

wondered how attitudes towards gender roles may be changing. Research has tried to make sense of how these societal changes have impacted individuals.

1.3.1 Gender role attitudes

Berrington et al (2008) and Schober and Scott (2012) explored the impact of having children on men and women's gender role attitudes. Both longitudinal studies, conducted in the UK, used survey data repeatedly collected over a number of years in an attempt to determine whether attitudes do have a causal effect on behaviour.

Berrington and colleagues (2008) struggled to uphold the causal relationship they were investigating. However, they did find a connection between new mothers with more traditional views and the likelihood that they will change their work situation, for example by either reducing their hours or leaving altogether. They then reported that more traditional gender role attitudes developed as a result of this changing of their work situation. Conversely, new mothers who did not reduce their work hours were seen to retain their pre-birth gender role attitudes.

Following on from this study, Schober and Scott reported in 2012 that if "work and care arrangements did not conflict with prenatal gender role attitudes", they remain stable for parents after having a baby (Schober & Scott, 2012, p. 526). However, they also found that the woman's earnings did significantly impact her decision to return to work because of childcare costs, whereas the man's earnings did not. Such factors could influence their gender role attitudes, leading the authors to conclude that "a combination of psychological and structural factors help shape gender role attitudes" (Schober & Scott, 2012, p. 527).

Schober and Scott (2012) refer to cognitive dissonance as a driver for change in relation to gender role attitudes. They also cite sociologists Stets and Burke (2000) and West and Zimmerman (1987) as using the same concept. In their paper, Schober and Scott (2012) look at cognitive dissonance as a form of tension between a participant's initial gender role attitude and its fit with the situation they are in. They asked, if this tension is significant, can it influence attitude change?

1.3.2 The complexities of labour division

As will be explored in further detail below, it can be seen that no equation or causal relationship exists to make sense of how families divide the labour at home and what impact gender has on these decisions. Despite some researchers seeking to find a clear answer (Glynn, Maclean, Forte & Cohen, 2009; Martire, Parris Stephens & Townsend, 2000; Smith McCracken & Weitzman, 1997), none have succeeded so far.

West and Zimmerman refer to Berk's comments from 1985 (in West & Zimmerman, 1987), that division of labour is about more than whose time is more valued. Rather, there is something 'gendered' about *how* the time is allocated within a couple and what falls to what men 'don't' and women 'do'. The acknowledgment needed here is of the implicit expectation that women take on anything outside the home *in addition to* their domestic responsibilities (Gaddy, Glass & Arnkoff, 1983; Hochschild, 2002; Thompson, 1993), and until that is accounted for explicitly, understanding the division of labour in families will include significant unaccounted-for variance (Smith McCracken & Weitzman, 1997).

Some interest has been shown in how multiple roles are held when additional constraints are placed on families. Regarding one such demand, WRT, there is an assumption about

women retaining their domestic roles in a similar way to those families who hold multiple roles but don't travel for work. Gustafson (2006) and Casinowsky (2013) both found this in their quantitative Swedish-based studies, however neither of these are from the field of psychology and nor do they explore what this is like for their participants.

Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016) explored, qualitatively, the organisation of US families with a mother involved in WRT. They found that, although the parent at home was supportive of their partner's job and roles were generally negotiated, domestic tasks remained gendered and women tended to keep the majority of this responsibility despite their regular absence.

Another sociological study, this research offered more insight into the experience of the family members, identifying themes such as independence, interdependence, resilience and self-reliance. However, such claims could do with being explored further from a psychological perspective. Additionally, having analysed this data through a feminist social constructionist lens, the gendered division of labour has been held as significant (Swenson & Zvonkovic, 2016). Analysis from a different epistemological stance may well produce different conclusions.

1.4 THE DIFFERENT VIEWS ON HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES

One of the challenges with understanding the research on multiple roles to date, gender aside, is that it is an area of interest to many disciplines within social science and further afield. Some of the published work is written by psychologists, using psychological terms appropriately. Other research is making psychological assumptions without necessarily having the required background to support it, which leads to a range of terminology being used for similar concepts. Hyde (2016) refers to Kelley's description of this as the 'jangle

fallacy' (in Hyde, 2016, p. 96) which must be observed to ensure we honour the Counselling Psychology underpinnings of this research. Some empirically based, psychological concepts around holding multiple roles will be described next.

1.4.1 Gender Role Ideology

The use of ideology as a term suggests more of an overarching world view in relation to the roles one holds. Barnett and Hyde (2001) and Himmelweit and Sigala (2004), although from different disciplines, employ the word ideology to demonstrate a contrast with another constraint. In the former's case, the process of fitting one's gender-role ideology to holding multiple roles can contribute beneficial effects. In the latter example, conflict between ideology and behavioural constraints can influence a woman's identity. The question here is not how Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) employ 'ideology' in a similar or different way to a psychological understanding, but whether by 'identity' change they actually mean 'attitude' in a similar way to Schober and Scott (2012), in order to explain the experience of their participants.

1.4.2 Role Salience/Centrality

Martire et al (2000) choose role 'centrality' to express the main concept in their research, over similar psychological terms such as role salience and role commitment. It is not known whether this is a similar or interchangeable construct with ideology or identity in other research. They found that the centrality of a role could have a positive effect on psychological wellbeing but could also increase stress in certain roles.

1.4.3 Self-complexity

Koch and Shepperd's 2004 review of the research and literature conducted in relation to Linville's (1985, 1987) theory of self-complexity has highlighted the many different uses of the term with a range of adaptations and outcomes. Her original definition is that 'greater complexity of self-representation entails organising self-knowledge in terms of greater numbers of aspects that are relatively independent of one another' (Linville, 1985, p. 95).

Linville believed it acted as a buffer against difficulties within self aspects, which were considered to be not just social roles but relationships, types of activity, traits, goals and more. She argued against others who believed that numerous self aspects led to a fragmented sense of self and reduced wellbeing, saying that a number of independent self aspects is a positive cognitive structure.

1.4.4 Role Conflict/Enhancement (e.g. work-family conflict)

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in detail the extensive body of research on work-family conflict. An especially pertinent and psychologically-derived paper is that by Marshall and Tracy in 2009, who explored the impact of work-family conflict on working mothers with infants. Another longitudinal study, the authors describe work-family conflict as the positive or negative influence of one 'microsystem' on another, including elements such as job and family satisfaction, psychological health, marital tension and parenting.

They found that poorer quality jobs impacted the depressive symptoms of mothers with young children more than longer working hours did. Additionally, mothers with less healthy children displayed more depressive symptoms and single parents experienced more work-family conflict than married people (Marshall & Tracy, 2009). This view of work-family conflict is important to consider in comparison to Linville's (1985, 1987) research into self-

complexity. Linville's view was that self aspects (i.e. multiple roles) could maintain clear differentiation, where Marshall and Tracy believed that roles and environments dynamically influenced one another.

Executive travellers in Australia with reduced work-life balance had increased work-related stress in the form of a sense of 'foreignness' at home and general instability, but this experience did not induce any intention to change their habits. For the male travellers, having a stay-at-home partner was the norm (Black & Jamieson, 2007). Female executives reported and observed to still be expected to organise their family lives as well as travel, so role conflict existed consistently, as work was prioritised over family.

The research described so far suggests that differences in experience may not be due to the 'natural order' of things, but as a result of socially constructed boundaries. How men and women hold their roles, as a result of single item measures and large-scale quantitative research, have been distilled into previously defined categories. These categories have not necessarily questioned the gendered assumptions that previous research and their own hypotheses have made. We cannot turn back time, but we can use our critical skills to create a space for Counselling Psychology to explore this and suspend definitions to allow people's voices to be heard, as Gilligan did over 30 years ago (Gilligan, 1982).

1.5 THE EXPERIENCE OF HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES

The vast majority of research found on holding multiple roles is quantitative. For example, the UK studies mostly make use of the British Household Panel Survey and attempt to make sense of people's experiences from there (Berrington et al, 2008; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; Schober & Scott, 2012). Within the disagreement between factions over role overload,

role conflict and role enhancement, there is a consensus that the role/s an adult holds does impact their life, yet there remains a lack of research into the qualitative experience.

1.5.1 The place of differentiation and connection

Gilligan's (1982) theory of development towards maturity explored the idea of people moving from a place of differentiation to connection in order to hold multiple roles and relationships. This challenged the dominance of earlier theories where the aim of developmental stages was seen to overcome conflict and separate from others, despite Gilligan recalling that Freud himself identified moves in this direction to be relevant. By highlighting this alternative thought, Gilligan suggests that there is a place for both in human development.

She also described the place of aggression in a different way to earlier theorists, in that it was demonstrated when disconnection was threatened, as opposed to others who believed the fear of connection prompted such a response (Freud, 1930, cited in Gilligan, 1982). These are interesting juxtapositions in light of Linville (1985, 1987) and Marshall and Tracy's (2009) perspectives, as they hold different views of the importance of internal separation or connection on role interaction and their impact on the individual.

1.5.2 Coping with multiple roles

McLaughlin, Cormier and Cormier (1988) and Rao et al (2003), in different countries and with 15 years between them, explored how people coped with holding multiple roles. It was found that self-care strategies were important in both cases and inversely, without making use of these strategies, distress increased. Interestingly, the idea of being realistic was reflected on in both studies. For Rao et al (2003), the participants were aware of their cultural limitations and worked within those, whereas McLaughlin and colleagues (1988)

made recommendations that female participants, who seemed to experience more pressure from others than men, would be better supported by allowing themselves not to be 'superwoman' rather than forcing use of self-care strategies.

In 2009, Glynn et al published researched that again demonstrated how complex it was to understand the relationship between mental health and multiple roles. Using single item measures, they attempted to assess the impact of role overload, finding that increased role overload negatively impacted mental health. The authors reflected that the limitations of their research such as using single item measures and a cross-sectional design may have affected the internal consistency.

However, they did report a strong positive relationship among marital quality, job quality and mental health, contributing to Barnett and Hyde's (2001) belief that these may act as buffers for multiple role stress (see below). The study concluded by stating that "it is becoming increasingly apparent that women's experience of multiple roles needs to be explored in a way that addresses the interaction of roles" (Glynn et al, 2009, p. 222) and how social context mediates experience.

Greenberger and O'Neil (1993) challenged the dominant research focus of the time and, instead of separating roles to find the relationship between them, looked at how people experienced role commitments and other elements when holding parent, partner and worker roles. Wary of the limitations of their study, they set out to find a 'construction', rather than causal relationship between men and women's well-being and roles when they had preschool-aged children. They found that work quality and feeling supported were important elements for women in minimising anxiety, depression and role strain. Marital and parental satisfaction didn't impact role strain but did influence anxiety and depression.

1.5.3 Role distress

Thoits wrote a number of very influential articles exploring role distress and gender from a sociological and psychological point of view (Thoits, 1983, 1986, 1992). Her theory, developed from research, went on to inspire further research. Thoits' 1983 article hypothesised a curvilinear relationship between role accumulation and distress, believing that there must be a cap to the benefits of multiple roles. However, she found this was not the case in this particular piece of research. Instead, holding more than one role is not necessarily bad for one's wellbeing and, indeed, seemed to be beneficial. This finding was taken on by Barnett and Hyde (2001) and investigated further, where the curvilinear relationship was borne out and expansionist theory resulted.

In 1986, when comparing married and unmarried women and men, Thoits found that working women displayed a little more distress than the other groups, but overall there was very little difference. Regarding women and work, Thoits (1983) acknowledged that the distress expressed could be related more to role strain, as in the early 1980s it could still be considered a novelty that women worked at all. She wrote that, prior to this, research had indicated role distress to be directly linked with multiple roles.

In Linstead and Thomas' (2002) poststructuralist feminist commentary on identity, they raise the issue of how middle managers in a particular organisation experience their work identities 'colonising the spaces' (Linstead & Thomas, 2002, p. 16) in their life and how this impacts their sense of self and wellbeing in different ways. The managers' contributions were analysed through Foucauldian Discourse, highlighting the power differentials and gendered assumptions in this particular workplace. More striking is that all four participants

experienced how the constant pressure and insecurity of their work roles - their 'masks' - impacted their identity.

1.5.4 The Scarcity Hypothesis

An earlier understanding of holding multiple roles was that of the Scarcity Hypothesis, described by Marshall and Barnett (1993). It was thought that people had limited time and energy to undertake multiple roles and so conflict and overload was inevitable. Additionally, the energy required to move from one role to another was thought to deplete a person's reserves. Although empirical evidence supported this hypothesis, for example Nordenmark (2002) and those cited by Marshall and Barnett (such as Coser, 1974; Goode, 1960; and Slater, 1963 in Marshall & Barnett, 1993), support for the alternative Expansion Hypothesis (Marks, 1977; and Sieber, 1974 in Marshall & Barnett, 1993) was eventually greater.

1.5.5 Expansionist theory

In response to Thoits' (1983) call for further research and following Barnett's previous studies that challenged the Scarcity Hypothesis (for example Marshall & Barnett, 1993), Barnett and Hyde (2001), developed a theory of holding multiple roles. Called the expansionist theory, the theory suggests that, if a person makes use of certain processes and adheres to particular conditions, their identity can expand to hold multiple roles with minimal conflict or distress. A review of this theory and related research has very recently been published by Hyde (2016), updated to include same-sex partnerships, intersectionality and the impact of today's global, 24/7 work environment.

In addition to the studies Hyde (2016) reviews in her updated chapter, the expansionist theory has been considered by other researchers in their investigations of multiple role

impact, with differing results. Where Nordenmark's research in Sweden found marginally more support for role stress rather than expansion hypothesis, while pointing to some of the processes outlined below as being potentially relevant (Nordenmark, 2002), Rao and colleagues (2003) were able to identify several moderators and processes in their research on Indian women holding multiple roles. Roehling and Bultman (2002) also referred to the theory when exploring WRT and marital satisfaction in the US.

It might be helpful here to consider the methodology of the studies. Nordenmark (2002) made use of an existing survey and drew conclusions from these, possibly without a psychological background to support understanding of distress and wellbeing. Conversely, Rao et al's (2003) team of psychologists draw conclusions using specifically chosen measures and an in-depth understanding of wellbeing and coping. Roehling and Bultman (2002), while using a simple set of questions compared to Rao and colleagues' (2003) mixed methods approach, also used their psychological backgrounds to interpret their results and, as a result, were better able to make use of Barnett and Hyde's (2001) theory.

In contrast to research discussed earlier that attempted to simplify the concept of roles, gender and attitudes, expansionist theory recognises the complex nature of holding multiple roles and seeks to consider them within its structure. It also encompasses many of the conflicting terms found in the literature and discussed above, offering an overarching psychological approach to this phenomenon (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Barnett and Hyde's (2001) expansionist theory works on four principles, of which all but three processes (see below) were upheld in Hyde's 2016 review:

1) That multiple roles are generally beneficial and that commitment to one role does not preclude another.
2) A number of processes contribute to what makes multiple roles beneficial for people, see below for examples.
3) The benefit of holding multiple roles is conditional: elements such as role quality and observing the upper limits of one's capacity are crucial.
4) Psychological gender differences are not large or immutable and it is not necessary to force differentiation.

1) Multiple roles are generally beneficial

Although many large quantitative studies had been conducted since 2001, often citing inappropriate causal relationships, some more experience-based studies demonstrated this principle in more depth. In particular, the work-family enrichment of holding multiple roles appeared linked to better mental and physical health.

2) A number of processes contribute

Buffering: Barnett & Marshall (1993) refer to job quality, partner support, marital satisfaction and relationship quality as positive buffers that moderate stress from other roles and lead to less damage on health and relationships.

Added income: Hyde (2016) found that, especially when the couple saw themselves as co-providers, marital satisfaction was enhanced. It was also recognised that, in many cases, a second income was essential for families to manage.

Social support is seen to be an important process for enhancing multiple role benefits, especially in conflict between work and family roles (Hyde, 2016).

Increased self-complexity: it seems that no single definition of self-complexity has been used in the literature, producing a range of findings (Koch and Shepperd, 2004). If an individual possesses a number of identities, they are more likely to have a form of protection against difficulties if the identities are harmonised (Hyde, 2016). However, Hodges & Park (2013, cited in Hyde, 2016) found that women hold their career and mother identities separately, which may either deplete their energy when moving between the two, or enable them to shift from one to the other to retain a positive sense of self when experiencing difficulty.

Three other processes outlined in the original theory remained of interest to Hyde in 2016, despite no further supporting research. She concluded that the first, *opportunities to experience success* may be a specific example of how role quality is needed to ensure holding multiple roles are beneficial. A second process suggested that by holding multiple roles, an *expanded frame of reference* is offered. The third of these unsubstantiated processes, *similarity of experience,* suggested that a shared frame of reference within a partnership is beneficial for holding multiple roles in a positive way.

These three processes seem especially salient to practicing psychologists, especially Counselling Psychologists. When working with stressed, anxious or depressed clients, empowerment and growth facilitation alongside authentic relating with another is incredibly important (Cooper, 2009). Holding multiple roles allows for more experiences to build an individual's picture of their life world, and therefore resilience. Being able to connect with another, developing a shared experience and supporting each other with that is also a fundamental element of being-in-the-world (Spinelli, 2005). So, although Hyde may conclude that lack of research undermines the validity of these processes, it feels important not to discard them just yet.

3) The benefit of holding multiple roles is conditional, requiring moderators

Gender role ideology is believed to be relevant, as someone with a more traditional ideology will not find multiple roles beneficial, for themselves or for their partner. Conversely, a more liberal gender role ideology would be enhanced by holding multiple roles. This can be seen in Roehling and Bultman's 2002 exploration of how WRT impacts marital satisfaction. Hyde (2016) is careful to employ the term 'traditional' in a more critical way than previous research.

It is also understood that there is an *upper limit* to holding multiple roles in the form of quantity or demands of the roles. For example, if a role is added to someone's load without warning, or the expectation from a role increases dramatically, the ability to hold those roles in a beneficial way may be compromised, leading to increased distress or reduced wellbeing and health. Thoits (1983) first investigated this, finding no point where multiple roles induced distress. Psychological research since this time has demonstrated otherwise, including how it can be a nuanced balance to achieve and relating to the final condition, *role quality.*

4) Psychological gender differences are not large

This is not to say that men and women are the same but, in holding multiple roles, the case for maintaining traditional differentiation has no place and people can be supported to pursue multiple roles without limitation due to gender (Hyde, 2016).

In this research there is much theorising, but little told about the actual experiences of people holding multiple roles, especially today. What is it like for men and women now? Some of the research suggested that equal role division to support holding multiple roles, even in progressive countries like Sweden, was challenged when under strain of absence

(Casinowsky, 2013; Gustafson, 2006). If a partner is committed in a relationship, but is regularly absent from the home for longer than a working day, what becomes of the 'gender contracts' and equal division of labour?

Roehling and Bultman (2002) explored this situation in relation to the elements of expansionist theory, finding that the relationship between WRT and marital satisfaction was moderated by gender, gender role ideology and parental status. In particular, the difference between higher and lower marital satisfaction for both partners when the male partner travelled was related (respectively) to whether 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' roles were held. They conclude that 'for working parents, the strain of the husband's WRT cannot be absorbed without cost when behaviour does not equal a couple's gender role ideology' (Roehling & Bultman, 2002, p. 290).

To provide more background to this study, we will next look at the literature to date on WRT and consider why it is important for psychologists to research how it is experienced.

1.6 WORK-RELATED TRAVEL (WRT)

1.6.1 UK statistics

In 2015 it was estimated that spending on business-related trips abroad increased by 30%, and the number of visits also grew by nearly 6% compared to 2014. Overall, that accounts for just under 11% of the UK's overnight travel (where approximately 65% of travel consisted of holidays and 22% family visits), and increases to 16% amongst Londoners. More striking, is that the amount of money spent on business-related trips in 2015 increased by 30.2% (ONS, 2016). This data suggests that the importance of WRT may have increased for employers, given this significant rise in spending. However, very little UK research has been

conducted on the psychological impact of WRT on families. Most of the literature is from the US or Sweden (see review below).

Makela, Bergbom, Saarenpaa and Suutari (2015) cite reasons for WRT to include international business, virtual, computer and project-based assignments in addition to expatriation. Additionally, multinational companies, markets and customers all take advantage of improved connections and transport options, meeting face-to-face whenever possible.

1.6.2 Types of absence

WRT literature covers a variety of absences and refers to the concept with a range of terminology. These differences were considered in Gustafson's (2006) introduction to research on the relationship between WRT, gender and family obligations. Given the spread of this body of research across different disciplines, it is difficult to make generalisations, however some experiences seem to be more common across situations. A range of quantitative, qualitative, mixed method, cross-sectional and longitudinal methodologies have been employed in a number of countries to capture these experiences.

Some absences could be considered 'stable', such as the FIFO (fly in fly out) communities in Australia where a partner would have a regular shift pattern alternating between working a period of time in rural Australia, mostly supporting the mining industry and time off at home (usually) in a city with their family (Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). This stability enabled the other partner to pursue their own line of work.

It was regarded that participants in this particular study differed from those in roles such as offshore work as the type of absence allowed them to maintain their independence regardless. Similar to this might be the 'commuter marriage' that Ferk (2005) explores, where the couple is separated regularly for at least two nights a week and maintain two residences by choice, in order to pursue their respective careers. This seems to have been a specific focus of research in the United States.

Research by Parkes, Carnell and Farmer (2007) and Thomas and Bailey (2009) substantiated the suggestion by Taylor and Simmonds (2009), as the longer periods of offshore absence (mining or fishing) result in different opportunities and ways of coping. Military deployment also results in longer term absence (Borelli, 2013).

What has become more common in recent years is the regular, temporary absence of people in business roles, who have become accustomed to traveling elsewhere in order to carry out their work. In their thematic analysis of the experience of this population, Nicholas and McDowall (2012) refer to them as 'business travellers'. Other studies name the phenomenon as 'frequent overnight work travel' (Black & Jamieson, 2007; Casinowsky, 2013; Lirio, 2014; Swenson & Zvonkovic, 2016; and Swenson, Zvonkovic, Rojas-McWhinney & Gerst, 2015).

1.7 THE EXPERIENCE OF HAVING A PARTNER WHO TRAVELS FOR WORK

1.7.1 Intermittent husband absence/syndrome

In Gustafson's (2006) literature review, a briefly entertained concept of 'intermittent husband syndrome' was also mentioned. This was researched in the UK as a potential issue for psychiatry in relation to the partners of people (usually men) working offshore. It was

suggested by Taylor, Morrice, Clark and McCann in 1985 (cited in Gustafson, 2006), that those most affected by this syndrome would be newly married working wives with preschool-age children and limited experience of husband absence, especially when the absence was intermittent.

Follow up studies were scarce (Rigg & Cosgrove, 1994, cited in Gustafson, 2006; Parkes et al, 2007) and did not replicate the original findings. Subsequent research into the effects of WRT on partners has not raised any further interest in this phenomenon from a psychopathy point of view. However, other research (discussed below) demonstrates a clear impact on the wellbeing of families.

1.7.2 Impact on the self

An issue highlighted by Casinowsky (2013), Swenson et al (2015) and Trussell and Shaw (2007) is the pressure one partner experienced when the other is away, and how isolating that could feel for them. The spouses in Parkes et al's (2007) research in Scotland echoed this. Despite reporting, generally, that they managed the extended periods of separation well when their partner was offshore, there was often loneliness and the challenge of always being responsible for making decisions.

With the focus on responsibilities, participants in all three studies reported that there was very little time to spend on personal pursuits. Casinowsky (2013) found that women and men have the same amount of non-work time but women are less likely to use it for themselves. This was most recently echoed by Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016) in their research into mothers engaging in WRT.

The need for one partner to carry on in the absence of the other was recognised in a number of studies, but none more noticeably than in Thomas and Bailey's (2009) sociological account of a seafarer's experience of time. The significant length of time spent apart meant that each partner had a different sense of time – the one left behind carried on 'as normal', while the seafarer was projected into a completely different trajectory, across time zones and working shifts. When together, the challenges of not understanding each other's experience while counting down to the next departure were marked.

1.7.3 Impact on the relationship

Despite statistics in the US and the UK pointing to WRT becoming increasingly significant for people, there is still relatively little research into the phenomena. What research there is comes from a range of disciplines – geography, sociology, business, human resources and psychology. Most research has been conducted in the US and Sweden, with a small number of studies taking place in the UK and Australia. Understandably, if Swenson et al (2015) estimate that 30% of America's workers undertake 'frequent overnight work travel', it would be considered an important area to explore.

Research conducted by Jackson, Brown and Patterson-Stewart (2000) and Rhodes (2002) into how different work contexts within a family impact women's experience of motherhood have found that one's partner regularly travelling overnight for work can cause significant disruption to relationships and family connectedness. Some elements explored so far have been in relation to partner perceptions of absence, communication and attachment. From a psychologist's point of view, the impact of working away on relationships is of interest as that dynamic can have far-reaching influence as well as highlighting elements that may not be recognised in situations with less demands.

1.7.4 Partner perceptions of absence

Swenson et al (2015) explored the dynamic of relationships and WRT with a mixed methods design, partly based on Kelley's Interpersonal Process Framework (Kelley et al, 2002, cited in Swenson et al, 2015). A psychological approach being utilised in a sociological study, the researchers found no gender differences in how couples experienced their relationship and work demands yet, within couples, partners spoke about their experiences in a similar way.

The way different couples were found to focus on the nature of their relationship as individuals and socially was broken down into three 'types' of couples: those who were aware; individually focused; or isolated. These types demonstrated how the couples experienced and talked about the 'common stressor' of WRT, and also related to whether/how they engaged with external networks.

1.7.5 Communication

Several of the studies found that communication was an important feature for relationships when one partner was absent with work. Making an effort to keep in contact, and the subsequent stress if this wasn't possible, was quite clearly described by both partners at times (Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). However, as Swenson et al found (2015), this could depend on the type of couple, or even the attachment style of each partner (Diamond, Hicks and Otto-Henderson, 2008).

This wasn't to say that there wasn't a fair amount of independence. Many of the non-traveling partners described having to find ways to cope with making decisions and managing alone, which could be a challenge for the returning partner if it seemed like they were returning to a well-organised unit. Other partners reported willingly handing over

responsibility when their partner returned, whether they were ready to take that on or not (Parkes et al, 2007).

1.7.6 Attachment

Two American studies have explored attachment in relation to partner absence. In 2008, Diamond et al published a quantitative study that used self-report measures and a physiological test to monitor the separation effects when one partner travelled. They suggested that these effects may be moderated by whether: the partner was the one at home or traveling; their attachment style was anxious or avoidant; they made contact; and in what form.

A small sample size meant that the results had limited generalisability, however they were significant in suggesting the different responses to separation could be moderated, particularly that an anxious or avoidant attachment style impacted stress levels in different ways at different points during the separation (Diamond et al, 2008).

The other study on attachment explored marital satisfaction through the process of military deployment (Borelli, 2013). Using a mixed method approach, the theories of attachment (narrative coherence in interview) and interdependence (the prevalence of 'we-talk') were hypothesised to predict marital satisfaction. The partners of military personnel were interviewed and asked to complete self-report measures periodically from two weeks prior to separation until two weeks after return, with mixed results.

The outcome of these studies suggest that further exploration is required to understand how adult attachment and planned absence influence experience of relationships. Another

aspect brought out by Swenson and Zvonkovic's (2016) grounded theory research, is the importance of independence (that is, resilience and self-reliance) and interdependence, being in connection with another. They found that the families very much valued both elements at different stages of the mother's absence.

1.8 RELEVANCE TO COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

As a Counselling Psychologist, our role is to sit with someone while they make sense of who they are in relation to themselves, others and the world they live in (Kasket, 2012). It is important to work holistically, which can only come from exploring what it is like for women to hold these roles in the first place without pathologising or assuming to know what their experiences might be (Cooper, 2009). Despite Counselling Psychology's interest in identity, wellbeing, empowerment and relationships, this phenomenon has not been the focus of any research to date.

With its concern for facilitating growth, a Counselling Psychology value is to help actualise potential (Kasket, 2012). It also accounts for the possibility that one's experience may be conflicting (Moore & Rae, 2009) which, given the inconclusive nature of the research to date, is important to acknowledge. This research question will explore women's experience of holding multiple roles in order to pursue their goals, in addition to supporting a partner who may also be striving toward actualising their potential. This may give rise to conflicting experiences.

Women (or their family members) holding multiple roles may present for support in the different contexts where Counselling Psychology is involved (Moore & Rae, 1998), for example GP surgeries, family centres, education settings, employee assistance programmes

or whilst holding management roles, recruitment, private providers and statutory or non-government mental health services. More specifically, it may arise in military or FIFO communities where absence is standard but women are increasingly pursuing their own careers (as discussed in Huffman, Craddock, Culbertson and Klinefelter, 2017). Counselling Psychology's recognition of how different psychology disciplines may view this phenomenon will allow an understanding to be developed from perspectives influenced, but not dictated by, theories, and will remain inherently focused on the uniqueness of experience.

1.9 SUMMARY

The research explored here is either a product of its time, or does not directly represent the current UK culture and policies. There feels a need to return to the individuals, allowing women to describe their experiences in their own words, without historical, patriarchal language and assumptions of what women 'do' or 'don't' do, or what 'traditional' and 'egalitarian' means in a contemporary context.

There is also a need to honour women's experiences as that, without necessarily looking through a critical feminist lens or from a single standpoint of power and control, although these may possibly form part of their experiences. The women in this study may have been influenced by earlier feminist discourse, either directly or via their parents. What is it like to hold multiple roles, with a backdrop of women's emancipation, in a fast-paced, demanding world where families are often organised very differently to previous generations?

Research has outlined how much family structures and career paths have changed since Greer published *The Whole Woman* in 1970, yet women still seem to shoulder the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities. This seems to indicate a conflict. Government

has introduced policies to help close the gender pay gap, but these have not yet brought the promised shift; and while the UK has a work culture that demands so much of people, it continues to cut mental health resources and support for new parents, including affordable child care.

Barnett and Hyde's (2001) expansionist theory now accounts for modern day contexts. Hyde (2016) specifically says that her update was based mostly on US research, and as seen in this literature review, most research does hail from the US or Sweden. She also says that further research is needed into how the 'New Economy' of 24/7 work patterns, employment instability and mobility is impacting how families experience their work-life balance. It seems from the research that understanding what it's like to balance multiple roles will give further insight into how to support people to do so.

Lirio (2014), after conducting research on the overnight traveller's experience recognised the importance of also looking into the family members' experience of work-family functioning. Similarly, Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016) recognise the growing trend of WRT and suggest that work-family research reflects this. We have statistics to estimate that there is a considerable amount of overnight work travel from the UK, and we know that women are simultaneously pursuing careers and raising young families.

As Hyde (2016) also reflected, much of the research on holding multiple roles tries, and struggles, to make causal explanations in order to help reduce distress and improve coping. Given the scarce recent psychological research on the experience of WRT, despite its growing prevalence and impact on family roles in the UK, it feels important to ask a qualitatively different question. Findings may provide insight that offer directly relevant suggestions for further research and support, as reflected by Glynn et al (2009). Previous

research has often used data and constructs that do not necessarily access what it is like for people to live this experience, and so new, rigorous psychological research is required.

Phenomenological researchers often quote Husserl when describing the underlying process of researching the lived experience and it seems apt here. Going 'back to the things themselves' (Husserl, in Finlay, 2011, p. 3), I ask, from a Counselling Psychology perspective: what is a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when her partner travels regularly overnight for work?

1.10 PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY

Being one of the first in my friendship group to have a child, I hadn't really considered how I would simultaneously hold a career, relationship and parenthood. During my maternity leave, I met some incredible women who were driven in their careers, yet committed to trying to be a 'good enough' mother. Many of those women had partners, also with demanding careers, which regularly took them away from home overnight.

As we returned to work and began to make sense of our new working parent identity, I began to notice how challenging this partner absence was for those friends and started wondering, not *how* they did it, as I had witnessed their supreme organisational skills, but what it was *like* for them to have this intermittent presence/absence during a time that is already one of great personal change. My partner did not travel for work and, as I embarked on the DPsych course, I was incredibly grateful for their consistent support while under such intense pressure. When the time came to write my proposal, I did some preliminary literature searches and couldn't believe that this area had not yet been explored, and so decided that I must ask the question.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes my process of undertaking the study. It will begin with formalising the research question and go on to discuss epistemological considerations and rationale for the choice of methodology. The evolution of the method will then be described, including how the pilot, recruitment and data collection was undertaken. This will also include an introduction to the participants and ethical considerations pertaining to the study. Finally, an explanation of how I approached the analysis will be provided, as background for the following chapter. Appendices referred to in this chapter have been included to assist readers in visualising how the research took shape. Additionally, references to my reflexive process will be throughout the document, represented within a blue bubble, as at the end of the previous chapter.

As discussed in the first chapter, when considering the prevalence of women pursuing careers while raising a family, and the growing number of people in the UK whose work requires them to regularly be away from home for a night or more at a time, it begs the question: what is a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional and partner, when her partner travels overnight regularly for work?

Some of the literature considered the multiple role experiences of parents with infants or pre-schoolers, such as Abele and Spurk (2011), Berrington et al (2008), Greenberger and O'Neill (1993), Himmelweit and Sigala (2004), Marshall and Tracy (2009), and Schober and Scott (2012). As has been found in other research (for example, by Bowlby, 1988; Gordon & Gluzman, 2007; Hibel, Mercado & Trumbell, 2012; and Lemma, Target & Fonagy, 2011), the

experience of motherhood in the first five years of a child's life has a particular quality. Additionally, it follows just after a period of major transition concerning the entry to parenthood, as explored by, among others, Gilligan (1982) and Smith (1999a; 1999b).

Although these elements have been well-documented individually, they have not been explored much in a more holistic way. In the introduction to her book and research, Gilligan (1982) describes how by exploring a specific context, in her case, the missing account of women's experiences of development, a contribution to understanding a broader phenomenon can be made, for example, of human development. In a similar way, I hope to use the specific context of partner WRT taking place in a family, to illuminate the experience of women holding multiple roles.

Given the lack of exploration in this area, I felt that to hypothesise on the nature of the experience would limit the scope of what may be found. As such, I decided to conduct an inductive, qualitative study into my research question. This supports the ethos of Counselling Psychology (Cooper, 2009) in that it aims to understand how a woman might make sense of this phenomenon in relation to herself, others and her world (Kasket, 2012).

2.1.1 Use of first person

To remain aware of my impact and involvement in the research, I have used the first person in my writing. This is in line with my ontological and epistemological position (Smith et al, 2009). It also enables both my reader and I to maintain contact with the very personal nature of conducting an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and acknowledges the part I have played in every aspect of the research.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Rationale for qualitative approach

As research into women's experience of holding multiple roles in the present climate has not been a recent focus for Counselling Psychology, it is important to first understand what their experience may be like. Although some literature has suggested that this could be a difficult experience (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; McLaughlin et al, 1988), other research found the impact of multiple roles on wellbeing to be a dynamic phenomenon, changing with the level or number of roles involved (Hyde, 2016; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Smith McCracken & Weitzman, 1997; Martire et al, 2000).

This literature suggests that holding multiple roles is a complex experience, and Roehling and Bultman (2002), in their exploration of this in the context of partner WRT, concluded as much. The numerous quantitative studies conducted have been unable to replicate one another, or even settle on a consistent set of terms, as explored in the literature review. It is possible that the literature and related psychological constructs have been unable to keep pace with the changes in women's experience over the past fifty years.

Exploring this phenomenon qualitatively has allowed participants to share their experience without the researcher making assumptions regarding what that experience is. It enabled those affected to prioritise what they felt others should know about the phenomenon (Willig, 2012). To impose quantitative boundaries onto this research question would have wrongly suggested that the researcher is more of an expert than those holding the multiple roles themselves, that there were specific things to be known, or that generalisations could be made.

Willig (2012) explains that qualitative approaches are the most appropriate way to capture the experiences and meanings of individuals. Existing theories and psychological constructs could not be assumed to explain what this phenomenon is like in the present day for those experiencing it and so were not made the focus of data collection and analysis. However, some theoretical constructs proved useful in deepening understanding of the data at a later stage (see Discussion chapter). Additionally, qualitative research acknowledges and engages with the impact of the researcher's experience on the data, rather than attempting to ignore it. As I have some personal experience of the phenomenon, it was important to recognise how this and my knowledge of psychological theory have influenced the process. To maintain an inductive approach I undertook reflexive exercises throughout the research (Willig, 2012).

2.2.2 Methodological and philosophical considerations

This research question required an idiographic approach, aiming to understand each participant's experience in its own right without attempting to make generalisations. The knowledge acquired from drawing on an individual's experience was dependent on how they thought about that experience. By privileging the subjective reality that the person constructed, I employed a very different approach to that within a positivist paradigm, which assumes a defined path and seeks to prove or disprove it (Smith et al, 2009).

There are many different terms used within qualitative research to explain the assumptions a question may be making (Willig, 2012). These may overlap, or the same word may take on a different meaning depending on context. I felt that my research question fell within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. It was not claiming to find a definitive answer, but gain insight into how each woman made sense of her reality through engaging with and

interpreting it. This relativist (Willig, 2012) ontology suggests that what could be learnt from this research was of a subjective, emic nature, rather than etic and empirical.

2.2.3 Epistemological standpoint

As such, I acquired relativist data, showing how the participants constructed individual meaning rather than suggesting an absolute truth or single reality. However, I analysed this data from a realist position, one which 'aspire(d) to the production of accurate and valid knowledge about what is going on' (Willig, 2012, p.5). The result of employing the two aspects together demonstrated that the research attempted to 'truthfully represent the participant's subjective world' (Willig, 2012, p5), a standpoint which Willig believes to be appropriate for qualitative approaches, and which also supports Counselling Psychology values of privileging the other's subjective experience over an expert stance (Cooper, 2009).

Understanding how each participant made sense of her lived experience was conducted from a phenomenological, rather than a critical realist or social constructionist stance. This allowed for the subjectivity inherent in the research question but acknowledged the reality of the experience (Willig, 2013). Phenomenology allows for the possibility of there being more than one reality, which is appropriate for this research question, as all participants experienced motherhood, career pursuance and the presence and absence of their working partner, but the reality of each was different for every woman (Willig, 2012).

Although participant experience was affected by social constructs, my research did not take a criticalist stance towards the values which influenced her construction of meaning. I remained aware of the impact of theories and other external influences on both researcher and participant by adopting a questioning approach to how data may be interpreted through different lenses (Willig, 2013). I could not hope to bring about transformation with my

research question when so little was known about how the phenomena was experienced (Willig, 2012). This research took the epistemological stance that in participating in the study, each woman's reality would be understood through analysis of the participant-researcher interaction.

Spinelli (2005) explains that phenomenological psychology intends to integrate with, rather than override other standpoints. This suggests that acknowledging the influence of critical theory and other constructivist-interpretivist epistemologies is appropriate, and also supports the holistic, subjective values of Counselling Psychology. Alongside my participants I strove to enter their life-world by embracing our intersubjectivity, as adopting a dualist stance would have limited the understanding I gained of *their* experience. However I was still aware of placing my interpretation onto their explanation and adding another layer of construction to the data. This double hermeneutic (Smith et al, 2009) meant that the eventual understanding was unavoidably co-created between participant and researcher as my experiences could be bracketed but never removed.

2.2.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

As discussed above, this research question aimed to understand the lived experience of women holding multiple roles when they have a partner who travels regularly for their own work. Very little previous research had been conducted in this area, and none in the UK taking into account its particular policies, working culture, and class system, so existing constructs in similar fields could not be assumed to have direct relevance. Taking an individual approach to exploring each participant's experience of holding multiple roles suggested an idiographic, phenomenological process (Smith et al, 2009). This would, in the most holistic and empowering way possible, allow for a detailed look at what this is like for the women being studied. In contrast to other qualitative methodologies, IPA accounts for

the inevitable impact of the researcher and makes the double hermeneutic a strength of the approach (Smith et al, 2009).

2.2.5 Rationale for employing IPA

This research question in particular lent itself to IPA in that the phenomenon consists of different parts, many of which have been studied separately in psychology and social science. However, without looking at the different parts in the context of the whole person it could not be said to represent each woman's experience. The use of a hermeneutic circle could at once look at all of the aspects of this phenomenon from the perspective of part, whole or combined relationships (Smith et al, 2009) similar to the way that Counselling Psychology would approach a client or their issue/s.

A fundamental focus of both IPA and Counselling Psychology is on an individual *in relation to*. In the former, it is the phenomenon; the latter, the self, world and others. Smith et al (2009) explain this as Heidegger's Dasein, the concept of being in and of an experience without it becoming something one can 'own'. As Counselling Psychologists, we are aware of our impact on clients and that it is unrealistic to remove our presence from interactions with others. IPA does the same, using the intersubjectivity of participant-researcher to draw out the participant's reality as they apply it in the context of their world (Smith et al, 2009). As I was looking at interpreting the experience itself rather than focusing on the way it was discussed, I did not feel that discourse analysis was appropriate. Additionally, not intending to come from a criticalist stance meant that the social construction of the discourse was not the focus (Willig, 2012).

The phenomenology of holding multiple roles could be seen to relate to Husserl's intrapsychic approach, Merleau-Ponty's more embodied understanding or Heidegger and Sartre's existential take on experiencing (Smith et al, 2009). It can be argued that being parents and partners are major life roles for a person, and the attainment of a profession is something that also gives purpose. When both people in a relationship are involved in these roles it can impact both of them existentially in terms of choices that are made (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Magnuson & Norem, 1999; Nordenmark, 2002).

What is this impact? And how does each participant think and feel about these existential experiences? Finally, how do her children, the physical presence and absence of her partner, and the different spaces she occupies affect her experience? By focusing on only one phenomenological perspective, understanding the participant's life-world is limited to that interpretation alone. IPA's inclusion of all three approaches allowed for the influence of each to be considered in relation to this phenomenon (Smith et al, 2009).

Although IPA doesn't expect to reach conclusions or develop theories from the data generated, it does commit to a thorough analysis of it, both for each participant individually and across all of the participants. In this way overall themes can be highlighted as areas for further research without conforming to a pre-set agenda (Willig, 2012). At this early stage of such an unexplored phenomenon, expecting to generate a theory was unrealistic.

However, understanding the themes and experiences of the participants in this context has offered new insight into the relevance of other existing theories such as women's experience of motherhood, well-being and work-family interaction. Willig (2012) explains that "interpretative phenomenology reflects on the data in the context of wider meanings" (p.10).

As mentioned previously, qualitative research terminology is fluid and there is considerable overlap in ideas and definitions. It seems clear what the research question is not looking at, i.e. hypotheses, theories, single realities or critical discourse, but the scope of what may influence participants' experience and how they construct their understanding was less obvious. As IPA was developed from a wider philosophical stance, it offers scope for this piece of research to be guided by what emerges from the data rather than focusing on only one standpoint. This allowed me to retain a phenomenological epistemology while remaining open to the influence of social constructs and the most appropriate way to analyse the data (Smith et al, 2009).

I felt IPA was appropriate for my question over and above other approaches such as descriptive phenomenology, discourse analysis or narrative research for several reasons. Discourse analysis is limited in understanding the social context beyond the text, which I feel is important to be considered with this experience (Willig, 2013). Narrative analysis seems less appropriate than IPA as there is no assumption that exploring this experience will lead to development of a theory, and narrative data collection sometimes employs grounded theory methods.

Finally, descriptive phenomenology also neglects to take into account the wider social influences and the impact of the researcher – this seems naive, and that an element of understanding the participants' experience is missed in following this method (Willig, 2012). IPA provides space for all of the above to be considered and more, as appropriate. It has also been suggested by Willig (2013) and others that IPA is a more psychological approach, which lends it to being more appropriate for Counselling Psychology research.

2.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

Initially, coming from a Counselling Psychology perspective made my decision regarding my research question's epistemological stance a seemingly simple one. This is because the values of Counselling Psychology and a phenomenological epistemology seem to map onto one another fairly well. For example, both honour the relationship and its influence on each other's experience in interaction, yet they also appreciate the uniqueness and difference of individuals; they reject the idea of therapist/researcher as expert, and accept the possibility of there being more than one interpretation or reality.

However, as time went on and I grappled with the questions around my topic's relevance to Counselling Psychology and what the question really needed, I found I needed to undo my initial thoughts and retrace them in a more systematic way. Undertaking a process of elimination regarding other stances and approaches, and working to understand what interpretative phenomenology meant to me vastly improved my interview technique and data collection process, as I had developed a constant reference point with regard to what I wanted to know, and why (Kasket, 2012). Moving forward with the research, I continued to consider the relevance of alternative standpoints, such as social constructionism, to the research question so as to maintain a fresh commitment to my chosen epistemology.

2.4 EVOLUTION OF METHOD

The following section will describe how the study developed and changed throughout the process, to arrive at the analysis stage. As will be explained fully further on, the method of data collection incorporated three different aspects. This was done in the spirit of rigour, as an attempt to maximise participants' opportunities to share their accounts in ways that felt

comfortable, and to access the phenomenon from different perspectives. These aspects – a semi-structured interview, use of visual methods, and a journal exercise – were first piloted, amended, and then employed with six participants recruited through various networks. The data collected was then transcribed in preparation for analysis.

2.4.1 Pilot

In order to determine whether the interview schedule and materials were yielding an appropriate depth of data for the study (Smith et al, 2009), I conducted two pilot interviews with personal contacts who fit the criteria. One completed the journal exercise as well, sending her entry by email the night her partner was away for work.

I reviewed the interview schedule (Appendix A, B) after conducting each pilot interview by listening to the recording again and typing out my responses. I decided not to transcribe each full interview because I did not want any cursory themes or ideas from these interviews to influence me in the study itself. My aim was to gather enough data to determine whether my collection process was sufficient.

I also spoke to each pilot participant about their experience of the process. Both fed back about the objects, sharing their relative ease or difficulty with discussing them. This led to me dropping two of them and keeping only those that fit with previous literature and which garnered responses from them that added to the interview. They also spoke about how helpful it was to share their experiences, the length of interview felt appropriate and the questions seemed relevant without being intrusive.

The pilot process was helpful for several reasons. It enabled me to become more familiar with the questions I was asking and what I was listening out for, to ensure the interview remained focused on the research question. It also helped clarify any assumptions regarding the phenomena that I have gained through my personal interaction with my pilot participants over time. This is thought to be an important point in hermeneutics, highlighted by both Gadamer and Heidegger (in Smith et al, 2009).

Additionally, by using, gaining feedback on, and amending the technique where items were presented to generate discussion I was able to further determine how best it could be done and clarify the purpose of doing so. Being aware that this is not a common way of collecting data in IPA studies, I needed to be sure that it was a credible and quality-driven method. I also practiced balancing my interview style to collect the data and my therapist style to build rapport and offer a contained environment with minimal interjections. This ensured that the data collected was from the participants and not me, as I was unable to analyse any interventions I made (Smith et al, 2009).

I was also able to recognise when I was attempting to summarise or interpret the participants' responses and this helped me think about what information I was trying to get to, and adjust my questions accordingly. The process helped me realise when I was not asking open questions and my own assumptions or agenda may have been influencing my responses. Conducting pilots that I would be unable to use in my final study because of the ethics involved with knowing these participants freed me to change my materials as necessary without any hope of 'salvaging' the interview for later analysis.

I made only slight changes to the journal instructions (Appendix C) between the first and second pilot as the data collected from the journal exercise appeared to be relevant and

appropriate to the research question. When the first pilot participant was asked the follow-up questions to the exercise, she indicated that it had been meaningful for her to see and show me “what a difference a week can make”. Making use of my supervisor to review the pilots and spending time reflecting in my journal helped make the process as meaningful as possible.

2.4.2 Quality and rigour

Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) discuss a variety of approaches to ensure quality in published qualitative research. An aspect they discuss being incorporated from Packer and Addison (1989) and Stiles (1993; both cited in Elliott et al, 1999) to demonstrate credibility checks is ‘triangulation’. Although initially treated as a quantitative method for ensuring reliability and validity, it is also seen to provide internal consistency to the data by collecting it from more than one source, providing a more coherent picture of the participants’ experience of the phenomenon (Krefting, 1991). I used a form of triangulation in a way that supports the phenomenological epistemology of the question by allowing the possibility of participants sharing more than one reality with me (Willig, 2012; Smith et al, 2009).

Smith et al (2009) might refer to this as a “multi-perspectival study” (p.52). Reavey & Johnson (2013) discuss how multimodality in research can help reveal how “interactants manage their relationships and identities in the context of visual spaces as well as through speech and/or text production” (p.304). This was captured through the different data collection methods I employed. Smith (2004) and Smith et al (2009) encourage pushing the boundaries in terms of data collection methods, particularly by using more than one mode. They specifically suggest using interviews (collecting data through speech) and diaries (through text).

As semi-structured interviews are widely seen as the most reliable way of accessing how a participant makes sense of their experience (Smith et al, 2009), it was important to include this. Given the anticipated difficulty in arranging interviews with participants at a time when their partner was actually away, I decided to include a journal exercise for them to complete during a period of partner absence as it would be more accessible to her to do when she had the time. I would then gain an understanding of what it was like *in vivo* as well as giving them an opportunity to share their reflections following the interview.

The additional check included within the interview is in the form of visual objects. Elliott et al (1999) suggest that a credibility check can be made by including external factors such as quantitative data. Collecting quantitative data does not sit particularly well with the epistemological position of the research question as it reduces the participant's experience to a series of numbers or categories. Exploring how participants make meaning from everyday objects in relation to their roles, however, is appropriate to the phenomenological stance that the research takes - it allows an additional dimension of meaning making to occur (Spinelli, 2005).

A Counselling Psychology perspective is interested in how a person makes meaning of elements of experience as well as holistically (Cooper, 2009). The triangulation employed in the data collection not only accesses this through the questions asked at each stage, but also recognises it within each method. The journal is an introspective piece where the participant is in relation to herself at that time of writing; the interview places her in relation to an *other* (the interviewer); and the visual objects in relation to the world. Making use of triangulation is valuable for the 'trustworthiness' of qualitative research (Krefting, 1991) but also for engaging with Counselling Psychology principles such as these (Cooper, 2009; Kasket & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

2.5 DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

2.5.1 Semi-structured interview

The interview questions (Appendix A, B) were guided by Spradley's four types of questions: descriptive, structural, contrast and evaluative (cited in Smith et al, 2009; and Willig, 2013). They also aimed to maintain a Counselling Psychology focus in exploring participants' experience in relation to themselves, others and the world (Kasket, 2012).

The initial questions looked toward gaining a general description of the participants' roles and how they are structured. Question three explored the contrast in expectations and experience, allowing space for evaluation if raised by participants. The following three questions specifically explored interaction. They again focused on contrasts, but between how the roles are experienced in relation to the self or others; or how they are experienced in different situations. If participants evaluated the experiences against one another, the question aimed to make sense of how they did so (Smith et al, 2009).

The penultimate question is described in the following section; with the final question in the interview asked to allow the participant the opportunity to share anything else about their experience that they felt important.

It took time to become comfortable with the interview schedule and ensure that I was getting what I wanted from the interview while allowing space for participants to spontaneously add to the interaction, all within a set time frame. It was initially worrying to think that I may not 'cover' everything on my schedule but it quickly became more important to focus on listening and exploring the interesting points that participants raised. This also helped me to remain

curious and check my assumptions, where following a set schedule would feel less engaged and spontaneous.

2.5.2 Visual objects presented in interview

In question seven, participants were shown three everyday items as a stimulus for discussion. These were a Mother's Day card; magnetic 'To-do list' notepad and an iPhone (see Appendix D). It was intended that these everyday items would not lead participants, but give them the space to share what the items meant to them (if anything) with regard to their experience of their roles. Silver (2013) highlights how visual stimuli can be used to understand how a participant makes sense of their experience. This, in the vein of Barry's (1996) constructivist approach to research, offers the participant another way of sharing their experience by apportioning meaning to the items.

The use of visual stimuli supported Counselling Psychology values through developing an understanding of the participant's lived experience (Cooper, 2009). Barry (1996) discusses how different levels of meaning can be accessed by different types of stimuli and questioning. By using familiar items and open-ended questioning without making therapeutic interpretations I ensured the participants remained safe and in control of what they shared. Although he states that 'people usually reveal what they are ready to see, hear and own' (p425), he does recommend that support resources are offered in case emotions are raised in the process, which I did.

Additional reflexivity was employed throughout the pilot of this task, where in the interviews I aimed to ensure that I had minimal influence over participant's responses (Silver, 2013). I

was also aware however, that as I knew my pilot participants, there would invariably be a different and possibly greater amount of influence by nature of our established relationship.

Although this visual aspect of my data collection didn't involve participants creating their own artwork or choosing an item to present, which are more common visual methods, the objects included allowed for a verbal discourse that differed from the rest of the interview (Temple & McVittie, 2005). Use of pre-existing objects focused the research on participants' engagement with items in relation to their roles, rather than interpreting the meaning of the items themselves. This was suggested by Iedema (2003, cited in Reavey & Johnson, 2008) and Temple & McVittie (2005) as an appropriate way to access meaning.

Beloff (1997) and Barthes (1995) are cited by Reavey and Johnson (2008) in their discussion of how the use of visual methods can provide a key to understanding everyday social life. Similarly, Frith, Riley, Archer and Gleeson (2005) suggested that contemporary issues such as that which my research explores can benefit from exploring how contemporary objects impact experience. Items such as iPhones take into account the way women make sense of their roles in today's society, and contrast with more enduring concepts such as Mother's Day and to-do lists. Brown (2001, cited in Reavey & Johnson, 2008) also suggests that people may experience and view their world within a material space, which suggests it is relevant to access the meaning the women make of what is in this space, from their different roles.

Lynn and Lea (2005) and Reavey and Johnson (2008) discuss the issues that visual methodology can have with validity. They refer more to the creation and analysis of art/objects rather than the use of pre-existing items to stimulate discussion. This is not a new concept, as psychology has been using visual stimuli in research to elicit meaning for years,

albeit clinically and socially, for example Rorschach (Frith et al, 2005). In contrast, Barry (1996) describes how constructivist researchers ensure validity. He refers to triangulation, citing Richardson (1994), Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness and authenticity (1989) and Fine's 'working the hyphens between self and others' (1994, p.419).

This final comment also refers to the Counselling Psychology principle of inter-subjectivity and relation, suggesting that these approaches do have relevance to the field. Whether approaching research from a social constructivist, feminist or phenomenological standpoint, one's experience influences & is influenced by their surroundings. By making use of objects to stimulate thoughts on meaning making, I hope to gain access to another aspect of what it's like for women when holding multiple roles; of them in relation to the world, as well as to themselves and others.

Although there is an element of researcher bias in determining which items to use for the research, which I will need to remain reflexive about, the focus on the participants' meaning making via visual methods is consistent with IPA (Silver, 2013). Additionally, the items chosen are related to themes highlighted in the literature review. Glotzer and Federlein (2007) found that in commuter families, and for women holding multiple roles, communication, organisation and role/task division were important factors. Others corroborated this: Jackson et al (2000), Rhodes (2002), Parkes et al (2007), Taylor and Simmonds (2009), and Swenson et al (2015).

By using a phone, notepad and Mother's Day card I made use of relevant research and theory, but by asking open questions in relation to them I allowed the participants to explore their own meaning. This was not done with the aim of evaluating their answers in relation to

the literature, but ensuring that what they were shown could be interpreted as safely within the bounds of the research question and therefore remained ethical (BPS, 2010).

2.5.3 Journal

The final aspect of data collection involved participants being asked to keep a journal for one period of partner absence, which was returned to the researcher after the end of that period. This provided participants with an opportunity to share their experience of holding multiple roles as they lived it, in contrast to the interviews which may not fall during a period when their partner was away. As Plummer (2001) describes, diaries talk "to the subjectivity of a particular moment" (p.52), which is valuable in this instance for gaining an understanding of what it is like for the participants as they experience the phenomenon.

By providing regular contact during the period of writing, setting a fixed timeframe and offering guidelines for what to include, the participants were supported to provide meaningful, relevant data in a safe environment. Additionally, with an emphasis on quality and not quantity of writing, the exercise acknowledged that participants may be even busier during this period and so unnecessary pressure on their time was avoided (Willig, 2013).

Participants were asked to record their thoughts, feelings and activities daily in relation to the three roles, relationships and feelings about the self (see Appendix C); through any medium the participant was comfortable with. For longer absences, 3 entries per week were requested to manage the data collection and maximise uptake. The journal submission was followed up with a brief telephone interview to gain feedback on participants' experience of the exercise.

2.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

2.6.1 Recruitment

Once I was happy with my materials I began recruitment. Smith et al (2009) recommend that six to ten interviews are collected for a Professional Doctorate level study. As I was collecting two sets of data from each participant, I needed to ensure I didn't collect more data than I was able to adequately analyse in the time available, but enough to enable a rich data set. To this end, I aimed to recruit six to eight participants.

I began by making contact with a network called 'mediaparents' (www.mediaparents.co.uk). After understanding my rationale for the project they agreed to post my advert (Appendix E) on their social media sites. From this I received interest from 1 participant. After she read my information sheet (Appendix F) she said that she wasn't sure she fit my criteria, prompting me to question my reasoning for writing it as I did. This led me to the first amendment.

Although London is a hub for professionals of all genders and work-based travel, this is not to say that the phenomenon doesn't exist elsewhere. Hence, I removed the need for the participants to be London-based. Additionally, this woman was also on maternity leave, due to return to work in the coming months and had previously fit this context with her other young children.

I realised that by stipulating that participants be currently working I may be excluding others with relevant experience which would be better assessed in a screening phone call rather than excluded outright. Given this is a study focusing on the lived experience and meanings made by the participants in the study, using quantifying criteria that I had arbitrarily set did

not sit comfortably with the ethos of IPA. It felt more appropriate to allow potential participants to self-define terms.

I approached a contact in a senior management position of a London-based law firm to help recruit participants. Through this process I further refined my exclusion criteria, removing the requirement that participants should be working 'at least 3 days per week' and also the definition of 'regular travel' being 5 or more days per month. This enabled my recruitment process to fall further in line with my methodological approach, allowing participants to define these concepts for themselves (Willig, 2012).

Additionally, I decided to keep the criteria that participants have a child who is under 5 years old as the literature suggests that the experience of working when their child is of this age is different to that when they are older and more independent (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1993; Gordon & Gluzman, 2007). This yielded one participant from numerous enquiries.

In the meantime, the 'mediaparents' network reposted my advert on their media sites and I arranged to meet the participant who initially expressed interest and another woman from the network. I also approached two other parenting support networks: 'stokeyparents', and 'citymothers' as well as contacts in nurseries, child care centres, law firms, and a secondary school. Through these networks I recruited three more participants.

As participants expressed interest, read the information sheet I sent them and agreed to participate, I arranged a brief screening telephone call. This was to check that they did meet the criteria, and as outlined in the information sheet, to assess their wellbeing at the time by asking how they were feeling and whether they felt well enough to participate at that time. I

also asked briefly about willingness and time to participate, as well as open questions about whether there was anything they wanted me to know, or wanted to ask me.

After some time, the networks and contacts ceased to bring forth further potential participants, despite reposting my advert in different places. After discussion with my supervisor it was agreed that I had collected data rich enough to analyse using IPA, and could stop recruiting.

2.6.2 Participants

The participants each had two children under the age of five. Five lived in London and the Home Counties, and one in the North West of England. See Appendix G for a summary.

2.6.3 Communication

Following the screening phone call and agreement to take part, participants and I arranged a date, time and venue to meet and conduct the interview, which was convenient to them. I reimbursed them for the cost of their travel if they came to meet me. Interviews took approximately eighty minutes and consisted of eight open-ended questions with additional prompts and questions as appropriate.

Prior to beginning the interview the participant and I read through the consent form (Appendix H) and information sheet (Appendix F), each signing two copies of the consent form as stipulated by the BPS (BPS, 2010). Following the interview I gave her the 'Additional Resources for Support' and 'Journal Instructions' (Appendix I, C). We discussed the instructions briefly and agreed a date to collect the journal and feedback regarding the

exercise. Follow-up conversations following the journal exercise were brief. Notes were taken by me and later incorporated into the reflexivity and discussion sections of this thesis.

2.6.4 Interview locations

I interviewed two participants at their place of work; three at City University; and one at a hotel near the main train station in the city. These were discussed and agreed with the participants in the screening phone call to ensure it was at a time and place they were able to focus and be comfortable. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, confidential space, without interruption.

2.6.5 Recording and transcription

Two forms of digital recorder were used to record the interviews which were transcribed by me after each one. They were stored according to data protection legislation requirements (BPS, 2010). All journal exercises were completed in a written format so further transcription of audio data was not required, but they were transferred to a line-numbered format.

I decided to transcribe each interview myself because, although time consuming, I felt I developed a fuller relationship with the data, having heard and paid attention to every word and pause on the recording. I was also able to recall, while transcribing, how participants were behaving as they spoke and listened to me. Given that one part of my data collection involved participants looking at some items and talking about them, it was important for me to include non-verbal responses as well. I feel this was better remembered while transcribing and reliving the interviews myself. I ensured the verbatim, semantic transcription was appropriate to IPA as suggested by Smith et al (2009).

2.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Smith et al (2009) outline some ethical considerations specific to IPA research, but underlying their recommendations are the principles of the BPS (2010). These standards were kept in mind throughout this research and guided any decisions to be made regarding the integrity of the project. This is demonstrated in the recruitment and data collection materials (Principle 2.1 and 2.4), the analysis process (Principle 2.2) and justification of the research topic's necessity (Principle 2.3 and 2.4).

Prior to undertaking this research, approval was gained from the University's Ethics Board and signed off by the Counselling Psychology Department, further ensuring that the proposal was appropriate and ethical (see Appendix J). These requirements have been upheld throughout the process.

To safeguard participants against adverse effects of the research I ensured that a screening call took place before meeting to assess risk and determine suitability. The types of topics to be explored in the interview and journal exercise were also mentioned so participants felt appropriately informed (Smith et al, 2009). At the interview, an information sheet containing a confidentiality statement, right to withdraw, and details of the timescale were given while signing informed consent contracts.

I also provided referral information for ongoing support if the need arose during the course of the research but did not take GP details. Any concerns regarding participant or their child's well-being were assessed during the three check-in points provided. Although the sample group was a non-clinical population and the risk was expected to be low, I remained alert to

any sense that the participant needed additional support from their GP or social services and was prepared to raise this with them (BPS, 2010).

In order to preserve anonymity I used a coding system (key to which kept separately) and removed/changed any identifying details. All data was stored securely with passwords and encrypting if digital, and in a locked safe if hard copies.

It was anticipated that participation in the research would offer the chance for the women to explore and discuss their experiences of the phenomenon and this would be seen as an advantage. Conversely, if the chance to talk about this experience had caused unanticipated upset, I was prepared to offer an immediate withdrawal from the research without consequence, destroy all data relating to them, provide an information sheet with details of support services and ensure the participant had an opportunity to talk it through with me. None of the participants had this experience.

I endeavoured to provide a safe space so participants felt contained during the process, demonstrating empathy, unconditional positive regard & a non-judgemental attitude while maintaining my role of researcher and clear boundaries. As outlined in the journal instructions, I also ensured I was available for participants to contact me during this component of the data collection and arranged specific times to contact them during the process.

In order to manage the risks regarding participant well-being, participants had the contact details of the researcher, supervisor & university complaints procedure if they felt they needed additional support/information during or after their involvement with the research. I

believe that the long-term benefits of the research would outweigh potential risks if managed appropriately.

For my own well-being, I maintained my reflective journal, used personal therapy and the support of my supervisor to safeguard against any adverse effects of the research process. I also took planned breaks from the research while revising my working timeline on an ongoing basis to avoid unrealistic expectations and unnecessary stress.

2.8 METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

Regular discussions with my supervisor, particularly at significant points in the pilot, interview and analysis stages helped me keep in mind what I was researching, and thinking about how best I could achieve that. This resulted in some changes to inclusion criteria, schedules and deep thinking about the data collection method I employed. From the beginning of the research I had in mind a 'Plan B', as in options for carrying out my research in case aspects of it didn't work. This allowed me flexibility in thinking about how to conduct it (Kasket, 2012).

Throughout the process of conducting the research I was aware of the importance of maintaining flexibility in the research design, so as to address any unanticipated problems without derailing the entire project. However, I also needed to hold in mind that any changes were to remain within the boundaries of what had been granted ethical approval. This became salient during the recruitment process, when potential participants were made known to me through friends, but my approved recruitment procedure had not included 'snowballing'. Therefore obtaining the desired number of participants took longer than planned, and was extremely frustrating as I slipped further behind with my work plan.

2.9 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

As a first-time IPA researcher, I aimed to follow the steps suggested by Smith et al (2009). However I kept in mind throughout that they were recommended steps only, and that my analysis may take a different path at any point, depending on what most systematically helped me understand the participant's experience, especially as I had two sets of data for all participants bar one. Erica[1] had been finding that her partner's work travel dates kept being changed and she was unable to complete the journal. We kept in contact for nine months after interview until, in the end, she stopped responding to my 'checking in' emails. After discussion with my supervisor it was agreed that even without Erica's journal, her interview data was still meaningful information and should be included in the analysis.

I wrote myself a set of guidelines after completing analysis of the first participant, so I had a sense of continuity during my process. This was amended slightly as I went through the six participants, but the basic list helped to ground me when I was feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data I was faced with analysing.

What I found worked was knowing the transcript well, holding lightly the themes that seemed to be emerging naturally as well as those I uncovered through detailed analysis. I ensured I was specific with naming emergent themes, using quotes wherever possible, so as not to 'summarise out' the direction of experience or actual feelings expressed (for example using 'when PWA the priority shifts to just meeting basic needs' rather than 'PWA changes priorities', or ''heartbroken' over lost parts of self' as opposed to 'strong feelings of loss').

[1] All participant and family names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality

I ensured that I always had one eye on the question, it being written in several places I could easily see. This was assisted by re-reading the paper by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006), and drawing a diagram (which I also had next to each transcript I was working on) to summarise their explanation of how phenomenological sense-making takes place for a person (see Appendix K). This enabled me to reflect from the participant's point of view: how their objects of concern, preferred resources and experiential claims were used to make sense of their topic of interest (holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when PWA), and then determine what it means to them.

My process of analysis involved listening to the recording twice while tidying up the transcription. I would then print the transcript, read and listen again, add anything I had missed and note initial impressions separately. Following this, I went through the transcript three more times, noting descriptive, linguistic and conceptual exploratory coding on the right in relation to the question (see Appendix L and M), as suggested by Smith et al (2009) (I am also left-handed). In the first two transcripts I made notes on emergent themes to the left of the text, however this felt like I was just copying notes from the right to the left. It was overwhelming and unsatisfying, not feeling like I was drawing themes from the data at all.

On the third transcript, I tried something different which worked much better for me. Reading through the exploratory coding (Appendix L), I noted emergent themes on a separate sheet of paper (Appendix M), referencing the relevant transcript page next to them. Each time it felt like a theme recurred, I wrote the page reference next to that theme, and if a new theme seemed to emerge, I added it to the list. These were then transferred into Excel (Appendix N). I had a separate spreadsheet for each participant which grew throughout the analysis process from Column 'D' ('Emergent theme') along to Column 'F' as themes were reduced and amended to better reflect the data. Quotes were also attached (Column 'C'). After trying

again with Georgie's journal (Appendices O, P and Q), my new way of capturing emergent themes felt more effective.

Although I knew that any 'clusters' as I called them would change during the cross-analysis, I felt the need to look across the emergent themes for loose groupings into 'master themes'. This was an interesting process at the time as it gave me an overall sense of how each participant made sense of their experience, however I held it very lightly and found that it didn't help me in subsequent abstraction. It was also interesting to hold the loose master themes and clusters for each participant's interview, journal and visual object responses up next to each other for an initial sense of similarities or differences.

Once this was completed for all participants I undertook a cross-case analysis to identify overarching themes. After discussion with my supervisor, I decided to treat all interview and journal data sets individually instead of combining the interview and journal for each participant. This was because the experiences they described in each felt different and I feared I would lose the multi-perspectival aspect of the study if I treated them as the same. This meant that I had eleven sets of emergent themes to work with.

Initially, I printed the spreadsheets with each participant's journal and interview emergent themes on them and laid them on the floor, but they were just a sea of tiny words. I am a much more visual person so decided instead to play to this. I printed the 197 emergent themes again and cut them into strips, the journal themes differentiated from the interviews by being underlined. I then stapled each theme to sticky labels, coloured to correspond with my six participants, and stuck them on my wall (see Appendix R).

Smith et al (2009) suggested that certain themes would gravitate towards each other, which they seemed to do, as if by magnetic force. However, I was concerned that this had happened too easily. Unsure whether they were master or subordinate themes to be organised into groups, the seven themes were: About PWA specifically; Responsibility; Barriers to intimacy; Roles; In relation to others; The developing self; and Inner world.

These groupings suggested to me that there were elements to the participants' experiences which mapped onto four different perspectives: their internal sense of self, relationships with others, experience of the roles themselves, and their interaction with the world and the context of PWA. Returning to my wall of sticky labelled themes, I set about rearranging them as such, coming up with a 'Saatchi-esque' work of increasing circles to demonstrate the aspects of meaning making, moving from internal experiencing to engagement with the world at large (see Appendix S).

These four different areas also seemed interrelated by crossover themes, and although the circles made logical sense, they didn't directly answer my research question. I in turn, struggled to make sense of how the roles connected to the other three circles. Eventually, after writing all of the subordinate themes from the circles onto fresh sticky labels, I reordered them into what became my final three master themes with related sub themes (see Appendix T). These will be discussed in detail throughout the following chapter.

My focus on the hermeneutic circle during this process was crucial. At regular intervals throughout the analysis of each transcript, I returned to my circle to assess where I was in the process. I also regularly returned to my pilot interviews and journal entries to check my assumptions against my interpretations of the participant's data. This systematic subjectivity, as described by Smith et al (2009) allowed me to remain in contact with the

influence I was having over the analysis. Regular conversations with my supervisor also enhanced my reflexivity over the impact I was having on the data.

2.10 PERSONAL REFLEXIVITY

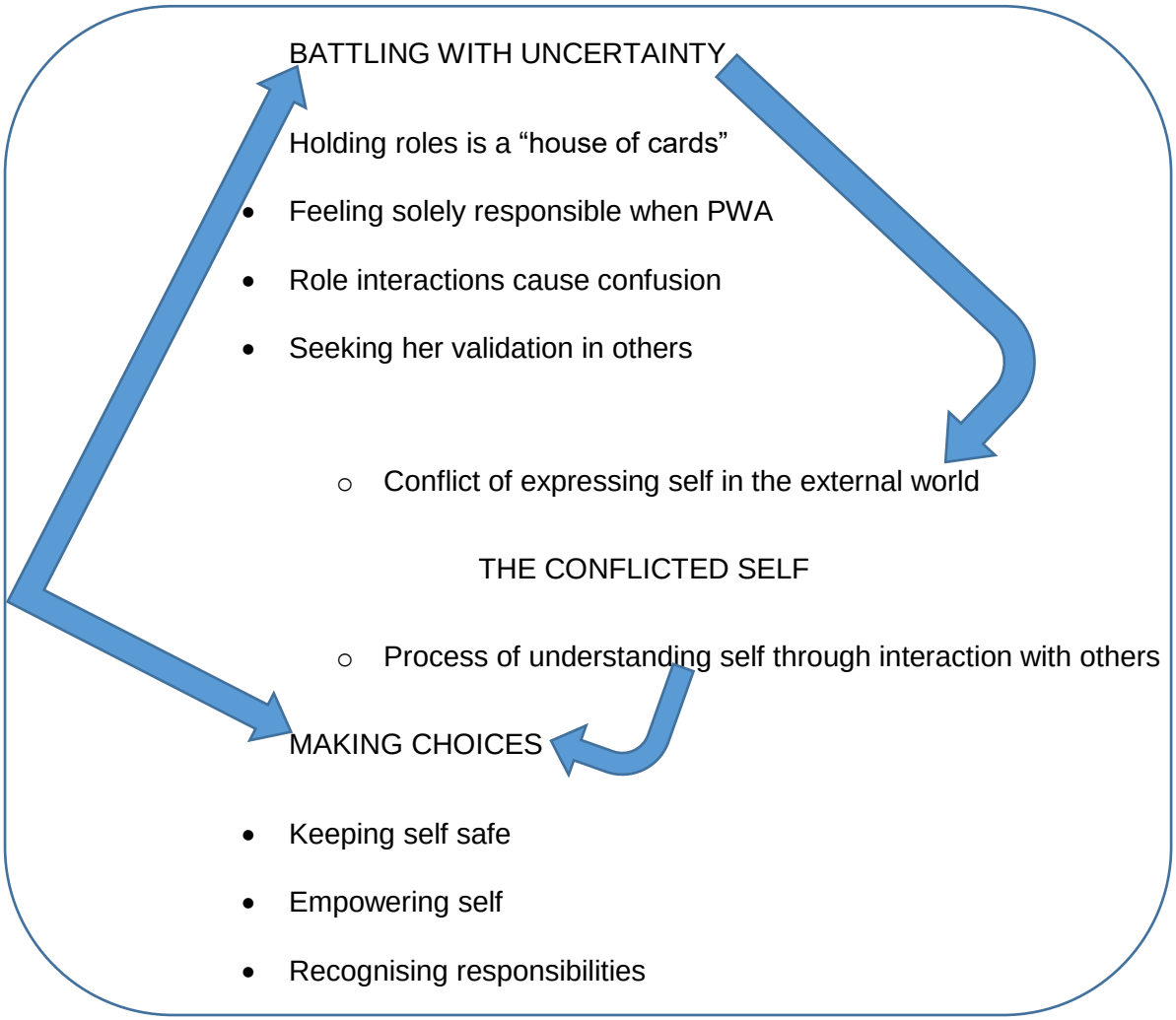
As a career-minded mother of a pre-schooler I worked hard to ensure that I was not assuming understanding of my participants' experience. I continued to ask questions of myself and the process throughout. I did not have a partner who travels for work, nor was I doing paid work, so had an element of separation from my own experience and the research question. I was also reflexive about experiences of friends and family. While providing the initial inspiration for the research in wanting to understand how this experience was for them, they cannot be assumed to have had an experience I could generalise. As I met the participants I became aware of my similarity with some in terms of age and career drive. The match in age was something I had wondered about but had not wanted to assume as women start families in a much wider age range than in previous generations.

I kept a journal of my experiences throughout the research to maintain reflexivity and continually question my subjectivity. I made use of personal therapy and my research supervisor, as appropriate, to discuss any personal issues that arose. This helped reflexivity in terms of methodology and my epistemological stance as I learned more about myself and in turn, the research process over time (Kasket, 2012). I questioned assumptions I made and kept an open mind to hearing the opposite of what I expected. My hope, to have insight after the process to offer others in this position, including friends and family, was something I remained aware of to ensure it did not cloud my data collection or analysis. As expected, the participants had very different views of their situation and my awareness of my hopes helped to avoid premature generalisations.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interview and journal data through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. These came about from reaching *gestalt*, a point where I felt the themes answered the question: what is a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when her partner travels overnight regularly for work? Using participant quotes as illustrations, the themes are shown as 'Master Theme: Sub theme' (*Further section*). Throughout this chapter, any reference to 'the context' or 'PWA' can be assumed to refer to context of the partner working away. The figure below depicts the relationship between the themes and subthemes:



It appeared to me that a constant, reciprocal interaction was happening. As the participants' battle with their uncertainties fed their conflict between the internal self and external world, their engagement in making choices was supported by a process of understanding themselves through interactions with others.

The 'Making Choices' theme seemed to describe the participants' way of making sense of their context and taking action, where the 'Battling with Uncertainty' theme opposed that, representing the challenges and isolation related to their experiences. 'The Conflicted Self' theme seemed to play a part alongside both other themes, the subthemes representing both conflict and development through the themes' interplay.

3.2 MASTER THEME: BATTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY

This theme explores the difficulties the participants experienced when trying to instil a sense of control over their context. Regardless of whether their partner was away or not, but more usually when he was absent, they struggled with the impact of their roles. Seeking validation elsewhere mostly felt futile, but the participants pursued it anyway as a way of connecting to another whilst they so often felt alone with their many responsibilities.

3.2.1 SUBTHEME: Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA

3.2.1.1 The PWA context is hard and impacts her life consistently

In their journals, Tanya[2], Georgie, Lizzie & Donna all spoke about the context of PWA and how much it impacts them. This is highlighted for Lizzie by recognising how similar incidents are experienced differently on the night before her husband goes away and during his

[2] All participant and family names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality

absence. "It's a stressful time anyway but the absence of S exacerbates it all", reflects Georgie in her journal on Simon's first day away (Georgie journal, 2, 2-3). She is preparing for exams as well as looking after her two daughters and discovers his absence has become nine days instead of the original three.

Tanya further explains this by saying "every aspect of this is a struggle", recalling elements of her work day becoming a "battle" when PWA. The night before her husband leaves she writes "…knowing this is pending, things are tense at home…We usually argue before one (of us) goes away" (Tanya journal, 1, 1-3). Preparing for the following day is "a routine that we execute with military precision" (Tanya journal, 1, 6), but leaving work early to collect the children feels risky "…with one direct report wanting my role...I feel that this would be ammunition and used against me" (Tanya journal, 4, 4). Additionally, getting from work to the two childcare providers in time requires her to "battle rush hour traffic" (Tanya journal, 1, 23).

This contradicts the experience Tanya describes in the interview, as explored further down in 'Making Choices: Empowering self' (*Knowing self and making it work)*. There, although PWA is challenging, in the context of her other roles and commitments her descriptions suggest that it does not seem to feel as difficult. Karen also used combative terms when describing the experience of PWA, suggesting she is wrestling with it too. "Traditionally he doesn't work in January and February, and then goes away in March again, and it's just a very different beast" (Karen interview, 17, 13-14), and later in the interview, "you know it's just a constant battle." (Karen interview, 58, 15).

In her interview, Lizzie talks about how helpless she feels to the impact of PWA, and how unprepared she was for this:

> "I do think it is him being away cos I think actually, it would still be hard having two children, um and still having to juggle you know being a parent and a mother and everything else but it is the fact that I'm doing it on my own, what feels like fifty per cent of the time really and I think that's the hard thing and I think that's the thing I didn't really realise" (Lizzie interview, 14, 14-18).

As Tanya alludes to above, PWA also impacts while he is present and in the face of regular absence, continues to feature in the background of family life. Karen corroborates this, explaining that: "Anyway, all of this (the pressure and anticipation of Mac's departure) has been building up and I have been both looking forward to and dreading him going away in equal measure" (Karen journal, 1, 11-13) and, just before Mac returns: "Anyway, that's almost the first tour done. Next one is Europe and that starts (in 2 weeks)." The relief of his return can feel short-lived with another absence imminent.

3.2.1.1 Absent and/or alone

The feeling of being left alone and disconnected from others, particularly due to PWA, seems to be a strong theme for Karen, Donna and Lizzie. The key element is a sense of being isolated from their partner and others, which they describe as something different to their partner merely being absent. Where Lizzie had a sense that she was alone (disconnected) due to PWA, and Donna remained emotionally connected to Jason but had difficulties maintaining contact with others during his absence, Karen seemed to experience her relationships as feeling both alone (disconnected) and absent (not here now).

The responsibility for holding their roles while PWA feels heavy for some. Georgie described in her interview how difficult she found it after giving birth.

> "…the longest I think it's been has been six seven weeks at a stretch and it was just a nightmare and I felt totally responsible and on my own and like a single parent. Well a single parent, with, no that's not fair because single parents have it much worse but yeah I felt like I had responsibility for everything um and was exhausted and was having to work as well." (Georgie interview, 2, 16-21)

Other participants also compare themselves to a single parent before quickly retracting the claim. This suggests that the challenging position they find themselves in is an extremely isolating one; a recognition that they do have a partner to provide support and companionship, but when alone, they do not feel they can access that.

Karen's fierce independence and refusal to rely on others creates somewhat of a closed circuit for her in this dynamic. Her experience of Mac when PWA is that "he checks out" and "just misses everything". During the final part of the interview, where I present items for discussion, Karen revealed that Mac had forgotten her first Mother's Day, and so the Mother's Day card I showed brought up strong feelings for her about his absence.

The participants often return to their sense of managing the relationship on behalf of both parents throughout the interview and journal, the following passage being an example of Karen's experience:

> "I have quite low expectations. But he's, he's always away for birthdays, and I think we've been to like five weddings in our entire relationship and one of them was our own, cos he just misses everything and because he checks out and I do all of that, and I sign the cards and send them out" (Karen interview, 55, 9-14).

Karen here describes her experience of being alone, attending important events without him and holding her roles in relation to that absence. She says "I do all of that" and "I have quite low expectations", suggesting that she sees no point in trying to engage him as her experience of him is as "always away". She spoke elsewhere about their "choice" to pursue both careers and the consequences of being solely responsible for holding their roles:

> "Because also it's our choice that Mac goes on tour, it's our choice that he does that and it's our choice that I work, so I don't like to make that someone else's problem" (Karen interview, 45, 15-46,1).

As a result, Karen decided that paid childcare was required despite offers from family members to help:

> "I needed a professional involved… because adding a tantrumming two year old to my seventy year old mother in law was just not something I was gonna cope with… emotionally. Cos like, that would stress me out anyway" (Karen interview, 44, 23-45, 6).

However, because of the decision to use paid for childcare instead of family, when Mac was away, there was no one else Karen felt able to rely on:

> "And there were times when I'd kick myself cos I'd go to a meeting without my phone…just I think what if they needed to get hold of me, they're not gonna be able to get hold of anyone else" (Karen interview, 48, 10-14).

In addition to the physical feeling of isolation, there was also a sense that no one understood her unique situation, as explored further along in the theme of 'The Conflicted Self'.

Karen was clear that, in order to manage in the context of PWA, she needed to maintain independence. As she mentions in the quote above, the added stress of managing

relationships when PWA was something she found difficult. There was also a sense that she *should* be able to manage her roles on her own and could not justify reaching out to Mac: "He can't help, I'll tell him when he gets home" (Karen interview, 21, 4-5), or others: "I'm not a particularly proud person um, but I just thought, well you're supposed to be able to do this aren't you?" (Karen interview, 36, 2-3).

Lizzie also directly attributed the disconnection in her relationship to PWA. Although their relationship became more "functional" when they had their second child, she found that recurring issues within the family went unresolved because of her husband's regular absence. She stated that: "it only gets to the point that we discuss it when it gets really bad and, usually me ends up having, you know, getting really cross about something" (Lizzie interview, 6, 2-4). She explained the sense of disconnect:

> "I think, just with the added pressure of him not being there it it it does put you know sort of strain on your relationship and, I think for both of us if if we could make a change and you know go back to how we were and you know a lot more kind of loving and fun and you know caring about each other, um it would be great" (Lizzie interview, 3, 5-9).

Lizzie's comment above suggests that difficulties with holding her roles are not addressed due to PWA which has an ongoing impact on the relationship and her feeling alone. Challenging situations with her children also felt more isolating when PWA and, like Karen, a recognition that others would not understand the difficulties of their unique arrangement:

> "My sisters are quite lucky because they both live in the same town as my mum and they also live in the same town as their parents in law so they'd never be in my situation so I think it's quite hard for them to empathise because they've got such a-

and they've got each other so they've each got three kind of additional levels of support that they can call on" (Lizzie interview, 19, 29 – 20, 4).

The stark contrast between holding her roles in a more positive way and the sense of being alone is highlighted in Lizzie's description of summer weather, happiness and health compared to long winter nights where everyone is ill. She recognises that this is a common feeling of tiredness and frustration amongst her other, busy, working friends, but because of PWA, she explains:

> "that's when you just think, this is not sustainable and that's when I tend to kind of get really irritated by a situation and just say "you know we've got to agree when this is gonna end"" (Lizzie interview, 17, 3-6).

This relationship dynamic was not one discussed by Donna in the interview, however in her journal it was mentioned more, but contrasted with a sense of continued connection as will be discussed below in 'Making Choices: Empowering self' (*Attempting reciprocal connection: "We're in it together"*). She found challenging the sense that, despite feeling emotionally connected to Jason while he was away, she was still physically alone and so engagement with difficult feelings or anything that could negatively impact her ability to hold her roles was quickly swept aside. An example of how Donna shifted her perspective to manage this period of PWA when she was about to start a new job the following week, is the following journal extract:

> "Wonder if while I'm not working I should have taken them out of nursery more, even though we have paid for it, in order to spend more time with them. Remember I have them on my own from now til late on Saturday so will see them quite a lot!" (Donna journal, 3, 7-10)

The disconnection from others when PWA may have been exacerbated by Donna's focus on her sense of responsibility and the importance of maintaining continuity in his absence. She talks about needing to carry on with household duties, getting the children to sleep and feeding herself, all a challenge when alone, and how this also stops her from being able to make contact with her mother and Jason when she needs to. Additionally, she explained that his absence makes her "a bit jumpy at unusual or sudden sounds too when he's not there and I have sole responsibility for the kids overnight" (Donna journal, 5, 12-14).

3.2.2 SUBTHEME: Seeking her validation in others

All participants described, at some point, an engagement with the process of being recognised by others, to varying degrees of success. This process contrasted with that of maintaining barriers in the 'Making Choices' theme because, here, the participants are trying to make and receive contact of some sort. At this point, they seem to be engaging with a reaction to their experience and are trying to make sense of it.

The participants see themselves as comprising more than their roles, as explored in 'The Conflicted Self' and, in relationship with others, they seek validation for who they see themselves to be. They express feelings of relief when their attempts to be recognised are acknowledged by another, and resentment and helplessness when they are not. From this perspective, the power of judgement appears to be given to the outside world.

3.2.2.1 Trying to be recognised

A striking example of trying to gain recognition from others, is Karen's quote about Mac not recognising her first Mother's Day:

> "A character trait of Mac's is you just, he's just really shit on like, presents and acknowledgement like I would've loved if, I'm certificate motivated, like, like I could've, you know, that first mother's day when I did not get a card, goes down in marriage history for us" (Karen interview, 54, 20 – 55, 3).

The way Karen speaks in the above passage suggests this has upset her so much that it is difficult to verbally express what it means for her efforts to be acknowledged by another. The idea of being "certificate motivated" places significant weight on her efforts to be recognised as this keeps her going. Similarly, Donna, Lizzie and Georgie expressed how important it felt for their roles to be valued by others, in response to seeing the Mother's Day card.

It seems that the sense of being unacknowledged is exacerbated because Karen so often focuses on the needs of others ahead of her own. When discussing the meaning of the 'to do list' object, she explained how many lists were required for her to hold her roles, including managing PWA: "I'm sure he'd manage without me, but you know when I'm having to fedex passports (abroad) because he's forgotten it" (Karen interview, 58, 13-14). She does feel hurt that something important to her is ignored. Recognising that "…the thing is is that he showers me with gifts all throughout the year, so I think it is like a point of contention that he's been told it's this time…" (Karen interview, 58, 3-4) is an important distinction because it suggests that Karen is not focused on the gift per se, but the meaning behind it, which is an understanding and recognition of her needs.

Georgie also gave examples that suggested her focus was on meeting the perceived expectations of others in search of validation, to the detriment of her own needs. This resulted in her doing things to be recognised rather than what she felt she needed, causing her stress. For example, when she changed careers she took six months off "to just relax and have some time to myself which is what I'd been kinda craving for years and years", but

found it difficult because "that was never seen as ok in my family, um it was kind of yeah, a bit kind of bourgeois, middle- too- yeah I don't know" and as a result "filled my days with things that I needed to, courses to go on and better myself in some way" (Georgie interview, 31, 3-8).

Throughout the interview, Donna spoke of how important it is to her that women recognised and supported each other in their roles. Describing a situation while on public transport with her children when she felt judged and unsupported by other women, she finished by saying "all we women could've stuck together and helped each other out" (Donna interview, 32, 16). She keenly feels being let down by other women, especially in her roles as a parent and professional, when the disapproval of others is obvious and recognition of her holding multiple roles is ignored.

This leads to Donna responding in a way that suggests she feels the need to defend her roles in order to gain recognition. Just as the women on the bus judged her as a parent without consideration of her professional or other roles, women have, in other situations, judged her as a professional without valuing her parent role. Her response is:

> "And you just think, well, just get over it. People have children, so what? Just deal with it! Um, I'm tired of being sort of, I'm flexible and organised, don't worry. The job will get done." (Donna interview, 25, 18-20)

With saying "just get over it" and "so what", Donna could be seen as defensive because she hasn't gained the recognition she is after. She goes on to start saying that she's "tired of being" something which, elsewhere in the interview, was expressed in relation to being passed over for jobs because of being a parent, but she stops herself and becomes reassuring with: "don't worry, the job will get done." Additionally, Donna's focus appears to

be turning inwards from an initial external focus as if talking directly to a critic, to an internal complaint, and finally a reassurance of either self or other, "I'm flexible and organised".

3.2.2.2 Being recognised

Lizzie and Georgie spoke about their roles being recognised by others and how meaningful this is for them. A sense of validation enables them to hold their roles in a more positive way. Lizzie spoke in her journal of receiving positive feedback from her boss, which: "has given me more confidence that I am actually doing a good job!" (Lizzie journal, 1, 6-8). This feels like a significant reassurance to her, particularly when PWA.

Both participants spoke of feeling more connected to others through recognition, and this having an impact on their own experience: "I need to remember how much better I feel when I've had contact with good friends" (Georgie journal, 2, 26-27). Lizzie and Georgie's partners recognised how adapting their PWA routine would indicate support, which was appreciated:

> "I've noticed even him moving it to being away Tuesday to Thursday it it does change things I feel, you know so much better knowing that on a Monday we're both gonna be around" (Lizzie interview, 8, 22-25).

Tanya seemed to take a more pragmatic approach to being recognised for her roles. She believed that, as much as she was open about her parent role: "you have to be constantly selling yourself when you're at work" as well. Otherwise: "in their mind, they can't relate to you, so they just see you as a problem" (Tanya interview, 33, 6-10). By balancing this with putting her "positive spin" on things, she talks about showing she can hold her professional and parent roles and be recognised positively, for example by her former boss when her son

was ill: ‘‘I’m really appreciate that you one, you shouldn’t be here but two you know, I do appreciate the fact you’ve made the effort’’ (Tanya interview, 35, 21-22).

3.2.2.3 Not being recognised

Conversely, their roles not being recognised felt very difficult for many of the participants. Despite the occasions cited above when their partners recognised the need for a change to their PWA arrangements in order to help them hold their roles, more commonly, PWA prompted feelings of resentment and powerlessness.

There was a belief, however irrational the participants understood it to be, that, while they remained at home ‘struggling’, their partners for example:

> "had no burdens and no troubles and he could just kind of swan in and out as he liked kind of care free which isn’t the truth but that is what it kind of felt, felt like." (Georgie interview, 8, 20-22)

Karen explained that:

> "I remember thinking I can’t tell him how hard this is, because he’s so so far away."

To combat that helplessness, she kept a journal for him to read on his return:

> "so he doesn’t get out of it" (Karen interview, 21, 2-14).

This clear recognition that what they imagined when PWA was not true, did not help them feel any more supported or validated. In comparison to their partner and his roles, some participants, such as Donna, felt that: "that’s a real shock. That’s a massive shock" to realise that their roles were not as valued (Donna interview, 29, 7). Karen described believing that others valued Mac’s living "the dream" more than the roles she played (Karen interview, 41,

16-17). This perceived lack of recognition from others seemed to further embed the frustration and resentment they felt about holding their roles.

Tanya and Erica also spoke about their work roles being unrecognised when their parent role came into play: "because I was the only person who was pr- or who had been pregnant, uh they don't deal very well with girls in that kind of situation" (Erica interview, 13, 23-24), and as a result: "…I thought "You're shafting me here'" (Erica interview, 14, 13-14). To manage her experience of this, Tanya talked about finding a position enabling her to be recognised regardless with her use of "positive spin" (see above 'Being Recognised') and avoid the sense of "missing out" when PWA impacted her ability to be present at work (Tanya journal, 3, 6-9).

Donna described a sense of becoming one dimensional when she was holding multiple roles and of the need to defend her parent role. Remembering the incident on the bus, she talks about how difficult it is to feel patronised and that it impacts her self-confidence, despite knowing that it isn't true:

> "…it's really hard to because you're used to being organised and competent and professional and on top of things at work and then something like that happens and you feel like, you're sort of made to feel like you don't know what you're doing and you start to question yourself a little bit. Was that unsafe, should I have gone and sat with her, did I do something wrong? That kind of um, tape starts playing in your head. I'm thinking but I'm, I'm a grown woman, a professional person, at work this would be crazy, it would never, you know this, a situation would never be, uh, would never be like this at work really" (Donna interview, 33, 4-11).

3.2.3 SUBTHEME: Holding roles is a “house of cards”

Although Georgie says that she knows life wouldn’t be chaos without order, she spends a vast amount of energy maintaining that order, especially when PWA. This is because, as she shared in her journal, there was a persistent feeling of anxiety that something terrible could happen while Simon was away.

This was echoed by Tanya, Erica and Karen. Tanya further explained that the added pressure when PWA made it feel even more important to have everything under control as there was no one else to help if there were problems. Although the participants managed this in different ways, that residual stress and ongoing anxiety about their sole responsibility was described by all. Not only did PWA impact elements of their roles, like development and enjoyment, but the anxiety present during every period that PWA, as well as often during the time around his departure and arrival, was apparent through the interviews and journals. The context the participants operated in was always held in their minds.

3.2.3.1 Do it and hope for the best

In contrast to the overarching fear and anxiety of feeling uncertain, as expressed by most participants, Tanya spoke several times about not allowing difficult situations to overcome her. Each time she made a conscious decision to take action to prompt movement and committed to this. "We don’t know what we’re dealing with so what are the solutions here, we can either all sit at home and do nothing, or we can go about our business" (Tanya interview, 21, 17-28). Donna echoed this several times in her interview by saying: "You just find a way to make it work" (Donna interview, 21, 25-26). There seemed to be a commitment to working through issues so PWA is managed, despite feeling like the uncertainty is overwhelming at times.

3.2.3.2 Relentlessness of role stress

If their systems of controlling for different variables to manage different roles stopped working, most participants reported becoming unsettled and anxious. Under the added pressure of PWA, when it felt like "my head contained so much information I had to just do endless lists" (Georgie interview, 25, 2-3), Georgie eventually found her phone and lists "a source of anxiety because they never seem to get shorter" (Georgie interview, 25, 19-20). Karen, Tanya and Erica all reported similar difficulties when feeling like they weren't in control of their roles. Lizzie reported in her journal that she couldn't escape her role stresses completely, especially when PWA: "Even tho I am not at work, I still have lots to do and think about as we are going away tomorrow… and would quite like someone else to do it for me!" (Lizzie journal, 1, 24-26).

3.2.3.3 Holding and losing touch with roles

Despite trying to maintain a sense of control, Erica described the experience of holding the roles as precarious, always at risk of tumbling and very difficult to predict:

> "when the kids are little, it's a bit of a house of cards, and when everything works perfectly you think, I'm totally nailing this it's really easy, but it take just the slightest puff of wind sometimes to throw it all out of sync" (Erica interview, 28, 8-11)

This sense of powerlessness was very difficult for Georgie to hold. She acknowledged being a naturally organised person, and working on her rigid thinking in therapy had helped, however, she still described the experience of holding multiple roles as:

> "the fear is that it's all overwhelming get on top of me and I'll fuck up or something or I won't do something right or, um, yeah something (whispers dramatically) something terrible will happen (laughs)" (Georgie interview, 28, 13-17).

Although she is able to joke with dramatic whispers and laughter, it could still be wondered that Georgie's use of strong language such as swearing, "fear", "all overwhelming" and "terrible" belies her discomfort in such an unpredictable situation.

Part of the precarious nature of holding the roles seemed to be the conflict between them, as related by Donna, Erica and Karen. The experience of holding multiple roles, due to its perceived inability to be controlled, seemed a challenging thing for the participants to sit with, especially when it interacted with, or exacerbated, their existing identity conflicts. Throughout her interview, Karen described herself in several different ways, which she seemed to feel were difficult to hold together.

As a result, she experienced an either/or situation in which her identity as an artist most often lost out to other roles. Other roles, such as the parent, seemed to change position throughout, from desiring to hold that as a main role above work, to struggling to accept that a woman with a job should give it up for motherhood. For example:

> "I'd like to not work for this period of my life (to raise the children) but I'm too frightened that my value as an employee will just disappear if I just take five years out." (Karen interview, 25, 24 – 26, 2)

> "if my sons were daughters…basically I just don't think I could say to them 'go and do a job, and then as soon as you've had babies the right thing to do is give it all up, you know and and just be a mother'. (Whispers) Just be a mother that's terrible! (Laughs)." (Karen interview, 29, 7-14)

> "He tries to support when he's home as much of me getting out and doing things as possible. Um and in terms of us supporting each other as a couple, um, you know he

is an he is an artist, he does sometimes need pep talks over the phone he does need support." (Karen interview, 20, 19 – 21, 1)

"Being an artist, like to not be able to work is like losing a piece of yourself because it's so tied up with your identity" (Karen interview, 63, 8-10)

3.2.4 SUBTHEME: Role interactions cause confusion

3.2.4.1 Helpless to role influence

Participants also reported times where they felt they had lost their agency and were powerless over the influence their roles had on each other. PWA could amplify these feelings. Tanya described how, despite keeping her roles from interacting, they still influenced each other in many ways. Specifically, her wife role felt like it had been absorbed into her parent role, as can be seen here when she described them as one: "My obviously main role for me is wife and mother… well certainly that's the role that I play" (Tanya interview, 13, 10-14).

She also told a light-hearted anecdote which demonstrated how prominent her professional identity was for her despite being on maternity leave, in the way she interacted with her son:

"I think sometimes I have to catch myself, like I still remember at baby group, having, when my eldest was crying I remember saying to him 'Be reasonable' and thinking, uh be reasonable? A child does not understand be reasonable, and then I had to remind myself that I wasn't in a sale- I wasn't in a negotiation position, a baby doesn't care if you if you don't like the fact, that you think they're being unreasonable, whereas obviously when you're having a conversation at work you would say to somebody, 'I think you're being unreasonable' or, even to a friend for example if you think they are." (Tanya interview, 29, 3-10)

Karen spoke about how she felt her roles were impacted by PWA regardless of Mac's presence or absence:

> "I'm constantly thinking about how we parent and how we do things and is that achievable when you've gone. Particularly around going to bed and things like that and I'm just like 'If we do this, we do it like this. If we engage in all these little rituals that I can't do when it's just me on my own then it makes it ten times worse than when you're not here." (Karen interview, 49, 17-50, 4)

The constantly changing landscape, largely influenced by PWA, is experienced by Karen as impeding her development within her roles and she feels powerless to this influence. This is indicated not only by what she says in the following passage but in her pace, the release of breath suggesting a surrendering to the process, and the repeated use of "just", as if appealing for compassion:

> "…(breathe out) what I've noticed with only like having under (five's) I've got friends with lots of kids of different ages and um they just it just changes so much so if you ask me again in three months' time it will just be different again because the stages just seem so fast when they're so small. Um and people ask me about that when Mac goes away and they go how are you gonna cope and I'm like well I just have to make it up new each time." (Karen interview, 5, 12-19)

Other participants also felt that PWA influenced their roles in a way that they could not control. Georgie and Erica spoke about PWA impacting their ability to stay connected to their partner role and how challenging that felt. Erica said: "…suddenly you're not a partnership.

It's a, I'm on my own as *the* parent, not mother and father, I've got sole responsibility which I think is, is, is tough." (Erica interview, 18, 14-16)

Donna's relationship with her parent role was described as challenging from the beginning, with the impact of her parent role on the others being completely unexpected. She described this experience in dramatic terms: "I think every parent would say, nothing, nobody prepares you and nothing prepares you" (Donna interview, 17, 6-7), for "a kind of juggernaut that is family life" (Donna interview, 17, 15-16). The repetition of "nothing" and "nobody" contrasted with "every" sets an extreme tone, which then goes on to suggest with "juggernaut", that family life, i.e. holding parent/partner roles, is an unstoppable, almost destructive force. It is a vivid description of the hole that has been ripped in Donna's world without warning.

Donna also described how PWA then amplified feelings about the impact of her parenting role on her freedom of choice and sense of agency. She says:

> "I thought you know, my career is important, I, um, it's clearly important to me. Surely I will be able to just pursue my career, um, and it should be fine. No one's gonna stop me and I earn my money and d d d. Surely! It never occurred to me that actually, if it doesn't fit in with family life or if it's not gonna work in terms of the childcare situation back home, then no, it may not quite go the path that you want it to." (Donna interview, 19, 9-14)

In contrast to the passage above, Donna described this experience in a very matter-of-fact way, as if what she is saying is common knowledge to all and therefore not to be challenged. Her surprise that this may not be the case lent weight to the "juggernaut" she is still coming to terms with. Therefore her "liberation" over leaving work early to hold her parent role when PWA, described later in the 'Making Choices' theme, feels in stark contrast.

3.2.4.2 Difficulty making sense of role interactions

Because of the participants' focus on ensuring their parent role was being held "regardless of the situation" (Tanya interview, 2, 15), they reported that, when PWA, the roles needed to interact more in order to fulfil them. Tanya's journal entries held several similar accounts of this:

> "Dinner is a microwave meal for one, with added salad. Lunches are made for tomorrow, clothes out and then head into my office to catch up on work missed earlier." (Tanya journal, 3, 12-13)

During the day, her roles are even more intertwined as she combines domestic chores with work tasks regardless of whether she is in the office or working from home.

She described feeling "guilty" for rushing her children in the morning, "annoyed" that her work day becomes a "deadline over my head" and then "guilty" for leaving work early (Tanya journal, 1, 14). These emotions are a contrast to the rational Tanya in the interview who only acknowledged that "when one of you are away they (the children) do tend to play up a bit" (Tanya interview, 8, 15), and feeling a bit jealous about her husband's fantasised "nice" trip (Tanya interview, 44,20-45, 12).

As shown by the difference in Tanya's explanations, for some participants, role interactions do impact emotions when PWA. Lizzie talked about her experience of holding her roles being different when her husband is home or away:

> "…when he's around we're probably a bit more of a not of a family, but it, it's also more relaxed because I know I don't have to do everything, so I can sort of lie in bed

> for five minutes rather than jumping out and trying to run into the shower before the children wake up." (Lizzie interview, 23, 16-19)

As well as the interactions changing their role experiences, the participants also spoke about the emotional impact roles could have on each other, and how this could be increased by role interactions. Georgie described in her interview how her feelings changed towards PWA and her partner when her career change helped her feel better about herself: "a combination of changing, changing my career and doing something I was happy in, if I felt happier in myself I think I felt happier with him being, him being away" (Georgie interview, 11, 1-2).

In contrast, her journal showed other increased role interaction as: "brain on overload from having to do exams, plus think about running of the house/family – inevitably means my patience is low and feel a bit frantic" (Georgie journal, 2, 15-16). Compared to earlier journal entries where Georgie felt so much more present and calm holding one role at a time, these emotions are a stark difference.

Several of the participants described how challenging it was to make sense of their roles once they had been interacting. Donna said, laughingly, in the beginning of her interview that:

> "I, *I* say it's like I've got two full time jobs, I've got my career job and then I've got my mum job. And um, they're both full time. (Laughs) if that's possible! And it's squeezing those two existence into one (Laughs again)." (Donna interview, 1, 2-4)

She repeats "I", with emphasis, and "full time", as if she's underlining this seemingly impossible feat. It suggests, with her laughter, that she struggles to make sense of it as it is so contradictory.

Lizzie became confused over her wife role in the interview, which came as a shock to her. When asked to describe her role of wife, she found she couldn't do so in the way she wanted and returned to puzzle over this several more times. "Do you know what I've honestly never thought about it. It's quite bad that I don't even know that!" (Lizzie interview, 1, 7-8). Becoming a parent has changed her experience of being a wife so much that she cannot recognise her partner role anymore and, given the option, "I would say I would definitely prioritise, if I had to, being a mother over a, over a wife" (Lizzie interview, 4, 2-3).

Erica finds that holding her roles of parent, professional and partner of someone who works is a unique experience at her firm given her level of seniority, and she indicated this when struggling to describe her position, by stumbling over role-related words and eventually seeming to give up on trying to make sense of how she is seen by others:

> "Um…mmm I guess in my day-to-day life I meet very few people like me. I'm quite, well it sounds, it sounds um a bit strange in the year two thousand and fifteen, within a law firm context there are very few um, female senior-ish lawyers who work fulltime whose pa- whose fa- um whose husband works fa-pa- fulltime, who um…does the whole kid thing as well as lawyering thing. Now obviously there are a few of us and they're starting to get more frequent, but especially at senior management level, I would sefemine- say there's there's no one particularly, um, quite a lot of se- female partners but not necessarily ones whose husbands also work? Um so my interaction with other people like me is quite limited I think. Um…my interaction with pe- just

generally is, I don't know what. I think people know my story. I'm not sure what else." (Erica interview, 9, 4-14)

She also seems to feel somewhat exposed, as she highlights being singled out by someone else: "someone who reports to me…said that "I'm one of the few people that she can see that does the mothering lawyering wifeing"" (Erica interview, 10, 22-23). It is possible with her choice of language here regarding her roles, that she is trying to normalise them or remove some meaning by turning them into verbs rather than retaining them as titles or nouns that define her.

3.3 MASTER THEME: THE CONFLICTED SELF

This theme draws together the internal and the external in different ways. As opposed to the theme of 'Making Choices', where the participants demonstrated a knowledge of who they were and an active engagement with that, here the participants are exploring their identity in the context of relationships and the world around them. This interplay seemed to deepen their understanding of self, but also unearthed conflicts.

Most participants expressed a conflict regarding their identity. Of all the roles they hold, it is felt that PWA most restricts the professional role, one which they feel is most important to their identity. There also seems a reluctance to fully embrace the motherhood role as part of who they see themselves to be. This places the participants in a position where who they feel they are (identity) and what gives them their feelings of self-worth, do not necessarily correspond with how they are holding their roles.

3.3.1 SUBTHEME: Conflict of expressing self in the external world

The conflict between participants' understanding of who they are and contradictory external factors, was described by all participants. It will be seen, as these conflicts are described further, how the experiences explored in 'Battling with Uncertainty' have fed into this subtheme.

3.3.1.1 Conflict between honouring role or identity

The place of motherhood in their identity seemed to present a challenge for most participants. The professional role offered a sense of the self-worth and identity expression that they struggled to find as a parent. Only Tanya did not appear to experience this. The following quotes describe how it appeared to the other participants:

> "I get my, a lot of my self-worth from work and I don't get it much from being a mother or a partner so it's very important for me to have that kinda separate side." (Georgie interview, 11, 15-16)

> "You know, strong independent feminist career women, and you have children, and then you're at home all day with them, and then you go on public transport and you're out and about in the community, in society with these children. That is a real shock, the way you are treated." (Donna interview, 29, 7-11)

> "…to not be able to work is like losing a piece of yourself because it's so tied up with your identity and um, I can imagine not working, not doing anything artistic for five or sixth months but still when people ask me what I do I still have to say it because I just think I'd feel kind of quite like I'd lost something … I don't think a lot of people see how much I help to enable him [Mac] to do that [pursue his career] by looking after the kids and by you know, supporting that." (Karen interview, 63, 8-12, 20-21)

> "I know I'm the kind of person that needs to have my own kind of not status but but you know my own role that's just for me. I think that's important to me but equally, I know, it's not as important as being a mother and I really like the balance that I've got." (Lizzie interview, 13, 5-8)

> "I'd say um they, the mother role takes precedence over any other role apart from the job role, any other um, role that I think that I have." (Erica interview, 4, 5-7)

Later on in the interview, she further alluded to her struggle identifying with her parent role:

> "Em, what's funny is that makes me think of my mum it doesn't make me think of me necessarily, that makes me think of cards that I give to my mum. Um but it um, I can't even remember what we did last Mother's Day for example." (Erica interview, 26, 12-14)

A number of comments in this passage highlight this point strikingly. For example, Erica recognised that it is "funny", in which she could mean "odd" by her tone, that she doesn't consider herself initially. In the context of the rest of the interview, Erica doesn't mention her mother at all, so it is interesting that she is first to mind in this context. However, she could be referring specifically to the type of Mother's Day card as something that she does not identify with. Additionally, she does not remember what the family did on Mother's Day the previous year, nor does she pause to think about it. Using the phrase "I can't even remember" suggests that the event is particularly forgettable for her, possibly unimportant. In an interview discussing the role of parenthood, Erica's lack of a point of reference to herself in a Mother's Day card highlights the potential struggle she has integrating this role into her identity.

It seemed from these comments that something about the role of motherhood was difficult to assimilate into the identities of some of the participants and it felt safer for them to focus on work as a place that held their worth. Lizzie and Tanya strike a balance that they feel expresses their engagement with both a career and parenthood, although Lizzie is unhappy with her actual job. Her satisfaction with her work/parent balance has been overshadowed by her unhappiness about the impact of PWA on her roles and relationships. Tanya spoke about using the love of her career to increase her happiness in her other roles as discussed in the next subtheme.

3.3.1.2 Conflict: the impact of context on identity

How the participants experienced their roles seemed to be influenced by how genuinely they felt the roles were being held, such as the conflict Karen described between her values of "keeping it real" and the privileged position Mac's job provided them. Her identity as an artist and a hardworking employee, a mother who doesn't pretend to others that her life is wonderful, and a wife in an equal relationship means a lot to her and she wants to portray it through the roles she holds. However, Mac's career as a musician exposes her to another "showbiz" side, providing a comfortable life but with significant absences and constraints. Reconciling these two sides of her life is difficult and causes Karen internal conflict. She feels unable to do anything about the PWA context that is felt to contradict her sense of self.

This uncomfortable combination is played out in the following passage:

> "It makes no difference to me that he's in a five star hotel although I might seethe a little bit in the morning knowing he's had his breakfast delivered. But like I am conscious that we don't moan about it. Sometimes I feel I do give people a bit of a

> reality check and go why do you think that's fun? Like why do you think I should be made up over that? It's paying the mortgage, I'm really grateful about that but you know, he could be selling carpet…or you know he could be a soldier…or anything do you know what I mean, just travelling… whatever, it doesn't change what goes on at home." (Karen interview, 42, 9 -43, 3)

She acknowledges how far his travelling lifestyle is from her own daily experience, going to great lengths to normalise his absence by comparing it to other jobs and focusing on the practical uses of his career, paying the mortgage. The beginning and end of the passage dismiss the impact Mac's career has on her, but is betrayed in the middle by using a very descriptive term, "seethe", to demonstrate her controlled anger, recognising her urge to "moan", and by her need to "reality check" others. This also returns the focus to her own experience and who she is, rather than allowing others to fixate on Mac and his 'rock'n'roll lifestyle'.

3.3.1.3 Conflict between behaviour and internal valuing of self

Another conflict experienced by the participants, was a feeling that external events are not as genuine or valuable as their internal processes. For example, Georgie explained:

> "I think it's very difficult and I think that some (laugh, intake of breath) I think I often say one thing and then show and do something else. So you know I'm very strong views about women in the world and then but yeah at the same time I I think I then take on the majority of the kind of gendered roles in in the house." (Georgie interview, 22, 23 – 23, 4)

What's striking in this passage is that she owns her views as part of her: "I'm very strong views" and then she stumbles to explain the contradiction in her actions, laughing at the same time. This could possibly be a deflection of embarrassment due to her incongruence. As with Karen, it suggests that, despite recognising important parts of her identity, she feels constricted in the world to behaving in a different way. In her journal, Georgie reiterated this by saying "I just want to feel able to give myself the time I need", suggesting that, what she is able to do and what she feels is important for her, are two different things (Georgie journal, 2, 19-20).

3.3.2 SUBTHEME: Process of understanding self through interacting with others

Here the participants described how particular relationships with others, or between roles, have influenced the meaning they make about who they are. When being observant of their interactions and experiences, the participants seem to better recognise their positions in relation to others and the world they live in. This insight appears to go on to influence the experiences described in the final master theme, 'Making Choices'.

3.3.2.1 Recognising influences

An aspect the participants discussed was how certain past and current experiences become internalised, influencing their experience of their roles. Factors such as their upbringing (Georgie), being inspired by work (Tanya) or restricted by PWA (Karen, Georgie, Lizzie), seemed to have differing effects on how they placed themselves in relation to their roles and what those interactions then meant for them.

Georgie spoke at length about the very different upbringing she had from her current family life and the "massive influence" her parents had over how she sees the world now. She

reported this to have had a positive effect in understanding "women in the world" and believing in her right to hold multiple roles, which she is also handing onto her children:

> "…aside from our own personal relationship, it's a positive image for our children to be growing up and to see that dad's not just the one to come home and make mess and play with you, they also you know, take you to school, and do homework and give you baths and do the cooking and cleaning and all those kind of things. Um, yeah so I feel very fortunate in that respect…Yeah and you know I, I my dad was very like that as well so I feel like I've kind of (laughs) taken a lot from how my parents were…And brought it into my house so yep." (Georgie interview, 24, 5-14)

However, it does create conflict as well. Despite Georgie and her partner's issues, she says they demonstrate what she believes are appropriate values to their children. Similarly, although separated, Georgie described how her own parents ensured she was exposed to values that would empower her as she grew up. As could be indicated by her laugh in the above passage recognising the conflict, Georgie feels strongly about her upbringing and how difficult it is to maintain her values in the current context.

This highlights to her a contrast in which she struggles to reconcile:

> "Um, and I guess I'm bringing my children up very differently to how I was brought up um, and I like I don't like I like I would prefer some taking some of the ways that I was brought up and using them in my own kind of parenting and I haven't really done that I feel it's quite an isolated thing being a parent and I really my mum and my dad…had a very community style of bringing up children with lots of different families together, um and I really like that idea and I don't feel like I fe-yeah so I feel a bit too isolated from from people." (Georgie interview, 18, 15-22)

It feels like Georgie is caught between two worlds in this passage, as her expression is stilted and she appears to move back and forth between two different ideas. It could be an indicator of the conflict she feels over the importance of her parent's influence and desire to be like them, and the reality of her situation where she is in fact, in a relationship yet isolated.

She seems to relate to her mother as a single parent, yet she has been unable to buffer that experience with a community, as she did. I get the sense, from her saying "I really like that idea and I don't feel like I…" that Georgie feels regret about this and holds herself responsible for the isolation, which is hard for her to acknowledge.

Tanya stated that: "if you love what you're doing in your career and you've almost found your passion, I think when you have subsequent children, I think the decision is already made for you" (Tanya interview, 27, 2-4). In this and other passages, she repeatedly showed that, despite believing that "the children come first, they have to" (Tanya interview, 8, 12), being passionate about her professional role elevated her motivation to hold multiple roles and ultimately enhance her experience. "I would much rather be at work be happy then go, and go home being happy than be at home all day looking after the children being miserable" (Tanya interview, 8, 25-26). This was also echoed by other participants.

Conversely, an example of an ongoing influence on her sense of self and resulting experience of her roles, is expressed by Lizzie in her journal and was something which several participants referred to as directly impacting them, especially when PWA:

> "Feeling very tired and grumpy this morning as up multiple times in the night with the baby. Feel resentful towards my husband as I know he would have had two nights

> unbroken good sleep whereas I haven't and feel like I am always the one getting up with the children in the night." (Lizzie journal, 1, 21-24)

Karen returned regularly to discussing the impact PWA has on how she is able to express her identity, which in turn influences how she holds her roles. Specifically, supporting her husband's career and its required absence, means she struggles to pursue her own chosen career, which impacts how she feels about herself.

The participants' process of integrating these experiences into their understanding of themselves influenced what it was like for them to hold their roles. They also acknowledged how reflecting on their previous stances highlighted how they may have changed. For example, Tanya expressed a commitment to making the most of every opportunity, recognising that she would not have achieved as much as she had without this belief. She also spoke several times of teaching her children this and of the value in learning from experience, as she has done herself:

> "I encourage them to be confident and to go out there and to talk to different people, because it's through those talks that they'll learn things it'll give them the opportunities when they're bigger." (Tanya interview, 13,25-14,2)

3.3.2.2 Developing insight in relationships

Through discussing their relationships, the participants revealed insights into their own points of view which impact their experience of their roles. Several participants spoke about recognising their perspective in relation to another. Karen and Tanya shared insights gained when talking with friends. Both can be seen reflecting on comments and deciding whether

they are relevant to their perspective. In these situations it enables them to think about their context and review the justification for living in this way.

> ″I think...there is like a tension around when we talk with friends and I just go "Oh I've got (thing), you know I, I I'm doing this with work and or I wanna do this but I won't be able to Mac's away" and there's sort of tension around that like, "well it's not fair is it that it's always you that has to compromise". But someone has to compromise. And the boys can't, cos they're three and one." (Karen interview, 60, 19 – 61, 1)

> "Friend pops in unexpectedly for a cup of tea. Welcome distraction and I hear about her ''horrid'' day with her ''horrid'' children and ''horrid'' husband, who refuses to do anything. Listen to how I'm so lucky my Husband does(n't) things to help, which makes me think. I am lucky as this week is exceptional, with him being the primary contact for the children." (Tanya journal, 4, 18-22)

Tanya also talked in her interview about an awareness that, although their choices make her lifestyle different to people around her, she knows: "that in my heart of hearts that the children would, would probably be disadvantaged (laughs a little) if I was at home all day" (Tanya interview, 9, 6-7). Her self-deprecating laugh points to her recognition of her need to work to be a fulfilled parent too.

In contrast, Lizzie talked about having recognised through PWA, that:

> "to me it is more around having him present, more present and and more of an active parent than it is us being able to afford to go on holiday you know, twice or three times a year." (Lizzie interview, 19, 24-26)

Although her family may have warned her of the potential difficulties, she didn't imagine it would be so hard.

However, she also reflected that: "I've got people who are in the same situation and I don't really look at people's lives and think, oh my god I wish that was my life" (Lizzie interview, 16, 10-12). So, although she and other participants recognise that PWA creates additional challenges that feel magnified when they are alone, their perspectives can change when there are opportunities to reflect in a more balanced way.

Georgie cited examples of times when the comparison to others does not offer a positive experience of holding her roles: "I feel like every day there's something to worry about, or um, I don't know, yeah, someone (another parent) to compare yourself to" (Georgie, 13, 27-28). In light of the earlier comments regarding the isolation of her life as a parent, it seems that Georgie finds it difficult to hold the role of parent and feel "good enough" in comparison to others.

"I quite often see you know will see another couple um and kind of go "Oh, look how happy they are" (Georgie, 20, 23-24). However, she is also able to find an alternative perspective as well: "I have some friends who have s- you know quite liberal partners and it's nowhere near as equal as our household is" (Georgie, 23, 5-7). These different stances could suggest that Georgie is caught between two ideals, one which is of a content couple, and the other of an equal household. In the absence of the former, she looks to the latter as a way of feeling more positive, especially given the first comment about parenting comparisons.

3.4 MASTER THEME: MAKING CHOICES

In contrast to ‘Battling with Uncertainty’, this theme draws together elements of the participants’ experiences that see them making conscious decisions about their situation. Again, holding their roles in the context of PWA feels challenging, but here they describe times where drawing on their inner resources enabled them to hold them more proactively. The contrasting relational dynamics are used in different ways. At times participants needed to maintain their barriers to avoid feeling vulnerable and, at others, the attempted connection with their partner was an uplifting experience and offered some respite to the feeling of isolation described in ‘Battling with Uncertainty’. These dynamics seemed to be accompanied by a self-awareness that suggested participants were making active choices.

Participants also described the acceptance that despite feeling heavy, their responsibilities were there to be met and the way to do so, especially when PWA, was to see them as a process to undertake. The participants spoke about their experience of managing the impact of this process and its inevitable consequences.

3.4.1 SUBTHEME: Keeping self safe

3.4.1.1 Keeping her distance and maintaining barriers

This relational dynamic contained an element of self-protection, and possibly control, in a context where participants at times found themselves feeling powerless. When the experience of PWA led to particularly difficult feelings, participants reported defending against a connection with others. All participants apart from Donna spoke about this.

Donna spoke more about always trying to connect. Her stronger subthemes were 'Absent and/or alone' and 'Seeking her validation in others' from the 'Battling with Uncertainty' master theme, suggesting she experienced being left rather than instigating a disconnection. Within

this master theme of ‘Making Choices’, she spoke more about ‘Attempting reciprocal connection: “we’re in it together”’. This subtheme will be explored below.

Most participants shared how they found it unsafe in some way to express themselves clearly about emotional topics. In a more explicit way, Georgie described how she and her partner both used action to fix emotional problems rather than talking about them: "I need to deal with it but I don’t quite know how to make it better” (Georgie interview, 20, 21-22). Using active words such as "deal with" and "make it better" gives a sense of fixing a problem by herself rather than exploring and understanding it with another. This idea of action rather than words was echoed in her description of her partner:

> "…he felt like the way to help was to do stuff, to do, you know to take the trash out and do all this stuff and try and make it so it was easier for me rather than kind of, um talking about it I guess." (Georgie, 8, 9-11)

Less explicitly, Karen, Tanya and Erica employed language to create distance and manage their feelings. For example, when I asked Tanya about what seemed to be an emotional moment, she dismissed the idea. It seemed that she then redirected me towards a possible cognitive explanation by repeatedly saying "I think", and depersonalised her experience with "you’re/your" and "people". A struggle between states could be suggested as, despite trying to create distance with her language, she used words like "emotional" and "personal" several times as well:

> "Um no not really, I mean obviously I think when you talk to any parent I think they’re always, yeah there’s always going to be that emotion, emoth- emotional side I think when you’re talking about your children, and certainly if people criticise them I think people tend to get really emotional. You know it is a personal thing and it would be hard not to get emotional about your children." (Tanya interview, 14, 13-17)

When explaining the parent/professional interaction when working from home, Erica focused on the impact on her children and used "you", possibly to balance her feelings, making them easier for her to express, given her previous admission of "the guilts" about her work-life balance:

> "…it's more that it's tough for them actually because they're, "Why are you in the house but ignoring us?" which isn't very fair. I mean, if they were twelve you could explain it to them, but you can't really explain anything to a two year-old. So yeah, that's a, that's a interaction." (Erica interview, 22, 22 – 23, 2)

Karen dismissed any feelings she has about PWA by, for example, responding that "it's just our normal" when friends ask how she copes (Karen interview, 18, 1-2). These tactics could be seen as helping the participants to engage with their roles while navigating difficult relational experiences.

Maintaining distance within relationships was also described as disconnecting from others. Erica described close relationships with family and friends as "nice", rather than implying that the relationships were intimate. Similarly, in her interview and journal, Lizzie referred to others in an impersonal way, without using names or intimate terms. For example, in her journal, her Easter holiday was being taken with "the family" (Lizzie journal, 1, 18) and, in order to cope with her roles when PWA, she preferred to disconnect completely from others: "looking forward to being able to watch my programme on TV and not have to talk to anyone!" (Lizzie journal, 1, 12-13)

Georgie also spoke about disconnecting from others when she was feeling stressed. In her journal she described: "Vie [I've] failed to stay in touch properly, its almost like it's another chore on my list – sad really as I'd probably feel less burdened and stressed if I shared it with him more" (Georgie journal, 3, 20-22).

In her interview, she explained how hard it also was for her to reconnect with her partner when he returned from being away:

> "it would take quite a long time for me to climb back down from that, kind of this is how the house has to run and let him back in and kind of be soft and warm so and then, you know, two days later he'd be off again, so it was a real, it was very difficult when he was going away a lot." (Georgie interview, 7, 20 – 8, 2)

These examples of disconnection, whether directly related to the context of PWA or not, seem to be a conscious behaviour from some participants to protect themselves from intimacy. This impacts their experience as all of their roles involve relating with others.

If participants create barriers within relationships, it can have a direct impact on their experience of their roles. Georgie described this in several different roles, from old friends: "(I) have used kinda having young children as a reason why I kind of haven't kept up contact in the way that I want" (Georgie interview, 16, 11-12), to her partner role:

> "…it's probably felt less important a role than the other things, or it's not that it's less important, it's not been easy so it hasn't, yeah I guess that's the role that I tend to try and not think about too much because it's not good at the moment." (Georgie interview, 20, 17-20)

As can be seen by the way she stumbles finding the right words, it is difficult to express this. Georgie went on to describe feelings such as guilt, neglect and shame in relation to the state of her relationship.

Erica spoke about how prioritising her work role gave less opportunity for intimacy with her husband and children. As she said several times in the interview, her and her husband "don't always have time for each other" (Erica interview, 7, 4) and, as discussed above, when she works from home, she has to actively create distance with her children in order to hold her professional role appropriately:

> "…the kids get upset, especially or especially if I'm talking to them and…someone phones and I literally have to cut them off and shut the door on them, and that's, that's really tough on them so I haven't quite got that right yet." (Erica interview, 23, 16-19)

Some participants appeared to maintain their distance in relationships when they needed to by putting themselves in control of a situation. Similar to expressing difficulties indirectly, a position of control was communicated and strong emotions avoided to minimise conflict and stress. Karen uses this with Mac to manage her parent role when PWA. This example refers to their different approaches to sleep training: "this is what's gonna happen, so you can either help me do it now or we can you know…" (Karen interview, 50, 21-22). As can be seen, Karen makes clear that she is in control and it feels like there is a slight threat left unsaid that suggests someone will be worse off if Mac doesn't comply. Despite his desire to do something else, he helps her and conflict is avoided. This may be a tactic that allows Karen to avoid engaging with strong emotions.

3.4.1.2 Risking vs protecting self

Some participants explained that openly acknowledging their feelings and needs felt frightening and so their other option was to protect the vulnerable parts of themselves by not doing so. Georgie and Karen redirected their attention to holding the PWA context responsible for this:

> "I definitely feel like I have used his being away and his job as a reason for things kind of not being very good with me." (Georgie interview, 6, 7-8)

> "I think about not having anything to say to people when they ask what Im doing at the moment. Stupid pride heh? maybe I just need to power through this. accept that it won't be my shining hour and just be grateful they still want me to do it… (despite) going off radar when mac is away." (Karen journal, 3, 26 – 4, 2 & 12-13)

Both Georgie and Karen described being unhappy in their jobs but felt unable to make a change, they said, because of PWA. Both later admitted that there were other factors impacting their happiness – Georgie's fear of taking responsibility for her career direction and Karen's of losing worth in other's opinions without a job title. In contrast, Tanya spoke of creating a diversion from her feelings when interacting with others, as she felt unable to acknowledge vulnerability when in her work role:

> "Obviously when you're at work, I personally have a different guard up than I would do with my family for example, because I know that certain things that might come out in a work environment could impact me, or could be used possibly even against me." (Tanya interview, 29, 14-17)

As a result of this conflict, it could be suggested that participants' experience of their roles would oscillate between creating an environment of control or equality. An example of this is

Karen's explanation of how she sees her relationship with Mac: "we are quite an equal couple when he's home" (Karen interview, 20, 14-15) but, because of PWA, "I got final say, because and that happens a little bit to be honest, cos I get to go *whispers* "Well you go away'"" (Karen interview, 49, 4-6). It could be suggested, from the way her tense changed in the second passage and how she whispers, that this power imbalance is an ongoing issue for her which doesn't feel very comfortable to vocalise.

3.4.2 SUBTHEME: Empowering self

3.4.2.1 Attempting reciprocal connection: "we're in it together"

Most participants expressed a reciprocal dynamic in relationships, which was not necessarily contingent on their partner's presence. They all described the impact of PWA on their relationships and the importance of the continued connection despite absence, as they were a "partnership". Some spoke of how important it was support each other in their roles. Although this came up with each participant except Lizzie, it was not as strong a theme as the other relationship dynamics. This suggests that, although the participants are committed to working towards a reciprocal relationship, with PWA it is difficult to achieve consistently.

Georgie described how she can now "welcome him back into the family" on her partner's return from being away. "I think he feels you know closer to the girls and more part of the family and um so it's yeah it's been it's been great" (Georgie interview, 33, 7-8). It could be wondered that the stumbling and use of "you know" suggests that she is still not used to speaking in this way after years of estrangement. In other passages, it has been noted that she has also found it difficult to speak smoothly about emotional subjects.

As explored at another point, Georgie finds they still disconnect from one another when PWA, as opposed to Erica, Tanya and Donna who continued to feel connected in their partner's absence. Erica explained:

> "It's not like he works on a gas rig or anything. He's um, he's always, he's a constant presence within the house um but he um, he does go away a bit yeah." (Erica interview, 17, 13-15)

Another relationship highlighted by Tanya in her journal was the importance of providing consistent connections with the children, especially when PWA:

> "Day 4 [of 5] **–** Morning the same, but feeling very tired. Youngest was up twice during the night, wanting cuddles. Woke at 5am and got up for the day. Spend less time today on my appearance and spend it instead with the children." (Tanya journal, 5, 4-7)

After the first few days of trying to hold her roles efficiently so her work role is not neglected, she chooses to shift her priorities and connect with her children, resulting in a calmer start to the day.

There is an acknowledgement that creating a reciprocal relationship has its challenges and uncertainties. Both Donna and Karen reflect that the consequences of her and her partner supporting each other to hold multiple roles and pursue their careers need to be kept in mind constantly. Overall, the shared goal in the relationship is what drives them to connect:

> "Both agree there's nothing we can do about it now, see what happens, but it is a worry how both our jobs over the next few months are going to affect family life." (Donna journal, 3, 24-27)

> "I can't see not working at all, it would definitely be doing something. But we are gonna have to look at this year and see how it affects everyone and make the decision." (Karen interview, 31, 19-23)

Georgie and Tanya reiterated this with their emphasis on reciprocal support. In Tanya's case, she describes her children's potential response in quite an adult way, echoing other parts of her interview where she discussed treating her children as active members of the family, and talking to them as equals:

> "(PWA constantly changing routine) reminds you of the importance of communicating with each other, because if you didn't do that, things would fall down very very quickly, and I'm sure at some point either my boss would get cross, or the children would say, "Hang on a minute mum and dad, you know I'm not happy"." (Tanya interview, 17, 19-22)

3.4.2.2 Taking back control

Most of the participants spoke of the delicate balance between holding their roles and feeling empowered. At the times they took control, they reported experiencing them differently. In her interview Georgie spoke of regaining balance through changing elements of her roles, which allowed a more positive perspective, one she had felt to be absent for some time. She explained that "it took yeah, being depressed and doing something about it, changing, taking a risk on moving careers" to become happier in her other roles, including "it being ok that he was away", a significant change for her (Georgie interview, 10, 22-23).

Georgie also explained in her journal that, by not holding multiple roles simultaneously, she was more present and enjoyed what she was doing:

> "I do feel quite unburdened and relaxed and carefree while i'm at university, its so very different to the rest of my life – it's the only time my head feels uncluttered. I don't think about anything other than that moment I'm in." (Georgie journal, 3, 26-28)

By being present in the moment, she seems to take so much more from the experience and even her writing suggests she is less concerned with perfection: 'i'm', 'its'.

Georgie went on to write: "I end the work day feeling happy and can return home in a lighter mood be spend time with the kids" (Georgie journal, 4, 2-3). Although the word "be" is possibly a typing error and intended by Georgie to be "and", it could also be interpreted as an indication of the presence she feels and is able to transfer from her validating professional role to her parent role.

Donna found leaving work early, a rare occurrence in her field, "liberating" (Donna interview, 20, 24) when PWA and a welcome break from the challenges of breaking new ground to pursue her career as a new mother. She described initially feeling worried that this would work against her:

> "because if you talk about your kids too much people might think that you are limited in your availability, that you can't stay late, that you can't put extra hours in that you're not focused, I was worried about all these things." (Donna interview, 24, 19-21)

This was confirmed by situations where:

> "I've mentioned the kids and said "I could do the job but I'd have to start on such and such a date because of they're booked in to have immunisations or whatever it might be. "Ugh", that kind of reaction over the phone." (Donna interview, 25, 10-13)

However, she found her confidence and reported not only rejoicing in the early "liberation" from work on a Friday, but by responding to those negative reactions: "…tough…I'll go and do a different contract because it'd be a daft way of thinking" (Donna interview, 25, 5-6).

Erica spoke of her need to "protect" her family from the influence of her work role, as she was aware of how it could intrude. "I think you need to protect your family quite a lot whether it's, in terms of time spent with them or quality time spent with them" (Erica interview, 21, 8-9). However, she also found it held an important place in her role as partner, with its power to connect her and her husband who was also a lawyer: "it's quite reassuring and it's nice that I've got someone at home that I can bleurgh to and he'll sort of understand what I'm talking about and likewise he's the same" (Erica interview, 10, 8-10).

Similarly, Tanya's belief that "you wear different hats in different roles" (Tanya interview, 29, 21-22) enabled her to feel like her roles were separate to a certain degree and, therefore, have some control over how much they influenced each other.

> "I think I would be quite professional, I'm quite diplomatic, whereas …if you're in the middle of two fighting children, you can't always be diplomatic, you know, not every situation calls for it. So I think me, my approach changes depending on the audience that I'm with and the situation I'm in." (Tanya interview, 28, 17-23)

In relation to the way participants took positive elements from holding multiple roles, Tanya clearly described that "I'm always looking at the benefit of every situation" (Tanya interview,

23, 19-20). To gain enough perspective on her roles to make decisions for her family, "I've always gone well ok, that's not doing, that's not working out right ok what's, what other solutions have we got. What, what would work for us?" (Tanya interview, 19, 22-24).

Donna summed up her process of holding multiple roles with a clear statement, "I have to be *very* flexible and *very* organised" (Donna interview, 25, 17). In addition to understanding the PWA process so they could manage, the participants spoke about controlling for as much as possible being an important part of their experience. Again, the idea of consistency and minimising change was seen to be helpful, but without order Georgie said, "I feel like it (life) would be chaos but I know in reality that it wouldn't" (Georgie interview, 27, 13).

Karen also reported feeling it was important to maintain control when PWA, because she experienced PWA as influencing her roles regardless of his presence or absence. As a result, she described having found herself to have inadvertently taken responsibility for all roles and relationships, in order to manage.

3.4.2.3 Knowing self and making it work

The participants described, in different ways, a sense of ongoing work in terms of holding their roles and their understanding of self. Through their experiences, reflection would produce insight and a new way of approaching the issue, as poignantly described by Karen in her journal:

> "I'm really not striving for any kind of show home, but the state of the house is getting me down. visually, there just seems no peace. theres just so much to do and I have to choose what 'has to be done' in the hours that I can do it. I find I'm missing meals because if i sit down in the evening then nothing else gets done. the ideal is

> something that takes a long time in the oven. i work till its done then eat then sleep." (Karen journal, 3, 4-9)

It can be seen here, not just by what Karen says, but also by how she is writing, with little punctuation, that she is struggling to keep up. The stress of keeping her home in some type of order while Mac is away is overwhelming if she stops, so she keeps going until enough is done to warrant attending to her own needs.

Elsewhere, she described the impact this is having on her experience of work as well, as she feels unable to give it the attention it deserves and this conflicts with how she sees herself:

> "They are just making even harder for me to walk away from it, but it's stressing me out that I'm not giving it my full attention. They hired me on my reputation and I'd like to keep that up, I'm not happy with the standard of my work. Maybe I just need to chill." (Karen journal, 4, 13-16)

Another example of recognising a need to adapt her approach to holding roles in a more genuine way, is Georgie's comment below. This could still be considered a work in progress as she returns to her form of self-talk at the end and disconnection from the moment, by using "you":

> "I'm running my life a bit too ordered or everything's having to be in a certain way and yeah that actually the enjoyment of life it's actually in the moment of doing something and not having to constantly be thinking about the next thing that you need to do." (Georgie interview, 27, 7-10)

Developing a congruent process of holding their roles and sense of self also required participants have an understanding of their boundaries and values. Tanya stated "'I never

would've been happy with that compromise. And I think to a certain extent I would've resented the situation I was in" (Tanya interview, 28, 5).

Donna described how "heart-breaking" (Donna interview, 26, 11) she had found it when previous parts of how she knew herself, namely her autonomy and how she was seen by friends prior to having children and PWA, seemed lost. This was not something she felt able to reclaim.

> "And that is because they can't, because their roles, well they've got their role as themselves and their career and relationship but they don't have that extra of mum or dad, being mum or dad or carer." (Donna interview, 26, 20-22)

In this case, parts of Donna's self that previously held significant importance gave way to new priorities, explicitly compared here in her and her friends' roles.

Erica echoed this development in her vehement description of changing roles within her firm when she became a mother:

> "No other corporate partner had had children, as in woman had had children, no associate had children, but this was like five ye- six years ago. So very different now, um I was the first one to do it so, they didn't really know how to handle me and I felt like I was pushed out and put into this role but actually this role had turned out to be the best thing for me. So, em, I've now got completely comfortable with it, but for a long time, and I still do say "God, I can't *believe* that they made me give up on all that". But, um…but now oh my god I would rather eat my own face than have to go back to it (laughs) so you just change don't you, you adapt." (Erica interview, 12, 24-13, 5)

The idea that she'd rather "eat my own face" than return to her former area of practice is a strong image, perhaps referring to the idea of taking control of her role within the cut-throat world of law and of how much she recognises she has changed in the interim. It could also be suggestive of tearing off a mask of some sort that would be required by returning to that role.

3.4.3 SUBTHEME: Recognising responsibilities

3.4.3.1 Understanding PWA as a process to manage

Karen and Donna described the necessity of simplifying everything when PWA in order to hold their roles and, in Karen's case, her professional role was temporarily suspended. Erica and Tanya both found maintaining perspective important though challenging, because "it's really hard not to feel quite irrational over certain things and you do- and you can get quite resentful" (Tanya interview, 45, 10-12). She noted in her journal the importance of maintaining consistency where possible: "This allows me to catch up on workloads and breath for a moment" (Tanya journal, 3, 22-23).

However, despite the regularity of PWA and the use of a process to manage, the experience often seemed to change each time. Karen spoke about the ages of her children, her work situation and the time of year factoring into the differences, which Donna and Lizzie also spoke about, Tanya adding the size of her workload as a factor.

3.4.3.2 There are always responsibilities to meet that are greater than her own needs

Tanya, Karen and Donna refer to some of the overarching responsibilities associated with holding multiple roles: the financial implications of childcare, prioritising the 'breadwinner' role and balancing the salaried and freelance roles, as well as prioritising decisions and

accepting the consequences. This was also recognised by the participants as involving a decision to override their own needs in favour of the children's or that of the family as a whole. Tanya stressed that a physical presence was needed in order to hold the multiple roles in the best way possible: "…we've (her and her husband) tried to work it between us that they (the children) see us as much as they can" (Tanya interview, 5, 1), regardless of their other responsibilities and PWA.

Georgie found that the responsibility of motherhood was great and particularly in the context of PWA, overwhelming:

> "…the longest I think it's been has been six seven weeks at a stretch and it was just a nightmare and I felt totally responsible and on my own and like a single parent." (Georgie interview, 2, 16-18)

This experience is described more in 'Battling with Uncertainty'.

3.4.3.3 The impact of prioritising

"…the children come first, they have to" said Tanya in her interview (Tanya interview, 8, 12). This was echoed by other participants. Prioritising the welfare of the children seemed very important to some of the participants, with Karen speaking about the connection with her children as almost a physical entity: "cause I'm just so attached, there was n- even when I was shattered, there was just no option of me mum taking him for a night or whatever" (Karen interview, 15, 18-20). Participants also felt strongly about work, but they still believed that putting their parent role first was not negotiable, even if it conflicted with their identity, as represented by their professional roles.

Donna noted in her journal an example where all of her roles will potentially interact and she has to not only prioritise which roles to engage with, but face the resulting consequences on other roles.

> "I have to finish the cleaning before the end of the day, because I'm working next week so it's the last chance I'll have to do it before my parents come to stay next weekend for Claires' birthday. It means I pick up the kids a bit later than normal, and Claire refuses to come home until she has finished her drawing. Start to get a little anxious as the evening routine always takes longer on your own, and already we are running late, and if the kids get over-tired it'll make it even harder to settle them." (Donna journal, 2, 5-11).

Lizzie talked in her interview about the difficulty prioritising "personal time" when PWA:

> "When your partner isn't there in the week you kind of expect them to be around all weekend. But I know he feels that's the compromise cos obviously, it's still important for him to do, some of the stuff that he wants to do outside of the family so it's, it's, it does create you know tension with uh, sort of your personal time and and balancing everything." (Lizzie interview, 9, 7-11)

The consequence of this difficulty is that both participants and partners often seem to end up feeling resentful of those missed opportunities, and instead of being empathic towards each other, find:

> "It's kind of a bit of a battle about who's had a worse week than the other and it's like competitive tiredness and I know my friends say the same thing but I guess it's worse when, you know they're away and um, you know you feel a bit yeah resentful. So no it's not it's not good at all." (Lizzie interview, 10, 15-18)

For participants such as Lizzie, the restriction of PWA and having to prioritise was overcome by "doing" and not "being". She described a day where she was "running" from the moment she woke up. Despite the participants saying that the children were their priority, only Tanya and Karen explicitly reflected on the impact PWA could be having on the children. Karen reflected in a journal entry: "For the first time our eldest is saying he doesn't want daddy to go away. so that has been hard to handle" (Karen journal, 3, 20-21), and on her final commute to work Tanya writes, "…find myself spending time looking out of the window, wondering if my kids will be damaged or inspired when they're older by their parents. Hope that it's the latter." (Tanya journal, 6, 2-4)

3.5 SUMMARY

As explored throughout the chapter, three master themes were uncovered from the analysis process, each with sub themes, in relation to participants describing their lived experiences of holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when their partner travels overnight regularly for work. The participants seem to experience an ongoing, reciprocal movement between the themes and subthemes as they try to make sense of holding their roles in relation to themselves, others and their world. This dynamic also echoes the way Counselling Psychologists perceive sense-making. PWA is seen to feature as a significant influence over their experiences however, it is not expressed constantly across all of the themes.

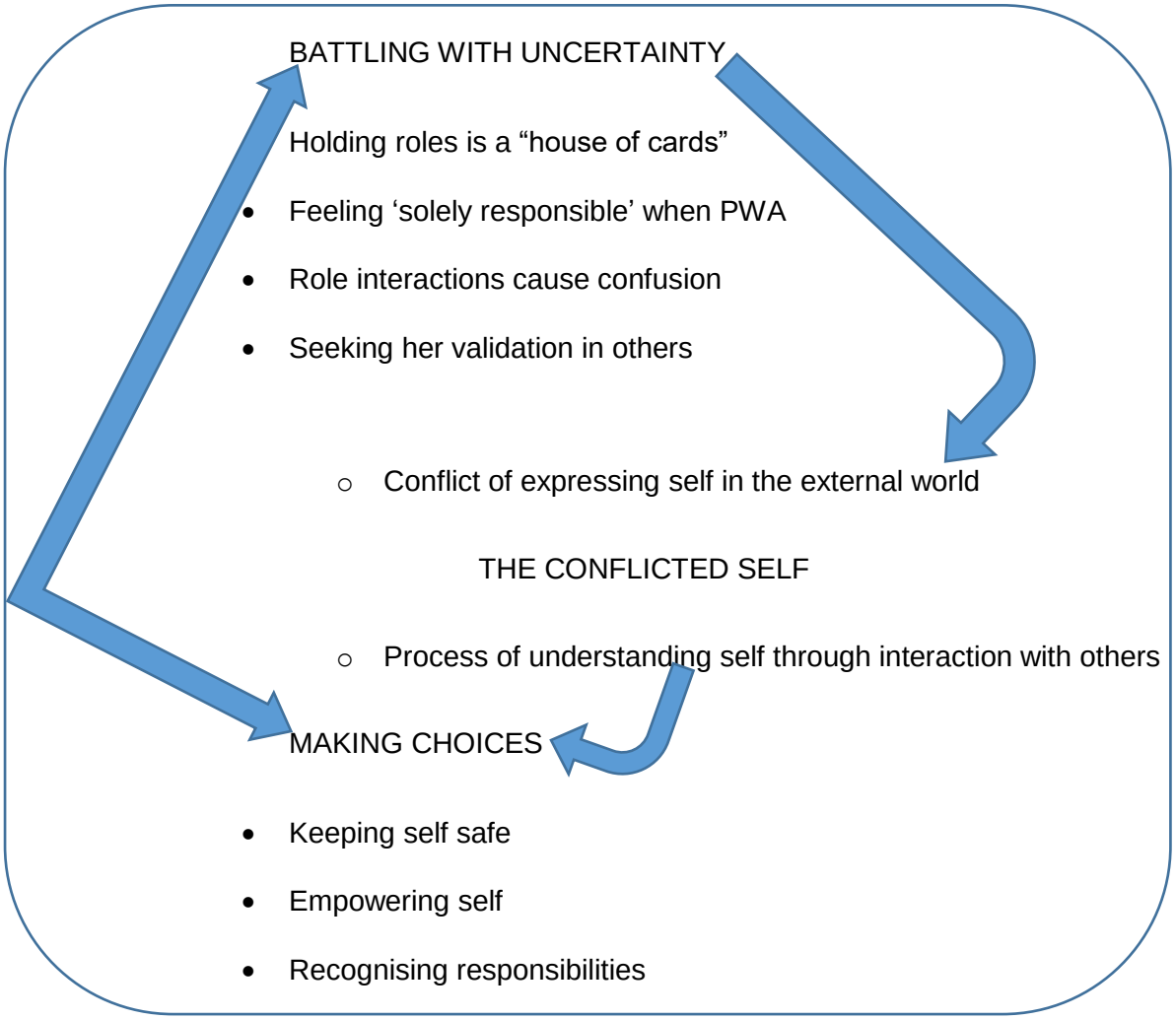
A way of looking at the data is that 'The Conflicted Self' represents two aspects of each woman's experiences. On one hand, the participants seem to struggle as their 'Battles with Uncertainty' feed into conflicts over expressing themselves in the external world. On the other, the process of understanding the self through interactions with others could build

insight, which then assists participants in 'Making Choices'. As 'The Conflicted Self' holds the participants' engagement with their self-development, the interplay between sense-making and action is possibly symbolised by the other two themes, showing the dynamic nature of the experience.

4. DISCUSSION

My analysis of the data gleaned three major themes and nine associated subthemes which have been described in detail throughout the previous chapter. In this chapter I will compare them to the bodies of literature and theories relating to multiple roles and WRT, reflect on the methodological and personal process of conducting IPA and discuss the implications for Counselling Psychology.

The findings are summarised as such, in response to the question, 'what is a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, partner and professional when her partner travels overnight regularly for work?'



I understood it that the women participating in my research experienced ongoing movement between engaging with their uncertainties and active choice-making, influenced by and influencing, 'The Conflicted Self'. The internal process of self-understanding through their interaction with others seemed to influence the choices the participants made about their responsibilities and looking after themselves in a protective and empowering way ('Making Choices'*).*

'Battling with Uncertainty' represented a different side to Tanya, Georgie, Lizzie, Erica, Donna and Karen's experiences from those described in 'Making Choices'. The precarious nature of holding multiple roles, the difficulty making sense of their interactions and the confusion of feeling responsible and alone when PWA, yet driven to be recognised and validated, are a stark contrast to the times when the women felt more control over their situations. These experiences then fed back into 'The Conflicted Self', influencing the part that tried to make sense of how to express themselves: honouring role or identity, external behaviour versus internal valuing and how context impacts their sense of identity.

4.1 FINDINGS IN RELATION TO EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The themes and subthemes uncovered in this research reflect much of the previous literature on the experience of WRT, holding multiple roles and identity. However, as the question itself sits between different bodies of research, so do the findings. I will begin by returning to the literature itself, reviewing it in light of what I have found. The reader is reminded that this interpretation of the data is mine and analysis by another could come to very different conclusions. As with the analysis chapter, interpretations are tentative and, as the nature of this methodology limits generalisability, the discussion aims to generate further thought and research, not draw conclusions.

4.1.1 Challenging 'tradition'

Research looking into gender-based differences continues to place its focus on the idea of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' or 'egalitarian' roles and attitudes. The assumption has been that traditional means 'male-dominated' and there is a clear difference between men who employ agency and women who do the emotion work (for example, Rao et al, 2003; Berrington et al, 2008; Schober & Scott, 2012). In some studies, these expectations can lead to surprise over the findings, such as for Smith McCracken and Weitzman (1997), who found that asking questions and seeming more 'dependent' enables more realistic planning for holding multiple roles than the high levels of agency they hypothesised to be so effective.

If we think about Gilligan's suggestion that development moves from separation to connection (1982), this outcome could be considered to support it. If someone was more inclined to ask questions and work with others, their ability to connect would be the appropriate developmental indicator, rather than agency and independence, as the authors took for granted (Smith McCracken & Weitzman, 1997). Another reading of it, is to question why men and women cannot have both agency and communion, utilising either when relevant. Abele and Spurk's 'weak' gendered differences in their research may suggest just that (2011).

In relation to the findings of the present study, the participants all spoke about the difficulty of holding multiple roles while alone (Battling with Uncertainty: Holding roles is a "house of cards"). They also spoke of the ongoing conflict between knowing themselves and making their situation work (Making Choices: Empowering self) and feeling helpless to the roles' and PWA's influences on them (Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion). The theme of The Conflicted Self holds these conflicts, with the participants recognising their influences – often from parents who encouraged them to "do valuable work" or in

comparison to others, feeling like their choices are right for them – alongside the impact of the external world on expressing themselves.

Subscribing to or actively challenging the idea of a "traditional" role is not how they identify, yet due to the context they live in, the women find themselves engaging with the concepts related to gender role differences and values, regardless. It was not as simple as reverting to a more traditional division of labour or role when PWA, for example, as the women's attitudes toward work and family didn't seem to change (as suggested by Berrington et al, 2008). This led to the conflict between identity and behaviour, highlighting that, at times, undertaking their roles may not line up with how they see themselves, leading to a discrepancy in behaviour and ideology. This is discussed by Roehling and Bultman as the gender role congruence theory (2002). So, although the participants didn't speak specifically about being traditional or not themselves, the way they spoke about their roles and others suggested that this concept coloured their experiences.

4.1.2 Holding multiple roles

A significant amount of research has been conducted to find a causal or definitive relationship between gender, roles and the division of labour. Gender role attitudes are a complex phenomenon and can change once a person becomes a parent (Berrington et al, 2008; Schober & Scott, 2012). In 'Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion', most participants refer to how much their perspective changed inadvertently either when they became parents or when PWA began interacting with parenthood. The conflict came from a commitment to retaining their careers and struggling to work out how to integrate parenthood. It could be said that the dissonance Schober and Scott (2012) refer to is significant enough to cause conflict but, if it is only heightened when PWA, perhaps it is not consistently tense enough to prompt lasting attitude change.

Although most participants changed their working schedules after having a baby, all have had to accommodate PWA into this which has further complicated their understanding of their roles. This suggests in the findings of the present study that attitudes have not changed significantly but the reduced opportunity for demonstrating them congruently has induced conflict, as borne out in 'The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world'.

The shifting of the women's feelings as a result of their transitions and PWA, is something not picked up by other gender role attitude research. Even though the studies discussed have often been of a longitudinal nature, any fluctuations between each data collection point may not be accounted for, so the results look like the attitude change is more stable over time. In the case of these participants, the context of PWA highlights the shifting experiences of role interaction.

Research as recent as 2016 (and being conducted in countries as progressive as Sweden) involving dual earner couples with and without WRT, conclude that women continue, on the whole, to retain responsibility for carrying out or organising domestic responsibilities (Gustafson, 2006; Casinowsky, 2013; Swenson & Zvonkovic, 2016). When asked to describe their roles in the present study, most described a form of "housewife", or "organiser of things", and much of their experience in relation to these tasks is conflicted.

In 'Making Choices: Recognising responsibilities', it can be seen that taking care of the domestic tasks override the women's own needs, including the process of PWA. This causes conflict for them, as they describe a more equally divided share of tasks when their

partner is home, so feel like the relationship is balanced…until he goes away again. At that point they return to 'Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA' (Battling with Uncertainty). Although Swenson and Zvonkovic's (2016) research was from a sociological discipline with a feminist social constructivist perspective, similarities between theirs, and the current IPA study can be seen.

Marshall and Tracy (2009) outlined the precarious nature of balancing work and family with young children which was echoed in the findings of the present study. Black and Jamieson (2007) also considered work-family balance and conflict in families where WRT was taking place. Although this second study focused on the experience of the travellers, it again highlighted that the homebound partner would most often balance their roles by foregoing their career in favour of their partner's.

Marshall and Tracy (2009) also suggested that one microsystem can influence another, indicating that work and home issues could often not be kept independently. The conflict that the participants in the present study experienced was that they often struggled to maintain this differentiation when PWA, no matter how they tried. This is highlighted throughout the theme of 'Battling with Uncertainty: Holding roles is a "house of cards"' and 'Role interactions cause confusion'.

It is interesting to note that the subtheme of 'Empowering self' (Making Choices) includes a theme of connection: 'Attempting reciprocal connection: "we're in it together"', one of agency: 'Taking back control', and one of insight and determination: 'Knowing self and making it work'. This suggests that in order to balance their roles, the participants required a number of processes to take place. As Gilligan outlined, an element of connection as well as separateness is important for people (1982).

The research discussed in chapter one on coping with multiple roles, highlighted the need for self-care strategies as a priority, especially being realistic (McLaughlin et al, 1998; Rao et al, 2003). The participants seemed to employ such strategies in the ‘Keeping self safe’ subtheme, for example keeping her distance and maintaining barriers, deciding whether to risk showing vulnerability or protect herself. As well as being self-care strategies, these could also been seen as defensive or protective techniques to avoid engaging with others (see later discussion on attachment). The idea of being realistic was raised by several participants, Karen in her focus on "keeping it real", Georgie challenging her need for perfection and order, and Erica’s mantra "it is what it is".

However, another subtheme under ‘Making Choices’ sees the participants placing themselves firmly at the bottom of the priority list in ‘Recognising responsibilities’. Although the women experienced ever present responsibilities to meet that are greater than their own needs, they recognised this phenomena and referenced the impact of this prioritising in the same subtheme. So, although they recognised the use of self-care strategies, in practice they were much harder to enact when holding multiple roles, especially when PWA.

4.1.3 Work-related travel

4.1.3.1 Types of travel

The different types of WRT that have been researched are commuter marriages, longer periods of absence, and frequent overnight business travel. The vast majority of these focus on the experience of the traveller, but some findings related to the partner at home.

Lizzie's experience could be seen as similar to a 'stable' absence (Taylor & Simmonds, 2009) or a 'commuter marriage' (Ferk, 2005), as her husband is away for 2 nights every week, traveling to the same place. As suggested by these studies, the stable nature of the absence allows Lizzie to pursue her own career while her husband is away, however she feels constrained by his absence as she is unable to travel herself for work. Given her role is a global one, having sole responsibility for their children three days each week has a significant impact on how she carries out her job.

With Mac's career as a musician, Karen could be left for up to six weeks at a time and his absences occur all throughout the year, apart from two dedicated months off. Her experience could be compared to longer periods of absence which have been researched by Parkes et al (2007), Thomas and Bailey (2009), Taylor and Simmonds (2009), and Borelli (2013). Unlike Lizzie's husband, when Mac is home, he is not working and is able to take a more active role within the family. Karen described that, despite these periods of presence, she always needed to make decisions in relation to Mac's absence because, whatever was decided needed to work for her when she was on her own. This was similar to findings by Thomas and Bailey (2009). They also raised the importance of providing space for a readjustment period when the partner returned, which was discussed by Karen and others too.

Karen found that she is able to work, but again, her choices and ability to do the job to her own standards are greatly constrained because her children are so young and need her focus when PWA. She spoke at length about her fear of doing freelance work as Mac was self-employed and, although he earned more than her, she felt the stability of having one salaried income was important to maintain. This choice meant that her own chosen career as an artist, holding much of her identity, was not being recognised.

The partners of Tanya, Erica, Donna and Georgie all engaged in ‘frequent overnight work travel’, sometimes weekly. This was often unpredictable and for different lengths of time, as they worked in a range of fields, from media to business, law or finance. The women have continued to pursue their careers despite this.

4.1.3.2 Impact of WRT on partners

Gustafson cites "increased levels of stress, stress-related diseases, marital problems and behavioural problems in children" (2006, p.516) as symptoms of intermittent husband syndrome. It is difficult to know how relevant a syndrome like this is to the present study, as it is concerned with individual experiences of making meaning rather than clinical diagnoses and symptomatology.

The participants at times spoke about increased stress and relationship issues, however they also seemed to be insightful as to what the issues were and how they could address them. Some had engaged with support in the form of counselling or coaching, which they found insightful. As being parents of preschool-age children and intermittent absence were seen as vulnerability factors for this syndrome (Taylor et al, 1985, cited in Gustafson, 2006), future research may do well to further explore this with families involved with frequent overnight work travel.

Although it cannot be determined whether the concept of intermittent husband syndrome is relevant to the participants of the present study, the research describing loneliness, isolation and increased sense of responsibility was clearly echoed, comprising a subtheme in ‘Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling “solely responsible” when PWA’ (Parkes et al, 2007). In ‘Making

Choices: Recognising Responsibilities', a lack of personal time due to prioritising the needs of others and the need to carry on regardless when PWA, were raised by most participants. This was similar to other research on WRT, such as Thomas and Bailey's paper (2009).

Additionally, Thomas and Bailey (2009) found their participants to experience a lack of mutual understanding at times because of the time spent apart. Again, this could be seen in the present study, however the women's descriptions were nuanced. At times, participants sought to be understood and recognised by their partners, with differing levels of success (Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others). On other occasions, the participants chose to maintain a distance from their partner and others to keep themselves protected from upset (Making Choices: Keeping self safe). As discussed in relation to expansionist theory, this is an example of the conflict the women seemed to be describing between their uncertainty and their attempts to have some control as a result of PWA.

The literature on adult attachment and partner absence is limited and difficult to condense into a summary. Comparing the findings of this research to these studies is also challenging as I didn't specifically explore attachment and drawing conclusions would require significant assumptions. It would be interesting to follow this line of enquiry into further research, as the experience of someone with an anxious attachment style would qualitatively be quite different to an avoidant style, as found by Diamond et al (2008).

Attachment style may also influence how and when any symptoms related to 'intermittent husband absence' occur and, as mentioned earlier, the act of 'Keeping self safe' by maintaining an emotional distance could relate to an anxious avoidant style (Bowlby, 1988) where someone 'Seeking her validation in others' (Battling with Uncertainty) may be indicative of an anxious resistant attachment. As I will explore below, the experiences

described in this study, referred to as symptoms in other research, may also relate to elements of other theories such as the expansionist theory (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), a more comfortable fit with the idiographic and non-pathologising nature of this study.

An aspect worth considering in the present study regarding communication, was how the participants responded to their partner's absence. Many of them spoke about their partner instigating the contact while away, as they go on with holding their more present roles of parent, professional and 'organiser of things'. Also, the reaction to the phone in the visual stimuli was varied but always emotive, some describing needing it but hating their reliance on it, others grateful for its ability to hold all the information in their heads and some resenting their partner's attachment to it. This is described in some literature as part of the present requirement for business travellers to be constantly available and therefore further impacting work-life balance, particularly managing adjustments to WRT (Lirio, 2014; Makela et al, 2015; Nicholas & McDowall, 2012).

This is quite a different response to communication than Taylor and Simmonds' (2009) finding that stress was often increased when couples could not make contact. The participants here expressed more of a need to distance themselves while their partner was away in order to focus on holding their roles and managing PWA (Making Choices: Keeping self safe; and Recognising responsibilities). Allowing a reliance in his absence made the separation feel much more difficult (Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA; and Alone and/or absent).

The process of planning towards the absence, friction related to the anticipation of separation, the act of coping while the partner was away and then the reunion all informed the women's experience of holding their roles. Although Parkes et al's (2007) study found

that the spouses of those working offshore did not pursue careers when their children were small, their reports of the process were similar to this. The conflict between struggling to share control again once the partner returns, and the urge to hand responsibility over as soon as he does, echoes this study's participant's engagement with the process (Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion, and Making Choices: Empowering self).

Development of independence and interdependence were cited in research as elements of maintaining relationships involved with WRT. As can be seen in Borelli (2013) and Swenson and Zvonkovic's (2016) studies, interdependence can be tricky to sustain. In 'Making Choices: Keeping self safe' and 'Empowering self', the participant's active engagement with another is demonstrated, either in the form of maintaining a reciprocal connection, or by keeping their partner at a distance to protect themselves from feeling dependent. These two perceptions contrast with the challenges of wanting interdependence but not always connecting in this way, as 'Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others' shows.

Another take on the concept of dependence, independence and interdependence was explored in relation to how couples perceive their relationships when influenced by work demands such as travel (Swenson et al, 2015). Using Kelley's Interpersonal Process Framework (Kelley et al, 2002, in Swenson et al, 2015), three 'types' of couples were identified in their participant group as speaking in different ways about their relationship and social networks: those who were aware (balanced between self, couple and external), individually focused and isolated (couple-focused).

Considering these typologies in relation to this study, similar perspectives arose within my themes. However, it seemed the participants moved between the types at different times rather than remain static. For example, Donna's journal held a much greater couple focus

whereas her interview was more individual. Overall, the themes and subthemes represented a more dominant exploration of the self, often in relation to and in conflict with the external world. This suggests that, while broader principles may be an interesting framework to compare with the findings here, Swenson et al's study did not capture easily comparable constructs (2015).

By nature of being alone with such responsibility, holding multiple roles required a level of independence to cope, as described by Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016) and demonstrated in 'Making Choices: Empowering self', and to a lesser extent, in 'The Conflicted Self: Process of understanding the self'. Here the participants recognise their resilience in this context by comparing themselves to others and acknowledging that, regardless of how they feel about their roles and PWA, they make it work. This seems to give them a boost of self-assurance compared to other times when they feel like 'Holding roles is a "house of cards"' (in Battling with Uncertainty).

When reflecting on the findings from the present study and existing research, what new thoughts this study raises is in the shifting nature of PWA and its influence on the participants' experience of holding multiple roles. The influence of what has been seen as traditional or non-traditional remains, even if participants are not explicitly announcing themselves as one or the other, or recognising its influence on the way they experience holding multiple roles. The participants do not tend to make the possible connection between their frustrations and constrictions and the historical context.

For example, gender role attitudes and perspective of the relationship may be influenced by PWA but do not necessarily instil a lasting shift. Also, conflict is felt due to PWA between participants' behaviour and ideology of holding multiple roles, the carrying out of domestic

duties and their self-care strategies. In contrast to other research, participants did feel that the combination of PWA and having young children constrained their career progression and that, to manage when PWA, distancing and a change in communication was required.

4.2 FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THEORY

This section will consider the findings of the present study in relation to some relevant theories discussed in the literature review. No psychological theories to date have been developed about holding multiple roles in the context of partner absence. As seen in the previous section, research conducted on this phenomenon has used existing theoretical concepts such as Barnett and Hyde's expansionist theory (2001), and Gilligan's theory of development (1982).

4.2.1 Expansionist theory (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hyde, 2016)

As described in the literature review, the expansionist theory has four main principles which seek to encompass the nature of holding multiple roles. It has been explored in various studies (for example Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Rao et al, 1999; Nordenmark, 2002; Roehling & Bultman, 2002; and numerous studies reported in Hyde's 2016 review). Of these, only Roehling and Bultman's research considered the theory alongside WRT.

When this theory of holding multiple roles is held up against the experience of the participants in the present study, the comparison raises some interesting ideas. It is far from the case that the themes my analysis gleaned map neatly onto this theory. There are numerous similarities as well as differences.

1) Multiple roles are generally beneficial, and commitment to one role does not preclude another

All participants described at least one other role in addition to parent, professional and partner. These included other variations on 'housewife', family roles, friend, colleague, volunteer and creative. Although these roles felt important to the women, they did not share the central importance of the other three. Martire et al (2000) explored a concept referred to as either role centrality, salience or commitment. The findings from this study showed all participants to consider their career as a central role, which they were committed to regardless of whether they were able to actively work in their chosen profession at that point in time.

They also spoke about the importance of their parent roles and of the lesser salience of their partner role at that time, to the extent that some struggled to separate their partner and parent roles. Thoits (1983) suggests that, when role partners overlap (i.e. partner/parent), the intensity of the relationship and loyalty increase. This could be seen with the participants in their commitment to their relationship ("We're in it together" Donna, Making Choices: Empowering self), even if their partner was regularly absent ("every aspect of this is a struggle" Tanya, Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA), the relationship itself was not functioning terribly well ("I can't tell him how hard this is" Karen Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others) and they felt unsure as to what the relationship consisted of ("I genuinely don't know what my wife role is!" Erica, Battling with Uncertainty: Holding roles is a "house of cards").

Some women described their career commitment as helping them to be a better parent, not only because it made them happier and more fulfilled, but it also showed their children the importance of working hard and being fulfilled. It is unclear whether holding both

professional and parent roles centrally was contributing to psychological wellbeing as the difficulties with not being able to invest in their careers as they would like was a significant conflict for the participants (The Conflicted Self: Conflict of expressing self in the world).

2) A number of processes contribute to what makes multiple roles beneficial for people

Buffering: in order to hold their multiple roles, the participants tried to keep them separated as much as possible, thus enabling any stress from one to be buffered by another without interference, most commonly between work and parenting by taking back control or maintaining their barriers (Making Choices: Empowering self). Although the women maintained this separation in their conceptualisation of the roles when PWA, in practice this was much harder. Subthemes like 'Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion' and 'Holding roles is a "house of cards"' highlight this and the subsequent increased stress (Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA, and The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world). Additionally, the women either absorbed their partner role into the parent role or kept their partner role separate by allowing distance to build up in the relationship, described for example in 'Making Choices: Keeping self safe'.

Added income: this factor was not spoken about much by participants. That their career gave them a sense of value was a more prominent contributor to their multiple role commitment. This could be seen in 'The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world', where participants expressed the importance of their profession as an expression of identity. Some stated that there was no financial need to work and, in relation to PWA, would prefer their partner's presence over the added income. Any protective factor of being a co-provider, as suggested by Hyde (2016), was challenged by the lack of influence over PWA (Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion).

Social support: an aspect of PWA that the participants struggled with was the sense of isolation. In most cases they appreciated the support from work colleagues, which protected against the loneliness of PWA, (Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling “solely responsible” when PWA). However, being able to access other social support, including family, was difficult due to time and locality constraints and prioritising other roles (Making Choices: Recognising responsibilities). Most participants also found it easier to keep their distance from others in order to cope when PWA, even if they recognised how beneficial it would be to access support (Making Choices: Keeping self safe).

Opportunities to experience success: all of the participants were very clear that their sense of worth came mostly, or in some cases exclusively, from their professional role. Without this, they believed they would struggle much more with holding a parent and partner role. To feel like they were experiencing an element of success in one role enabled the women to hold other roles they felt less confident with. ‘The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world’ demonstrates the struggle the participants have to prioritise those roles that boost their self-worth while maintaining their responsibilities to others.

Expanded frame of reference: Tanya describes the importance of taking opportunities and encouraging her children to do the same. Despite the challenges associated with PWA and holding multiple roles, the participants continue to manage, talking about their experience not just in a negative way, but also as an empowered, responsible adult. The subthemes of ‘Making Choices: Empowering self’ and ‘Recognising responsibilities’, and ‘The Conflicted Self: The process of understanding the self’ all show how the participants continue to reflect and engage with their roles, balancing the difficult experiences with positive ones. This

ongoing movement between the themes contributes to a constantly expanding frame of reference.

Similarity of experience: this is a significant process for the present study when thinking about holding multiple roles. Some participants found that working in a similar profession to their partner enabled them to hold a sense of shared experience, which they recognised as positive. If they also worked away overnight, they recognised this. When Georgie began doing overnight work, she reported a shift in her experiencing of her roles and relationships.

Conversely, those who felt there was a considerable lack of shared experience, spoke about their relationship as being much more distanced. Additionally, not having a similarity of experience with others regarding PWA was difficult and, in those situations, participants often looked for other ways to connect. The attempts to find a similarity of experience is held in 'Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others'; and when this is realised, in 'The Conflicted Self: The process of understanding the self', and 'Making Choices: Empowering self'.

Increased self-complexity: Although Hyde (2016) took Linville's original definition of self-complexity (1985) for this theory, Koch and Shepperd (2009) highlighted the many other ways that the concept was being used in research, as discussed in the literature review. In the present study, it can be seen that determining a person's level of self-complexity and subsequent related wellbeing is difficult, as the self-aspects that make up self-complexity can comprise things other than roles. As this is not an area that was explored in detail during data collection, it cannot be commented on here. It can be assumed that there is a level of self-complexity given that at least three different roles and, up to ten, are being held by each participant.

It can also be seen that the other element of determining self-complexity – level of independence between self-aspects – is difficult here, as the participants attempted to hold their roles separately, but were often unable to. It is not clear how to make sense of the conflict, or incongruence, involved with holding multiple roles while experiencing identity differently. The fluctuation in self-complexity caused by PWA could be seen by Barnett and Hyde (2001) as negatively impacting wellbeing in relation to holding multiple roles.

3) The benefit of holding multiple roles is conditional, depending on role ideology, role quality, and upper limits

Challenging the concept of traditional or non-traditional gender role ideology has been explored in the previous section. In relation to this theory it feels more important to think about the ideology of the participants in the present study and whether they are able to congruently hold multiple roles alongside their ideology. Again, we return to the recurrent subject of conflict, which is seen throughout and amongst the themes in the analysis.

'Battling with Uncertainty' is a very different set of experiences to 'Making Choices'. It could be suggested that 'Battling with Uncertainty' draws together when participant's ideology of holding multiple roles is incongruent with how they are experiencing them. Conversely, in 'Making Choices', participants recognise the incongruence and take action to realign their situation with their ideology.

'The Conflicted Self' holds both internal understanding of their sense of self and role ideology, with the impact of the external world influencing the participant's process on how to express this. In light of the expansionist theory, if the gap between ideology and experience widens too far, the benefit of holding multiple roles is questioned. As can be seen by the

present study, the participants are in constant negotiation with their role ideology and identity, trying to find a way to hold this and the experience of PWA in a more congruent way.

Role quality is another moderator for determining the benefit of holding multiple roles. Often, the participants in this study spoke of the difficulty when feeling their roles were of lesser quality. Acknowledging that 'Holding roles is a "house of cards"' (Battling with Uncertainty) suggests that it feels largely out of their hands at times and this could impact their experience of them. Feeling overwhelmed by the challenge of staying connected or moving between roles is an example.

Wanting to experience their roles as of a higher quality than they are is held in 'The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world' as the participants try to work out how to honour their roles within their context. 'Making Choices: Empowering self' shows how participants find a way to improve the quality they are experiencing. For example, taking back control over how they approach their roles to enjoy them when they are engaged with them.

The final moderator identified by Barnett and Hyde (2001) is that there is an upper limit to the number or type of demands on a person's roles which, when reached, can reduce the benefit of holding multiple roles. When PWA, the parent, professional and partner role demands change – often the partner demands all but disappear - and the parent demand increases. This impacts the professional role as there is very little room for negotiation so, although the role doesn't change, the space to perform that role may have diminished.

If this remains manageable, the participants in the study described PWA as a process to manage and the role demands required prioritising but could be done (Making Choices: Recognising responsibilities). If the role demands reach the upper limit of the participant's ability to hold them, they experienced them as a hard and consistent impact, as in 'Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling "solely responsible" when PWA'.

The analysis of the present study identified the impact of PWA on holding roles even when the participant's partner was present and all of the themes were represented across the current moderators. Considering PWA as a separate moderator and conducting further research with regards to this may be something worth considering. The idea fits with Hyde's 2016 update including the 'New Economy' where people are expected to work differently and hold their roles differently.

4) Psychological gender differences are not large or immutable and it is not necessary to force differentiation

It is not possible to comment on this, given the present study explored only women's experiences.

In summary of the expansionist theory related to the present study, new findings relate to the experience of women holding multiple roles when PWA. This context seems to have a significant impact on the principles and some consideration over where to best place it is warranted. The processes found to be beneficial when holding multiple roles were often impacted by PWA, changing their usefulness. If PWA is considered to be a condition that could hinder the wellbeing of someone holding multiple roles, this is borne out in the present study.

Most participants allude to the idea that PWA financially enables them to pursue their careers without the pressure of needing additional income. However, they would prefer to have their partner consistently present instead, as they would still choose to work because their career provides them with the opportunities for success that other roles don't. The women also have access to social support because of their multiple roles, but are constrained by PWA and can't or don't make use of it. The participants attempt to use their roles as buffers from the stress of other roles, but they find this difficult when PWA as their roles must interact in order to continue holding them. This is not experienced as helpful.

Despite the challenges, holding multiple roles while PWA does afford an expanded frame of reference given the increased range of experiences and pressures the participants engage with. The situations that an expanded frame of reference give rise to can then be used to find similarity of experiences with others, increasing the chances that holding multiple roles could be beneficial. However, thinking about levels of self-complexity in relation to the present study is difficult given the changing nature of the participant's experiences.

The three processes that Hyde questioned given the lack of empirical evidence to support them, have been demonstrated to be relevant in this study. Further exploration of opportunities for success, expanded frame of reference and similarity of experiences is recommended, in addition to the idea that PWA be a significant enough complication to be considered as a potential extra moderator.

4.2.2 Transition

A consideration that did not arise from the previous literature about the experiences the participants described is in relation to transition. Smith describes his findings regarding a transition to motherhood (1999a, 1999b) and Bridges (1980) compares the process of transition and change to be similar to the stages of mourning, or involving an ending, a 'neutral zone' and a new beginning. There does not seem to be literature to date reporting theories on transition for partners and WRT.

Smith's (1999a, 1999b) exploration of the transition into motherhood discusses the non-binary process of development, specifically that there is both regression and progress towards identity change. If this process continues into early parenthood and includes not only the reintegration of paid work, but the changing nature of PWA's influence, perhaps the role conflict experienced continues to be a dynamic part of this transition. Conversely, the ongoing cycle of the partner's presence/absence could suggest that this phenomenon is not so much a period of transition or repeated transitions towards a more stable state, but is the state itself.

It is true that the women in the study went through a process of some sort which was also recognised in other research (Parkes et al, 2007; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009; Thomas & Bailey, 2009), from preparing for PWA through to his return. Where they were in that process may influence the experience of holding their roles. Some participants spoke about similar incidents such as arguing just before PWA, settling into a routine while on their own and feeling glad when he returned but irritated at the disruption to the newfound peace.

However, this was not consistent across participants, nor did it seem to suggest a pattern in relation to the themes and subthemes I found in the analysis. I grappled with this quandary at times, wondering whether there was more to the process than I was uncovering. On

reflection, I returned to the themes and was again struck by the constantly changing nature of the experience. Perhaps looking at the phenomenon with a specific view and research question relating the process of PWA and roles will uncover how any transition might work.

4.3 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

An important element of conducting qualitative research, especially IPA, is the ongoing reflexivity required to ensure researcher impact and the process itself is transparently considered. In this section, I will reflect on the way the study was conducted and the quality of the project.

4.3.1 Recruitment

After I had recruited the sixth participant, interest from my networks slowed. I realised that it may not be for lack of relevant potential participants, but the significant investment I was asking of already busy people. At this point I considered with my supervisor the data I had collected so far. It was felt that its quality and depth was sufficient for IPA and further recruitment was not necessary. Additionally, Smith et al (2009) suggested six to ten data sets for a Doctoral level thesis and, as I had six participants provide eleven pieces of data, this requirement felt satisfied.

4.3.2 Participants

The participant group was quite homogenous in some ways. All six women were white British, with two children aged five and under and each pair of children was the same gender – 4 pairs of boys and 2 pairs of girls. Five women were married and one in a long-term relationship with the fathers of their children, although one married woman referred to her

husband only as her partner and only indicated she was married in the screening call. Five of the women were based in London and one was from another major city.

The perceived homogeneity of the group was positive insofar as some tentative generalisations being possible, however the lack of diversity in terms of ethnicity and sexuality means that there is no way of knowing whether these themes translate further afield. This is particularly interesting as one area that I was recruiting in has a particularly high number of LGBT and ethnically diverse families. Future research should consider the wording of recruitment and perhaps specifically approaching these groups.

I was curious as to why there was minimal reference to extended family or the participant's children in most cases. Given the open-ended nature of the questions and that most participants mentioned roles relating to extended family, it was a surprise. One or two participants shared more openly about their family when growing up but, for most, reference to life before children was sparse.

I wondered whether the way the participants talked about their children was due to the children's ages and I reflected on how I talked about my own son when he was that age. I recall there always being something to say, especially about the parent-child relationship. When the participants spoke about their children, it was the mother's view or experience that was more dominant. I found I struggled to get a sense of the children's personalities.

Now that the analysis is complete, I can see that the participants often struggle to engage with their parent role and especially when they are at work or on a day off, away from their children. It may have been them making the most of the chance to talk about themselves. I

could have done with a more specific question about attachment, but my research question wasn't about relationships, it was about roles.

4.3.3 Conducting the interviews

I met the participants when it was convenient for them, mostly during the day. It is worth reflecting on, but very difficult to say how much it impacted the participant's and my interaction. For example, the difference between meeting participants at their work could have made them feel more comfortable and in charge, or could have been stressful for them to be in 'work mode' and talking about all of their roles. Again, I hoped the use of journals and visual objects would provide a contrast to reflect on if necessary.

4.3.3.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

The participants I met at work seemed at ease, however I was more nervous. Those I met at university varied in their manner depending on whether they had come during their work day or a day off. Having only met them the once, it is difficult to know whether they were just presenting as 'normal'. All of the participants seemed happy to talk and I became aware that I was more concerned about the time than they seemed to be. In particular, the participant that I met in the evening seemed happy to stay and talk for as long as I was able. This suggested to me that, although my chosen participant group was likely to be exceptionally busy, they were also very glad to be talking about their experiences with someone who was actively listening and more objective.

Most participants seemed to struggle with answering the question about interacting with others, however, in other parts of the interview they offered unprompted examples of interactions. It may have been because they didn't want to, or couldn't think about how they

might be viewed by others. Again, post-analysis I could see how self-focused the participants were in the interviews and how little interaction was spoken about outside the immediate family. Even specific examples involving the children were difficult to garner – participants seemed to prefer talking about them more generally.

4.3.4 Using the objects in the interview: visual method

As with the journal submissions, I was surprised by the responses to the items. In many cases, the participants responded more emotionally to the phone, to-do list and Mother's Day card than any of the other questions. In particular, the phone raised conflicts for the participants in their attachment, their partner's attachment and their views on communication. It seemed to help with both triangulation and accessing emotion.

4.3.4.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

The decision to use visual objects in the interview was an unusual one, as I've discussed in the methodology chapter. I am naturally a visual person, so I think that partly informed me. I wondered, if I was interviewing someone who struggled to respond to the semi-structured format, how I could help them. I also thought, if I am interviewing women who are extremely used to such a format, how to offer something different to help get them out of 'work mode' if we had met during the day.

I felt that it was important to use objects that were of an everyday nature to ensure all the participants had an opportunity to talk about it and be grounded in our time to represent the current culture of working parenthood. I didn't want to ask the participants to bring something of their own, as I was aware from personal experience how much pressure that could put on a busy person and didn't want to put anyone off attending the interview.

4.3.5 Using the journal

The journals were completed at any point during the day and most participants fed back that they'd write notes at the end of the day. Some then typed them up at a later date so there was an element of reflection each time they engaged with the exercise. It was useful to see from the journal entries how much the mood changed from day to day.

4.3.5.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

My understanding of the journal was that it was a contained event with a beginning, middle and end. This way of communicating had a very different feel and I felt humbled that the participants had taken the time to share their experience with me when they were obviously very busy and tired. I could see how their process changed throughout the period and was most struck by how different the participant's tones were, compared to the interviews. It felt like many had shared something more intimate, and softer than what they felt comfortable to say out loud.

4.3.6 Feedback from participants about the process

After I had received the journals I arranged to call the participants to debrief. They reported finding different elements of the process more beneficial – some talking, some writing, some combined. Many recognised how 'jumbled' their roles felt at times by trying to explain it in writing, where some found the process of writing a more controlled way of expressing themselves 'objectively'. This suggested to me that talking about their experiences was more emotional for them and so, especially in work-mode, perhaps some participants found it difficult to share openly with me.

4.3.7 Doing analysis

I initially tried a few different ways to start my exploratory coding. I found the amount of data overwhelming and kept thinking I would find the magic combination by just looking at my transcripts. Once I started writing it felt, not manageable yet, but doable.

I found it crucial to keep an eye on my question at all times and had it written in several different ways all over my work station. I found that, between remembering what I was trying to capture and how I was attempting to do it, getting side-tracked by something in the data was quite easy. Thankfully I started with the participant who I had the most vivid memory of, and seemed to have the richest interview.

There was a constant need to reword the emergent themes into a concrete representation of the client's experience, yet clear enough to be held up against another interview and see potential similarities in theme. Again, this took several goes, including a full re-analysis of the first transcript to work out how I'd 'analysed out' all of the emotion. I realised, when I took it to my supervisor, not knowing why it felt so clinical, that I had summarised the experiences, not coded them. In the second attempt, I reworded the coding as well as looked for the feelings and came out with something more representative. Not long after, I re-read the Larkin et al (2006) paper and this further revolutionised my understanding of IPA (as discussed earlier).

4.3.7.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLEXIVITY

I was struck to recall during the transcribing process, how 'stuck' most participants became on two questions, one about interacting roles and the other about interacting with others. Having gone through the analysis process now, I can see how hard the participants try to

keep their roles separated and am not surprised that they often struggle to conceptualise their roles to be interacting.

4.3.8 Organising myself

4.3.8.1 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

During the final year, a friend gave me a special book to write all my thoughts in that weren't for my journal. It was a fabulous idea as, until that point, I had being using a different book for every subject to do with the research. Life became much simpler once I had that.

4.3.9 Epistemological challenges

Talking about and in relation to gender surrounds us every day. As Smith et al (2009) say, language informs our experience and vice versa. I found it a challenge to maintain boundaries between IPA, social constructionism and discourse analysis. It was difficult at times to separate the meanings the participants made from ideas on power, control or society's take on it, especially as my clinical work specialises in gender and sexuality. As a woman in a similar situation, I wondered how that might affect my interpretations. Reading through my journal over time I was surprised by how often I would raise questions from the data about gender, roles and history anew, as if I had not asked them before. It suggested to me that I was continuing to turn fresh towards the data, as opposed to always having the answer ready.

I am very aware that language and power dynamics inform both mine and my participant's experience and influences their conflicts but I also knew that I didn't want to focus on that element. I wanted to know how they experienced their roles in relation to gender, only if it came up. This reminder stayed with me and helped keep me from wandering down the path of grounded theory or thematic analysis.

Finally, I wonder about the controversial question of qualitative data and triangulation, or validity and rigour. I explored this in my methodology chapter but return to it now. I believe that using three methods to collect data: a visual, audio and written form representing reflection with the world, the other and the self, has given an interesting and informative perspective.

In future research it would be interesting to see what participants may bring themselves, either an object or even a picture to represent their experience of holding multiple roles. The analysis gleaned new information from each form of data collection and, when placed into the context of the others, formed a coherent story. This consistency across elements, suggested that they were accessing the same type of experience from different perspectives, demonstrating triangulation.

An alternative option could have been to use the visual objects as the sole focus of the interview, asking an open-ended question about them and exploring from there. This would have allowed the full power of the method to be utilised however, as it is not common practice in IPA, it also posed a risk regarding depth of data. As I was already conscious of timekeeping in the interviews, I may not have made as much use of them as I could have. Another option could have been to show the items at the start of the interview.

4.4 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This section will consider the reciprocal impact the research and I had on each other throughout the process.

I can't deny that I am a mother, who had a child under the age of five when I first began this, and I was pursuing my career. I have never thought that I was particularly political, but I have come to realise through the process of this Doctorate that my actions are political, even if my words are not. How much did this reluctant political stance and personal connection to the subject matter influence me? I had a desire for these voices to be heard. I questioned, and am sure, that part of my voice is in this, as is inevitable with IPA. I also wanted to know, understand how some women who are different to me experience challenging situations and whether the history of women's emancipation played a part. Is there still a cause to fight, not just for equal pay and anti-discrimination, but for our experiences to be heard, respected and learned from?

Throughout the process of the research, especially in the later period when I was reviewing the research, I felt strongly that I didn't want to reduce this project to trying to fit a few women into a theory; and I am very glad that IPA doesn't support this in the first instance. I do look forward to potentially taking forward and developing the themes that emerged but, throughout, the questions that kept fascinating me were, what is it *like?* What does it *mean* for the women*?* That's why I was so worried when I completed my first analysis and felt like I had lost the participant in the process.

I very much connected with participants at times and I felt like this was a really healthy process. As with counselling or therapy, when I become aware of that sensation I am able to question it: why do I feel that way? What's going on for me? And then I can put it aside but keep it in view. In particular, when participants spoke about the loss of control and the stress of feeling helpless to a situation, I identified with that as a mother, as a student, an employee, a partner, a woman. That motivated me to continue trying to understand, regardless of my own personal stressors. Those I took to therapy.

There have been times during the course of this research where life has happened to me, and I have been too far in it to see it. A couple of times when I was really struggling to work with the data and felt like I was trying to force something, my supervisor highlighted the parallel process taking place. Once this was when holding my own multiple roles was too overwhelming for me to work transparently with the data and I needed a break to gain some perspective. Another time I realised I was trying too hard to make sense of the main thing that the participants seemed to struggle so much with – separating their roles and identity. At that point I took a break, returned to it was able to find a less forceful way to order my themes. It is incredible how much one can live and breathe a piece of research.

4.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

People are holding conflicting selves and continuing to function in almost all settings that Counselling Psychologists work. It is important to consider that any woman with ambition and an interest in developing herself must make these decisions, and most manage. These findings will further enable Counselling Psychologists to acknowledge the challenges highly functioning people also face in holding the unknown. Having to manage PWA removes some of the coping strategies women employ when they first have children. The context pushes stress and roles to limits that expose vulnerability so they need support: a) with that loss of

crutch if vulnerable; or b) recognising that the vulnerabilities exist at all by acknowledging their existence and that of their strategy.

This research offers further insight into the impact today's expectations of women has on their sense of self, which in turn can be explored with clients. By enabling them to recognise the impact that holding multiple roles has on their own interactions, a greater sense of choice, control and responsibility can be gained in the empowering way that is such a focus for Counselling Psychologists (Cooper, 2009). Some of the participants have seen coaches and counsellors, been assigned mentors or their partner received counselling. They demonstrated that it does make a difference and that they were open to doing what can help, if they can fit it in. Often women would not use these options, dealing with their stresses as best they can 'on the go'.

We can draw attention to the potential internal conflict between the empowered contemporary and historically conventional woman in a non-judgemental way. This may help clients develop a growing culture of acceptance that somewhere in between 'genderless' and 'traditional' there are other ways to hold their roles authentically. These findings can also help us as practitioners consider that women may continue to experience this conventional pull of femininity and that it is real. Respecting this in a non-shaming way can add to the psychological perspective of feminism, honouring women as they are, not as they were or as they 'should' be.

A sense of coping and having an appropriate toolbox is important; however there is significant research into this, often without considering the experience underneath. It can be assumed that if women seem to be coping with their life, they are fine, but the difference between coping and not coping is the addition of too many stressors. Women such as those

in this study are highly functioning and may sometimes not even need active support, but merely recognition of what they are holding and knowledge of somewhere to turn if they begin to struggle.

Encouraging women to support each other, for example with systems like Lean In (worldwide: www.leanin.org), Cityparents (London: www.cityparents.co.uk), or MediaParents (UK: www.mediaparents.co.uk) offers the opportunity for sharing similarity of experience. Cooper (2009) describes Counselling Psychology as 'facilitating growth and actualisation of potential'. In the cases where women are constrained within their roles, Counselling Psychologists can support them to access a form of growth regardless and hold the constraints lightly until they can "rage forth" again, as Karen said.

The themes uncovered in this research highlight a potential underlying struggle for women in all situations where they hold multiple roles. In addition to primary care, specialist or secondary care services, Counselling Psychologists may encounter this phenomenon in private practice, within school or nursery settings, or in national or multinational organisations via Employee Assistance Programmes or health insurance referrals, coaching or return-to-work services. In workplaces where Counselling Psychologists are also line managers, their staff, including other psychologists, may disclose this experience of holding multiple roles. Finally, women may present in military, FIFO (fly in fly out) or academic settings, as a result of their own or their partner's career.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the research findings in more detail. Following on from the analysis, where the themes and subthemes were explained through participant quotes, here they

were explored in relation to previous literature and relevant theories. Many similarities were found between the various bodies of research and the present study, however there were some differences as well, such as how the participants maintained their roles despite a sense of continual movement between states of empowerment and uncertainty. The current findings have shown how qualitative, inductive research may help inform theories where evidence is lacking. Additionally, it can be seen that where women's experience includes the context of partner absence, previous literature supported by the findings here can be used to consider the most appropriate support.

The methodological critique of the research raised suggestions that can be further explored in future studies. The use of visual prompts to enable triangulation has proven effective, however there are many other ways in which they can be employed. The timing and location of data collection procedures need further consideration to maximise the participants' opportunity to express themselves freely. My personal proximity to the project, with an insider perspective, was helpful as far as connecting with participants, however an empathic outsider may yield a different pool of data to analyse. It is difficult to know which is better, but worth considering in future.

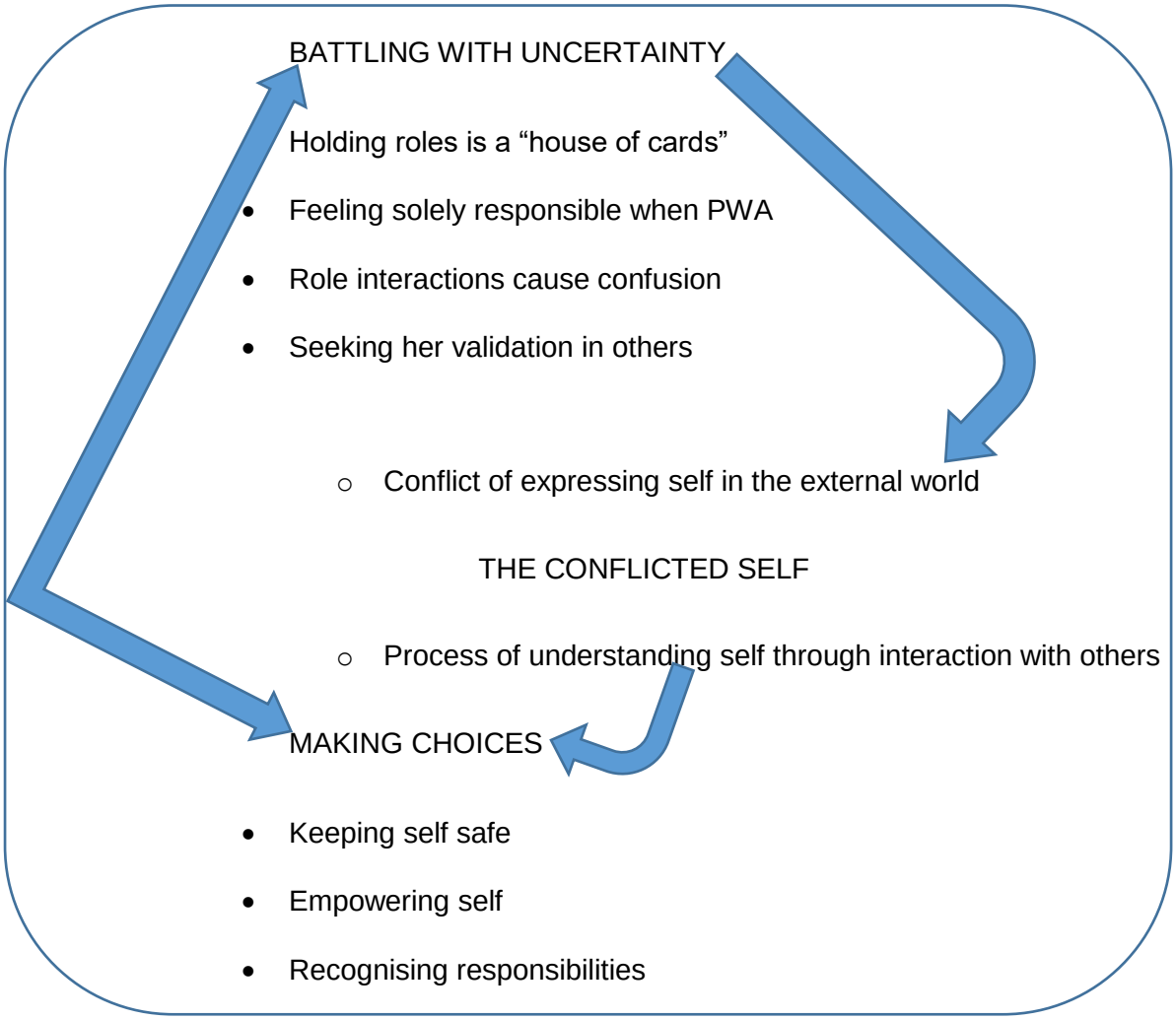
Finally, regarding implications for Counselling Psychology, it is most important for practitioners to recognise this phenomenon and be sensitive to the conflict clients like the participants may be experiencing. An immediate application is that consideration can be given to this highly functioning group of women, and acknowledging that their ability to cope may not necessarily represent the cost to their self-expression. Supporting women through peer or professional networks can give them a space to honour both their responsibilities to their family and career, and to themselves as a whole woman.

5. CONCLUSION

This qualitative research project asked: what is the lived experience of women holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when their partner travels overnight regularly for work? An IPA study, it developed both from my personal reflections as a mother pursuing her career, observing friends in this situation; and from a realisation that there was a gap in the WRT and multiple role literature pertaining to this phenomenon. Although many quantitative studies have explored the concept of both, there is little to no research into the experience and meaning-making process of those affected by WRT and holding multiple roles.

An important element of the work Counselling Psychology does, is to help people better understand themselves in relation to the self, others and their world. It felt important to explore this phenomenon, taking into account history's impact on contemporary cultures of women's roles, and the global world of work. Six women took part in a multi-perspectival approach to data collection, attending a semi-structured interview, discussing the meaning of objects I showed them, and completing a journal. Their responses were analysed in an interpretative, phenomenological way, uncovering the themes and subthemes described in this diagram below.

The themes found in the analysis of this data highlight an ongoing, reciprocal relationship between participants' different meanings of holding multiple roles, when their partner travels. In many ways their engagement with the relationship itself could be seen as fluctuating. This in some ways echoes previous findings and theories of development, attachment and holding multiple roles.



However, the findings also served to illuminate areas not covered by the literature, for example the interplay between making choices and battling with uncertainties; and less evidenced elements of expansionist theory. The strength of this research centres on its findings. Participants did not explicitly recognise a connection between their uncertainties and history’s influence on their experience, but it did emerge from the analysis. However, the women clearly recognised that their career progression was constrained by PWA and having young children. The potential for PWA to be included as a moderator in expansionist theory, and offering support to the three unsubstantiated processes are also positive findings.

In addition to uncovering the original findings and implications for Counselling Psychology, some challenges in undertaking the research were also considered. Use of the visual objects offered a new insight into ways to conduct IPA. The multi-perspectival combination

was positive for quality and rigour but could also have been carried out in alternative ways to gain different depths of data. For example, making the objects the sole focus of the interview, or using them at the beginning rather than near the end may have been a better utilisation. The homogeneity of the group was positive but a potential weakness was the limited ethnic and sexual identity diversity amongst the participants.

There are numerous ways that these findings can be employed to support women or people, especially if further research is conducted. More immediate applications include practitioners working with women to relate with the more stable elements of their relationship while PWA, rather than the instability and constant shifting of experience from presence to absence. This could enable them to find ways of holding multiple roles in a more connected way.

Another approach is to use these new understandings to help people come to terms with this shifting experience as a phenomenon, validate their experience and support them to hold it more authentically. Finally, through Counselling Psychologists engaging with organisations, networks and other applied psychologists, a holistic backdrop for the findings can ensure that our discipline's values are utilised to support and honour the experience of women.

Areas for future research include exploring PWA in relation to transitional and attachment processes, wider self aspects than purely social roles and whether elements of intermittent husband syndrome hold relevance for frequent partner absence. An additional consideration is to widen research to include men's experience, parents with older children, or as with other studies, the experience of the family as a whole. This will help us to better understand how holding multiple roles and undertaking work-related travel can support personal growth.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A: Pilot Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

Part 1: general description

How would you describe your parental role?

How would you describe your professional role?

How would you describe your partner role?

Do you have any other roles? What are they?

What comes up for you as you describe your roles? *How do they interact?*

Before you became a parent, professional and partner, what did you imagine your future roles to be like? Expectations, residual feelings, actualisation

Part 2: specific experience of where multiple roles may interact

I'd like to ask you about a particular situation to get a sense of your experience of holding these roles. Can you tell me about a time when it has felt like two or more of your roles were interacting?

What happened, what were the roles, when was this?

What does she think, feel, do?

How did it feel for them to be interacting?

What were the difficulties/positives of this experience?

Can you recall a time where your felt interacting roles was difficult/easy (opposite of what they describe)?

What was that like? Follow up...

What makes it a better experience? What makes it more difficult?

(*should I keep this specific experience?)* Were you aware of being in any role/s when you got home from work last night?

Did they change? What was that like? How does it compare to a difficult/easy night?

Part 3: making sense of roles from the outside/others

How do you think your partner would describe your roles?

Think, feel, behave, prevalence, importance

What's that like for you to be considered that way?

How do you think your colleague would describe your roles?

Think, feel, behave, prevalence, importance

What's that like for you to be considered that way?

How do you think your child/ren would describe your roles?

Think, feel, behave, prevalence, importance

What's that like for you to be considered that way?

Part 4: how roles might influence meaning-making

I have some items to show you. What comes up for you as you look at them? There is no right or wrong answer to this.

E.g. Oyster card; Mother's Day card; magnetic to-do list/notepad; iPhone; stone/shell

If you had seen these items as you got home from work last night, what would they have meant to you?

Do they have different meanings if you view them from your parent, professional or partner role?

What's that like?

Had you seen them at some other time, what would they have meant to you?

Finally:

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic which we haven't covered?

<u>Follow-up telephone call</u>

How did you find the journal exercise?

Was there anything that came up for you regarding your multiple roles that surprised you?

How do you feel it compared to our interview?

Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss before we finish?

Thank you very much for your time. Would you like me to send another debrief sheet?

7.2 Appendix B: Final interview schedule

What is your experience of holding the multiple roles of parent, professional & partner when your partner travels overnight regularly for work?

If mention partner being absent at any point, ask 'Does it have an impact on your roles? What's that like?'

1. How would you describe the different roles you currently hold? (*note them down*)

    parental role? professional role? partner role? anything else?

2. You've just mentioned (....). Can you tell me more about (first one)? And (second)? Etc.

    Description of role; interaction of roles; experience of role

3. What did you imagine it would be like to hold the roles of parent, professional & partner?

    Separately and/or simultaneously

    Expectations, residual feelings, actualisation

4. What is your experience of interacting with others while holding these roles?

    Go through all

    What do you think, feel, do

    Different roles prevalence, importance

    If 'others' are mentioned, ask probing questions about specific others e.g. husband, neighbours etc: what is it like interacting with your husband while holding this role of wife/these roles?

    How does it feel for you to be considered that way?

5. Can you tell me about a time when you felt your parent, professional & partner roles were interacting?

What happened, what were the roles, when was this?

What do you think, feel, do?

How did they interact? How did it feel? What was that like?

What were the difficulties/positives of this experience?

6. Can you tell me about a contrasting experience?

What happened, what were the roles, when was this?

What do you think, feel, do?

How did they interact? How did it feel? What was that like?

What were the difficulties/positives of this experience?

What makes it a different experience? If they judged, how more difficult/positive etc?

7. Get out items: As a parent, professional & partner, what do these objects mean to you when you look at them?

How do they make you feel and think about your experience of these roles?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of holding these roles which we haven't covered?

<u>Follow-up telephone call</u>

How did you find the journal exercise?

Was there anything that came up for you regarding your multiple roles that surprised you?

How do you feel it compared to our interview?

Is there anything else you'd like to share or discuss before we finish?

Thank you very much for your time. Would you like me to send another debrief sheet?

7.3 Appendix C: Journal instructions

I would like you to keep a journal for 1 period where your partner is away from home for work. The aim of this is to give you an opportunity to describe to me your experience of holding multiple roles while they are away, as it happens. I do not intend for this to be overly time-consuming, given how busy you may already be.

In the journal, I would like you to record your thoughts, feelings, and activities in relation to holding the multiple roles of mother, professional & partner while your partner is away. In particular I would like to hear about your relationships and feelings about yourself during this time. It is intended to be as in-depth as you feel comfortable with, and I do not expect it to be presented as a polished piece of work. I am most interested in your experience as it feels to you, however that is expressed.

The journal can be kept on paper or online as a word document, blog or whatever is most convenient for you. If it feels more appropriate, you could create an audio recording instead of writing. It would be helpful if you could make a daily entry, but if your partner is due to be away for more than 1 week, I request that you make no less than 3 entries during that period. If you would like to write more, that would be welcomed.

I will make contact with you at the end of the period your partner has been away for, and if they are away for more than 1 week, check in with you weekly. This will be an opportunity for you to ask any questions or give feedback, and let me know whether the exercise has caused you any upset or difficult feelings. I can then ensure you have access to support if you want it, in addition to the information sheet with contacts that I will give you at the interview. Additionally, if you let me know beforehand when your partner will be away, I can arrange to be available if you want to make contact during that time.

I will collect your journal at the end of the period your partner is away. If electronic, you can send it to my email address, and if in paper I can arrange to collect it from you, and if you like, return it to you when I have completed my research. As with the interview, your experience will remain completely confidential and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the second part of my study. I very much appreciate your time and hope that this experience has some value for you as well.

7.4 Appendix D: Visual objects

7.5 Appendix E: Recruitment advert

7.6 Appendix F: Participant information sheet

Title of study: What is a woman's experience of holding the roles of parent, professional & partner when they have a partner who travels regularly for work?

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

I am a trainee Counselling Psychologist studying on City University's Professional Doctorate. My research aims to explore the experience of women holding multiple roles, specifically those who are a mother to a preschool-aged child, with a professional career and a committed relationship to someone who travels overnight regularly for work. I hope to gain an understanding of what it is like for women in this position and how they make sense of their world in relation to these roles. Research like this has not been conducted from the therapeutic perspective of a Counselling Psychologist.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited because you are:

- Mother to a child/children under the age of 5 years
- Currently or recently working, while your child is/was looked after by someone else
- In employment that you would consider to be a career: 'job sequences that require a high degree of commitment and that have a continuous developmental character'
- In a relationship where your partner (who identifies as parent to your child and living in the same residence) regularly works away from home overnight
- You will not be able to participate in this study if I already know you personally (to ensure anonymity and confidentiality). Prior to interview I will discuss with you how you are feeling, whether you feel you have the time to participate in this study & whether there is anything you feel I need to know about that might be affecting you at the time. This is to check that you feel emotionally well enough to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any stage, or avoid answering questions which are felt to be too personal or intrusive, without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way. You can choose not to participate in part of, or the entire project.
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Once signed, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

- I will request that you remain involved with the research until you have attended an interview with me and completed your journal for a period where your partner is away.

- The research will be ongoing until the end of 2015
- You will meet with me as the researcher twice at the most
- The meeting will be approximately an hour long, and not more than 90 minutes
- You will be involved in an audio-recorded interview and complete a journal for a period
- I am using qualitative research methods which involves drawing themes from the data you provide in an attempt to understand your experience
- I will meet with you at City University in London (EC1) but if this is not convenient for you, we can explore other options, possibly meeting at your home or workplace instead.

Expenses and Payments

Travel expenses to the interview will be reimbursed, on presentation of paper ticket or receipt.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to participate in an (approximately) hour-long, audio-recorded face-to-face interview. You will also be asked to keep a journal during 1 period when your partner is travelling for work, to record your experiences. I will collect this from you when the period has ended.

What are the possible benefits and disadvantages of taking part?

This research will benefit you through having an opportunity to share your unique experiences with someone independent and trained in supporting people therapeutically. You may not have participated in an exploratory interview of this kind, or had the experience of keeping a journal. These may be enjoyable or helpful experiences for you. If they are not, you will be offered support in the case of the experience causing you distress. You can also contact your GP for help. The risks associated with participating in this research are very low.
Others will benefit in future from the outcome of this research if there is an opportunity to change organizational policy relating to the acknowledgement and support of mothers in your position.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

- Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to your information prior to it being anonymised
- Your personal information will not be used following completion of the research
- There is no intention for this data to be shared with anyone else
- If any issues are raised in the course of the research that suggests violence, abuse or self-harm may be taking place, I may be unable to maintain confidentiality. In this instance, the issue will be discussed with you before taking any action
- All records, audio recordings and written information will be stored securely and destroyed following the completion of the study

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be submitted as a final piece of work in my Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. It may also be submitted for publication in academic journals.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the project until 31st July 2015 without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. If you withdraw from the study all your data will be

withdrawn and destroyed. Whether you agree or do not agree to have your data used for this study, your travel costs will still be covered for your participation in the interview.

What if there is a problem?

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, City University London has established a complaints procedure via the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: What is a woman's experience of holding the multiple roles of parent, professional & partner to someone regularly work-absent?

You could also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg
[redacted]

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee, City University London.

Further information and contact details
Kerry Manera: [redacted]
Research supervisor Fran Smith: [redacted]

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

7.7 Appendix G: Participant introduction

The participants each had two children under the age of five, two with pairs of girls and four with pairs of boys. Five women lived in London and the Home Counties, and one in the North West of England. Their careers were in the fields of media/arts, law, finance, health and human resources, some roles being salaried and some freelance/contracting. Four participants worked full time and two were part time, with most having the option of working from home at times.

The participants' partners – all men - worked in the fields of media/arts, finance and law. Their work-related absences varied from being a set number of days in each week, to last minute ad hoc travel, to being planned well in advance. They took place over a range of time periods from a day to six weeks. The roles were all considered to be full time, however some men's careers would only require them to be working when away, and so their time at home between contracts was family-focused.

[3] All participant and family names and identifying details have been changed to preserve confidentiality

7.8 Appendix H: Participant consent form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

What is a woman's experience of holding the roles of parent, professional & partner when they have a partner who travels regularly for work?

Please initial box

1.	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: • being interviewed by the researcher • allowing the interview to be videotaped/audiotaped • completing a journal asking me about my experiences while my partner is travelling for work	
2.	I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.	
4.	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

7.9 Appendix I: ‘Additional Resources for Support’

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Additional resources for support

Samaritans

A free, confidential service that offers telephone, face-to-face or email counselling at any time

08457 90 90 90

http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us

Counselling Directories

Online services to help find a therapist near you

http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/

http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/therapists

http://www.cpdirectory.com/cgi-bin/index.pl

Mind

National mental health charity offering a range of services including counselling

0300 123 3393

http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/

Inner City Centre

Therapeutic services based in the City of London

020 7247 1589

http://www.icclondon.org.uk/

Your place of work may offer an Employee Assistance Programme with short-term counselling options. Contact your HR department for more information. Additionally, you can contact your GP if you find you are struggling to cope.

7.10 Appendix J: University ethics approval

Ethics Release Form for Student Research Projects

All students planning to undertake any research activity in the School of Arts and Social Sciences are required to complete this Ethics Release Form and to submit it to their Research Supervisor, **together with their research proposal clearly stating aims and methodology,** prior to commencing their research work. If you are proposing multiple studies within your research project, you are required to submit a separate ethical release form for each study.

This form should be completed in the context of the following information:

- An understanding of ethical considerations is central to planning and conducting research.
- Approval to carry out research by the Department or the Schools does not exempt you from Ethics Committee approval from institutions within which you may be planning to conduct the research, e.g.: Hospitals, NHS Trusts, HM Prisons Service, etc.
- The published ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009) Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research (BPS: Leicester) should be referred to when planning your research.
- **Students are not permitted to begin their research work until approval has been received and this form has been signed by Research Supervisor and the Department's Ethics Representative.**

Section A: To be completed by the student

Please indicate the degree that the proposed research project pertains to:

D.Psych

Please answer all of the following questions, circling yes or no where appropriate:

1. Title of project

A Counselling Psychology perspective: What is it like for women when holding the multiple roles of parent, professional & partner to someone regularly 'work-absent'?

2. Name of student researcher (please include contact address and telephone number)

Kerry Manera.

3. Name of research supervisor

Fran Smith

4. Is a research proposal appended to this ethics release form? **Yes** No

5. Does the research involve the use of human subjects/participants? **Yes** No

If yes,

a. Approximately how many are planned to be involved? 8-10

b. How will you recruit them?

Participants will be recruited through local nurseries, libraries, children's centres, networks such as www.citymothers.co.uk or http://www.mediaparents.co.uk/ and firms willing to advertise the research.

c. What are your recruitment criteria?

(*Please append your recruitment material/advertisement/flyer)*

- Mother to a child under the age of 5 years old
- Currently working 3 or more days per week, with child looked after by someone else
- Employment self-reported as a career i.e. 'job sequences that require a high degree of commitment and that have a continuous developmental character' as opposed to paid work (Rapaport & Rapaport,1971, p.9)
- Lives in London
- Partner (identifies as parent to the child and living in the same residence) works away from London (i.e. overnight) for 5 or more days in each month

d. Will the research involve the participation of minors (under 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults or those unable to give informed consent? Yes **No**

d1. If yes, will signed parental/carer consent be obtained? Yes No

d2. If yes, has a CRB check been obtained? Yes No

(*Please append a copy of your CRB check*)

6. What will be required of each subject/participant (e.g. time commitment, task/activity)? *(If psychometric instruments are to be employed, please state who will be supervising their use and their relevant qualification)*.

A screening call prior to the interview to determine eligibility (less than 30 minutes); attending a 60-90 minute semi-structured interview held at City University, or location more convenient to the participant; completing a daily journal during 1 period of partner absence (3-6 entries) & a brief follow up telephone call for feedback on their journal experience (no longer than 15 minutes).

7. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to the subjects/participants?

Yes No

If yes,

a. Please detail the possible harm?

No harm is anticipated, but the areas discussed may feel sensitive and personal to the participants, causing upset or distress during or after data collection.

b. How can this be justified?

The long-term benefits of deepening understanding of women and their families in this context will outweigh any adverse effects caused. Additionally, there may be some immediate therapeutic benefit for participants through discussing & exploring their experience with a trained professional in a safe space.

c. What precautions are you taking to address the risks posed?

Any concerns will be addressed through: an initial screening call to ascertain participant risk, suitability & current feelings of distress & wellbeing, setting the frame at the beginning of the interview so the participant knows what to expect, providing additional debrief information regarding relevant support services, being aware of the impact the research is having on the participant as we progress & allowing time to answer questions/concerns regarding participant wellbeing. I will use counselling psychology skills throughout the research process to offer a safe, contained space through demonstrating empathy, unconditional positive regard & a non-judgemental attitude while maintaining my role of researcher and clear boundaries. Participants will have the contact details of the researcher, supervisor & university complaints

8. Will all subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers receive an information sheet describing the aims, procedure and possible risks of the research, as well as providing researcher and supervisor contact details?

Yes No

(*Please append the information sheet which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)*

9. Will any person's treatment/care be in any way be compromised if they choose not to participate in the research?

Yes **No**

10. Will all subjects/participants be required to sign a consent form, stating that they fully understand the purpose, procedure and possible risks of the research?

Yes No

If no, please justify

If yes please append the informed consent form which should be written in terms which are accessible to your subjects/participants and/or their parents/carers)

11. What records will you be keeping of your subjects/participants? (e.g. research notes, computer records, tape/video recordings)?

I will be keeping process notes from the interview and a reflective journal, an audio recording of the interview, the journal they keep and signed Consent form.

12. What provision will there be for the safe-keeping of these records?

All online/digital information will be password-protected and file names will be coded. Process notes and journal entries will be coded and anonymised and paper records will be kept in a locked safe in my home. Any documents with identifying details will be kept separately & securely.

All data will be kept for up to 7 years after the research takes place, in order to use raw data when publishing the results.

14. How will you protect the anonymity of the subjects/participants?

I use a coding system that is not recorded anywhere so their information cannot be identified. I will ensure that identifying details such as name, age, ethnicity, where they lived/grew up are altered, as well as the names and details of other people the participants mention.

15. What provision for post research de-brief or psychological support will be available should subjects/participants require?

After the journal exercise I will conduct a telephone debriefing and check in with participants during the exercise if it is to last longer than 1 week. I will also be available during the period they are completing their daily journal so they can contact me if they need to. I will provide a debrief and information sheet with services to contact for additional support, and if, in the telephone debrief I realise that an issue has been raised that requires a different referral; I will endeavour to find an appropriate service for them. In the interview I will check in with them at the end and ensure participants understand the debrief sheet and are able to leave the interview feeling contained.

ptions)

If you have circled an item in **<u>underlined bold</u>** print or wish to provide additional details of the research please provide further explanation here:

Signature of student researcher [redacted] Date 13.7.14

CHECKLIST: the following forms should be appended unless justified otherwise

Research Proposal ↑

Recruitment Material ↑

Information Sheet ↑

Consent Form ↑

De-brief Information ↑

Section B: Risks to the Researcher

1. Is there any risk of physical or psychological harm to yourself? Yes **No**

If yes,

a. Please detail possible harm?

I may experience distress in the course of exploring participants' experiences, & may be at risk of physical harm from a participant.

b. How can this be justified?

These are risks taken when working alone & during research or therapeutic contexts. Precautions taken will minimise this risk.

c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

I will keep a reflective journal throughout the process & continue with regular supervision & personal therapy. I will aim to meet with participants in a neutral, public place such as City University offices, but if that is not convenient for them, I am aware of lone-working procedures & will implement them if I travel to their home or workplace. I will have also assessed risk prior to the interview.

a. Please detail possible harm?

I may experience distress in the course of exploring participants' experiences, & may be at risk of physical harm from a participant.

b. How can this be justified?

These are risks taken when working alone & during research or therapeutic contexts. Precautions taken will minimise this risk.

c. What precautions are to be taken to address the risks posed?

I will keep a reflective, diary throughout the process & continue with regular supervision & personal therapy. I will aim to meet with participants in a neutral, public place such as City University offices, but if that is not convenient for them, I am aware of lone-working procedures & will implement them if I travel to their home or workplace. I will have also assessed risk prior to the interview.

Section C: To be completed by the research supervisor

(Please pay particular attention to any suggested research activity involving minors or vulnerable adults. Approval requires a currently valid CRB check to be appended to this form. If in any doubt, please refer to the Research Committee.)

Please mark the appropriate box below:

Ethical approval granted ↑

Refer to the Department's Research and Ethics Committee ↑

Refer to the School's Research and Ethics Committee ↑

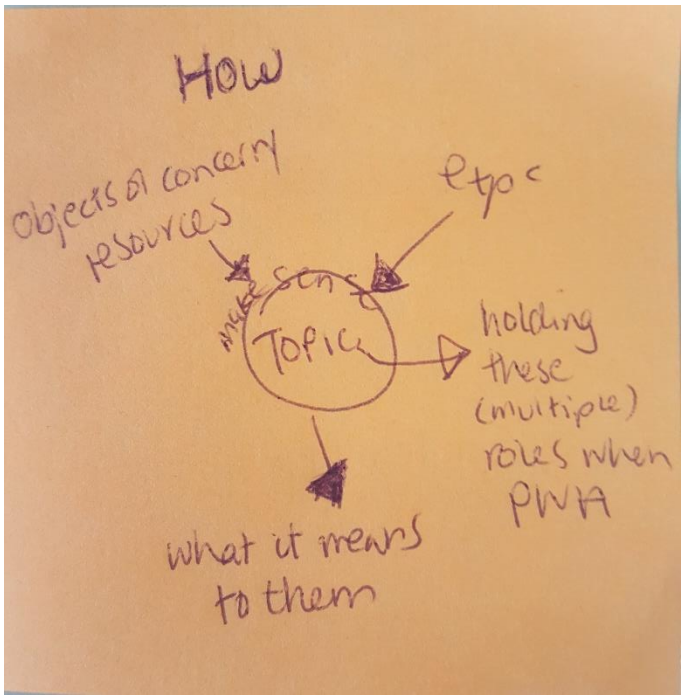
Signature - [redacted] Date- 17.09.14.

Section D: To be completed by the 2nd Departmental staff member *(Please read this ethics release form fully and pay particular attention to any answers on the form where **underlined bold** items have been circled and any relevant appendices.)*

I agree with the decision of the research supervisor as indicated above ↑

Signature - [redacted] Date - 17/9/14

7.11 Appendix K: Pictorial diagram of Larkin et al (2006) description of meaning-making



7.12 Appendix L: Excerpt from Georgie's interview transcript (5 pages)

Mmm

Ah the ph- phones I have a real, I have an iPhone and I spend a lot of time on it, and as well as finding it very useful in order to order my life and be in touch with people I, I do hate it as well and I do feel like sometimes I and I find myself kind of playing with my kids and kinda doing kinda this (picks phone up) at the same time and not quite giving full attention to anything, like always being quite distracted by something else that I have to do, oh I've just got to write that email or send a message to that person um so I think it, while it's helpful it also I think really detracts from kind of quality kind of focused time doing something. Yeah but yeah at the same time I couldn't probably couldn't run my life without it.

Mm

Um Mother's Day card, um, ah yeah, I don't know. I don't I'm not su- yeah I don't know, I think I'd be quite unhappy if I didn't get some kind of mother's day card but it I find the kind of 'sit back relax and enjoy' slightly kind of patronising and pukey. I'd rather something kind of a bit more, I don't know, personal like a little message from the child rather than the 'sit back and put your feet up you hardworking mother' I don't know, it's a bit, I know my own mother was very scathing about things like mother's day so I guess that's an influence, um I, I don't know, that there's only one day in the year that you're allowed to sit back and enjoy yourself and not be run off your feet ragged. Um, I don't know, I don't feel like I need a day to celebrate my motherhood but I also think it's important to recognise how bloody difficult it is as well so I don't know I have conflicting ideas about Mother's Day. Um and I think yeah, maybe if we all took time to kind of appreciate each other more every day then it wouldn't be necessary to have those kind of, those kind of things.

I don't know. (laughs)

When you're looking at them how do they make you think and feel about your experiences, your experience of the roles that you hold?

Um, it kind of like it's all like I don't sit- I don't give myself the opportunity to sit back and think about it enough, I'm kind of always on the go always thinking about the things I have to do. Um, and the actually, kind of you're not giving enough time just to kind of I don't know be in the moment with what you're doing or something. Or running, yeah like I shouldn't be run-, like I'm running my life a bit too ordered or everything's having to be in a certain way and yeah that actually the enjoyment of life it's actually in the moment of doing something and not having to constantly be thinking about the next thing that you need to do. It's a bit about wanting to um, slow down a bit and enjoy it and not kind of worry too much about it. Um

Mmm mmm what's it like for you if the order isn't there?

Ah, it feel- I feel like it would be chaos and I know in reality that it wouldn't. Um, and uh so I feel like everything would kinda get on top of me and I wouldn't be able to, you know it'd be more stressful I guess is what it feels like so, if I realised there was no school uniform cos I hadn't done the washing like that would be like this terrible thing, you know, in reality it wouldn't matter that she went to school in a dirty top.

Mm hmm

So I think it's the worry that, the worry that, I guess I'm an- I'm worried that I'm gonna be worried or something or that I'll get anxious or that I'll get really stressed, but by ordering it anyway I get quite stressed in that kind of...

Mmm

Does that make sense?

Not in moment enough - always focused on what to do / running distracted. roles interact by distraction

different meanings

organising

Ordering of life is getting in the way of enjoying it. Feels like she wants to slow down + not worry too much.

All she does is run around + run their lives.

Exp° of being present doesn't happen much - a realisation here that she doesn't actually 'sit back' much. SD. card is 'pukey' but there's sth in it?

Perception vs reality - how stressful it would seem to order.

doesn't finish sentence?

scared to own this?

get on top

knows that it's not that imp but in times of stress it's hard not to control it & keep perspective.

Does she let the order go, ever?

Order keeps worry @ bay. But ordering also creates stress.

lots 'worry' 'anxious' 'stress' - working self up by thinking abt it + then... losing track herself

Not saying - creating the order is stressful but still less stressful than the alternative

Checking in.

is aware of this

Worry about worry - cyclical + confusing

Mmm (KM)

Have you had experience when the order has disappeared? (KM)

Um I no not particularly, I I when I was in therapy a bit a lot of the work was about well why don't you just see what it's like not to tidy up the toys and you know and that I definitely am not as kind of rigid in that like as I used to be

Mm hmm

Um I wouldn't say it's not ordered on, that it's chaotic but it is not yeah, it's not as rigid and it's a much more enjoyable

Mmm

experience, but I'm not sure. Part of me just thinks that is in- that is innate in me to be that kind of ordered person even though I can see where it's come from from, you know my childhood and my growing up, I do think that I will never not be an organiser. Um but yeah the fear is that it's all overwhelming get on top of me and I'll fuck up or something or I won't do something right or, um, yeah something (whispers dramatically) something terrible will happen

mm hmm

(laughs) but I def- I mean I envy people who are much more kind of, kind of carefree relaxed spontaneous types.

Just before we finish, I've been thinking as you've been talking about the changing career so your role as a professional has has changed and it's you know it feels like there are three aspects to that that are quite significant your previous role and you know the decision to make that change and your current role. And I just wondered about what your experience of the role you had before particularly as you did have

a, a young child then what that was your experience of that role was like, um particularly compared to the one you've got now

Yeah um, well I I hated my job before I really hated it was a really interesting area, but I felt totally frustrated by the role that it wasn't, I wasn't where I felt I should be, um, I felt kind of deskilled in the job and something like I wasn't quite living up to my um potential I guess as a worker.

Are you comfortable telling me what it was that you were doing?

Yeah I worked in human rights law.

OK

Um but not so I qualified as a solicitor but then worked non-practicing but within law for quite a long time in a really interesting area. So I went to Texas and I did some death row penalty work and then I worked in a charity, um working with people who have been bereaved by, um whose relatives who have died in state custody. Um so it was death every day, death and misery and injustice and anger and

Mm hmm

And really really interesting stuff, but felt um really frustrated by the role cos it wasn't quite the solicitor role and it wasn't, so I felt quite kind of like I wasn't quite as into it as I wanted to be I wasn't making the decisions and I was quite frustrated by not having any kinda power in the case so I was kind of peripheral to that kind of legal case but kind of involved with the family um, felt like I'd lost all the skills that I'd had when I was being, when I was practicing as a solicitor, um, and felt the burden of kind of all this death and misery quite a lot, um and then you know with the parenting stuff it was kind of so I would go I would be on the phone all day with really bereaved people, and then at two thirty I would put the phone down and I

Describes difficulty in last job.

worked human rights law.

Job.

how did this influence her mood, interactions, anxiety?

her speech is v. unsure + ambivalent given she was a solicitor req to be precise

hi achiever - how did she end up in that role?

work mirrored home exp - no power over outcome / others just in her 'peripheral' work?

banging/tapping fingers on table while talking.

bereaved parents. HEAVY.

would run out the door and be 'Oh hello children! ...' and there was never a kind of time that I would (deep breath) you know calm down get rid of all the kind of misery from the day and allow my- and then could go off and be the happy parent, so it was rea- it was, I felt deskilled, really frustrated that I wasn't kind of progressing at all because there wasn't it was kind of static, there wasn't a hei- it was kind of a static role, in the organisation um and my management was dreadful, um and the only thing that kept me going was the people that I worked with who I loved, so I felt the role of kind of colleague was really important to me I loved the people I worked with and really enjoyed their company but hated, hated the organisation and hated the kind of frustration of where I was in my thirties not feeling like I was doing as well as I should be

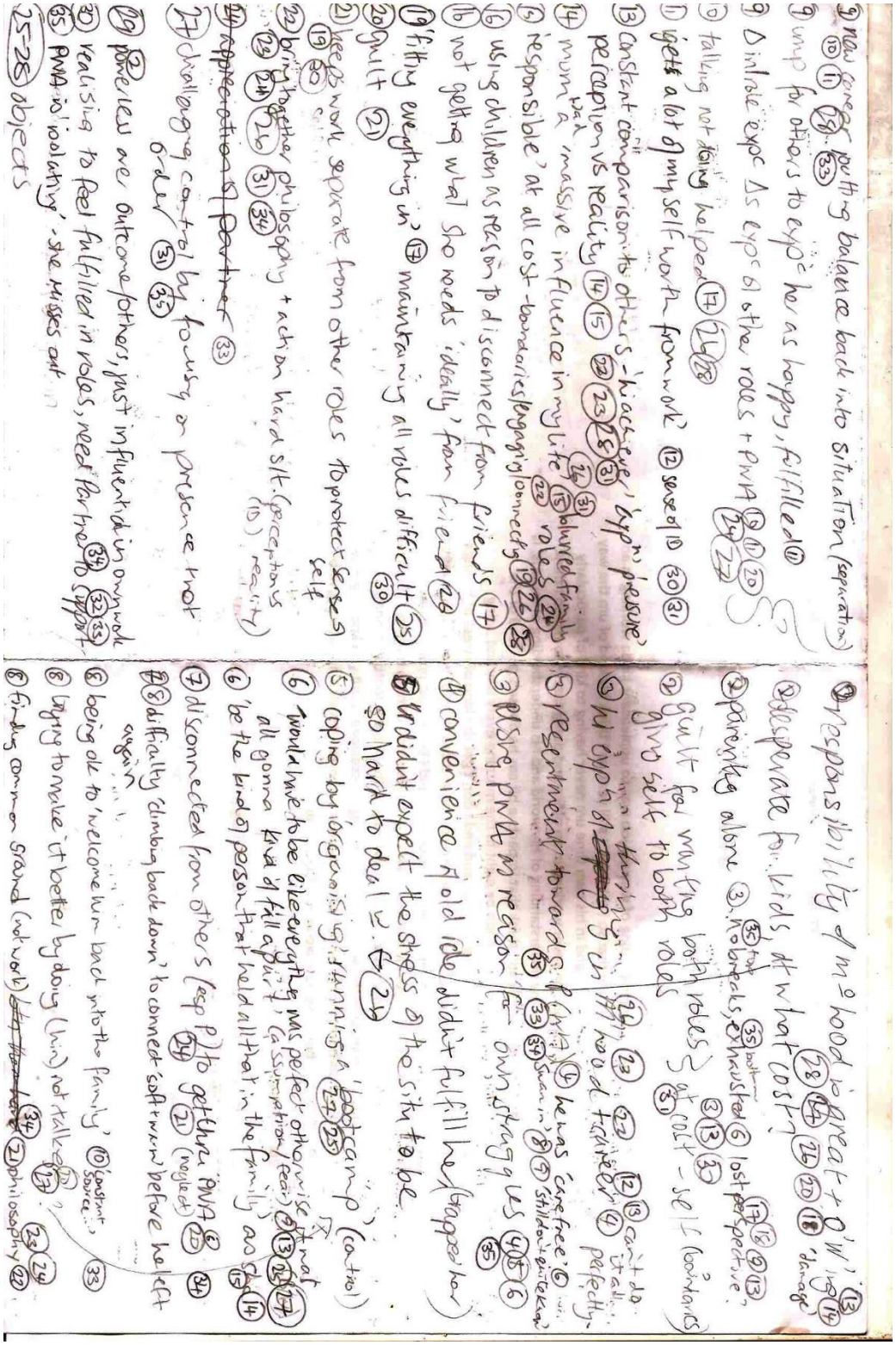
Mm hmm

And that's kind of, yeah kind of perfectionism and high achiever didn't feel like I was quite the person I you know, I should be. Um. But then totally terrified that I was gonna, had to, this new career that had nothing to do with law and I'd spent all these years studying and all that money studying ah paying for the courses and then I was just gonna kinda turn my back on it, so it was, you know I both hated it and felt like, I should, I dunno, it was ve- it was very co- yeah difficult and it took a long time to kind of pluck up the courage to, kind of go and do something totally different. Um, yeah

What was it like going through that process of changing career?

Terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. And I took six months off before I started being a student. It just felt like I needed a kind of break, a break from it, but that in itself was quite, I'm like what, what so not working and still and having children in childcare, like what, what does that say about who I am, like I, I'm not a stay at home mother looking after my children cos they're at school and nursery and I'm

7.13 Appendix M: New emergent theme process – Georgie interview



7.14 Appendix N: Theme development (spreadsheet): Georgie interview

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	PAGE	LINE	KEY PHRASES - EXPLORATORY CODING FROM TRANSCRIPT	EMERGENT THEME	EMERGENT THEME AMENDED	EMERGENT THEME AMENDED AGAIN
26	22		'conflicting ideas about Mother's Day', nice to be appreciated but not patronised	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	'I think I often say one thing (beliefs) and then show & do something else'
34	16-18		gendered work roles? "football isn't my favourite thing in the world" 'he's probably a bit bored of watching people give birth'	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	'I think I often say one thing (beliefs) and then show & do something else'
22	23-24		'it's difficult' 'I think I often say one thing and then show & do something else'	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	'I think I often say one thing (beliefs) and then show & do something else'
23	2-4, 12-14		'I'm very strong views about, women...but at the same time...I take on the majority of the kind of gendered roles in the house'	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	'I think I often say one thing (beliefs) and then show & do something else'
15	3-7, 17		no 'kind of big sibling rivalry' but she needed a different place in family to her sister	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	bringing together philosophy & action is hard sometimes	'I think I often say one thing (beliefs) and then show & do something else'
28	10-13		childhood experiences make her think she'll always be an 'ordered person'	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
15	11-13		'but I also think that the way...I was brought up has contributed to how things have ended up with me'	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
15	1-3		'be the one out of me & my sister who my mum would come to if she needed some help'	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
26	6-8		always distracted by something else she 'has' to do on phone	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
14	12-25		'felt pressure growing up to be the one that looked after things, sister etc	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
6	13-15		'be the kind of person that held all that in the family'	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
19	18-21		'there is always a time constraint or responsibility, so can't 'give myself' properly to the person I'm interacting with'	the cost of being 'responsible'	'I will never not be an organiser'	a lifelong need to create order has had an impact on interactions with others
33	2-5		appreciate partner shifting his work to support her change in career	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	acknowledges that when they don't work together to manage roles, it's are much harder for her
32	6-18		'in preparation for me being fulltime' he 'has changed the nature of his work role to 'make things easier'	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	acknowledges that when they don't work together to manage roles, it's are much harder for her
34	14-16		lack of shared understanding 'probably hasn't contributed very positively to...the way we kind of have managed our lives probably'.	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	realising to feel fulfilled in roles, need partner to support	acknowledges that when they don't work together to manage roles, it's are much harder for her
5	4		'used his job as...the reason why I wasn' doing what I wanted to do with my life'	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	blaming PWA instead of taking responsibility for own unhappiness
6	7-8		'definitely feel like I did...' using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	blaming PWA instead of taking responsibility for own unhappiness
3	9-11		'giving myself to it' hasn't been easy while doing a lot on her own	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	blaming PWA instead of taking responsibility for own unhappiness
35	14-18		missing out on being able to plan things and cancel things last minute	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	blaming PWA instead of taking responsibility for own unhappiness
4	26-28		'I had always used his job as a reason not to take a leap of faith and change'	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	using PWA as a reason for her own difficulties/issues	blaming PWA instead of taking responsibility for own unhappiness
20	22		'I need to deal with it, but I don't quite know how to kind of make it better'	trying to make it better by doing not talking (both)	actions replace feelings	both her & partner use action rather than talking to fix emotional problems
27	4-5		'I'm, kind of always on the go, thinking about the things I have to do'	trying to make it better by doing not talking (both)	actions replace feelings	both her & partner use action rather than talking to fix emotional problems
8	7-11		he'd 'desperately' try to make it better by helping, not talking about it	trying to make it better by doing not talking (both)	actions replace feelings	both her & partner use action rather than talking to fix emotional problems
24	1-3		'I don't feel like a nagging fishwife, like, lots of my friends feel'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
31	2-4		'family culture not ok with being a 'lady who lunches'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
23	5-7		'I have some friends who have... quite liberal partners and it is nowhere near as equal as our household is'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
14	1-2, 10-12		compares self to other mothers, and to own mother 'I look to her for advice about lots of things'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
13	1-3, 27-28		'every day there's something to worry about or someone to compare yourself to'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
22	13-15		own upbringing 'unusual'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
28	17-18		'I envy people who are much more...carefree relaxed spontaneous types'	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
31	19-25		adjusting to new position in relation to others from established role to being new but older	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
20	23-25		see other couples and wonder how they are so 'happy' & 'unscathed' after early year parenting	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others	constant comparisons to others influences expectations of self
24	5		'aside from...our own personal relationship, it's a positive image for our children'	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
16	8-12		'have used, kinda having young children as a reason why I kind of haven't kept up contact'	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
17	11-12		'I don't feel like I pick up the phone and just have a chat with people in the way I did before children'	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
7	11-17		would cut him off when away so she could cope	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
20	16-20, 25-26		partner role 'neglected' 'I tend to try & not think about too much because it's not good'	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
34	21-22		'we don't talk about work very much to each other, it's kinda not...an easy subject'	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
16	24-25		'I'm not quite getting what I would ideally want from them' friends	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
6	27-28		didn't ask for help and didn't get breaks, 'lost perspective	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
21	6-9, 19-20		doesn't talk about the 'not nice' things to others [relationship & work]	disconnected from others	disconnects from others	creates barriers with others to avoid intimacy
34	14		'very different experiences of work'	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
24	3-5		'share the kind of same views'	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
22	4-17		shared philosophy of gender roles & 'that girls 'can do anything'	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
8	13-17		he had no idea what it was like for her & she wasn't interested in his work	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
21	22-27		same views about mother being successful 'can be anything and do anything'	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
23	4-5, 22-24		'I think we show a united front most of the time and I think that's been really positive'	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	common & uncommon ground (philosophy)	despite very different work experiences, they share the same views on roles
2	10		'if we have kids this is gonna be how it is, I'm gonna be away a lot'	feeling powerless	feeling powerless	difficulties arise when roles are important to her but she is made to feel powerless
29	16-22		old role in human rights law 'not having any kinda power in the case' or making decisions	feeling powerless	feeling powerless	difficulties arise when roles are important to her but she is made to feel powerless

EMERGENT THEMES TRANSCRIPT: Georgie Journal Page 1 of 4

Monday 4th May 2015

Night before S leaving for 9 days. (was meant to be 3 days but hey ho!). Kids back from trip with my mum. Felt the stress rising at about 3 this afternoon, creeps up with a thought like 'better do the kids' washing today so there are clean clothes for the week and today is the only day I'm here to do it', which then leads on to about 5 other similar thoughts – food shopping, money needed to be got out for cleaner, meals to think about, schedule for the au pair to prepare...cue feeling overwhelmed within about 15 mins of going into autopilot sergeant major mode. Caught myself doing it and managed to calm down, got a few things done though which allowed me to feel less panicked and that I can manage. It is all so much easier now with an au pair here. Although she doesn't do loads of childcare (just two full days and some school pick ups), just having another adult in the house does make life so much simpler – I can run to the shops if nec without dragging the kids out, I can have help cooking or clearing things away, she's there if I need her. I have two exams this week, which mean stress levels will undoubtedly rise. I think the mounting stress the night before he leaves means that I don't ever allow or acknowledge any feelings about missing him & I let the fear of (not) being able to manage take over. This means that there are rarely nice goodbyes or time spent together the evening before – its all preparation and organisation from both of us. I will try to keep communication open and friendly while he's away and not go into single parent mode. It's important to send a warm text or email every couple of days, ones that aren't just about children or moaning!

Tuesday 5th

S left before we all got up so no proper goodbye, plus a fitful night's sleep due to youngest having a nightmare and then me not being able to get to sleep again. But an easy day as kids out and I'm at home working. However, found myself getting impatient at bath/bedtime for them to hurry up so I

could continue working for the exam tomorrow rather than enjoy the last 20 mins before they go to sleep. It's a stressful time anyway but the absence of S exacerbates it all. I'm out before 8am tomorrow so need to have everything prepared for the morning for the au pair to take over, clothes out, times of everything worked out for her, lunch for the youngest etc. Also need to shower, pack bag and work out where I'm meant to be for the exam. I don't feel quite able to just get up and leave the au pair to it, still feel the need to micromanage – innate personality or response to the stress of being alone (i.e. my normal coping mechanism? Needing everything to be just right so that life doesn't feel chaotic/out of control/not manageable. Consumed with stuff to do and things to revise – barely a thought about S away. No contact from either side.

Thursday 7th

Brain on overload from having to do exams, plus think about running of the house/family – inevitably means my patience is low and feel a bit frantic. I get the kids up, dressed, fed and ready, then myself out the door, did an exam and some study afterwards, grabbed a coffee with friends on the course but had to leave them to get home to make dinner for everyone. I just want to feel able to give myself the time I need to be able to revise sufficiently but don't have S to fall back on and feel too guilty about leaving them with the au pair if I don't have to. This trip is really bad timing. I am managing a night out with old work friends tonight after I've put the kids to bed. Everything is rushed and I feel like I'm running from one task to the next with no rest or reflection time. [later] lovely to see my old work colleagues, I miss them. I need to remember how much better I feel when I've had contact with good friends.

Saturday 9th

roles clash regardless but non-primer aspect adds to it. cannot shake stress. trapped in routine
not present.
full sentences
Recog PWA absence exacerbates stress
Thinking abt prep for tomorr
control · can see it would help but can't do it.
observ.
can't trust to leave to AP. Q's why: P or coping mechanism?
ref i/v. Need to feel in control.
as in she's alone so often, this is a normal response
how she copes - under stress, struggles to change response.
S barely features no contact, too busy doing 'consumed'.
priority is here/now - [I wonder how she'd feel if he did contact]
plan of 24hrs b4 gone.
neither changing habits.
type? over-stressed?
abbrev sentences - missing I/my unless for. rec.
'Frantic' - only imp day for her + thinking abt family.
not present
Δ tense - mirrors 'frantic'
role interaction - parent/student/friend/parent/child
full sent - Feels permission is needed from s/o to spend enough time revising at expense of kids/AP.
Contrast words suggest a choice.
clear, emphasis ≥ 'really' but no explicit emotions
is doing s/t for herself - going out - not w/o stress + running
like in i/v -
seems to be writing journal ≥ not to time + pass in the moment
Contact w good friend v. imp for mood - feels need to point this out to herself.
aware no space but can't justify slowing down.
BUT she is socialising (managing)
context insight + action -
suspect was not looking fwd to friends but it was soon. Like ≥ P - another thing to do + protects from being in contact w others
ref i/v disconnection.
Δ - is more than just a luxury giving self time. It's needed to maintain balance + reflection time)
[I'm like this: overload + = draw on stressed but contact always helps]

Kids are mental today and I just want to be able to lock myself away to write this essay. I can hear them shouting at each other downstairs so clearly work will have to take a back seat again. Au pair is meant to be looking after them but seems unable to calm the situation. This is when another parent comes in handy! I've taken them swimming and out for lunch and thought that would enable me to have a few uninterrupted hours of work. I feel very angry at everyone, want to blame them for me not being able to get anything done. Have calls and emails from my parents unanswered because I just don't have the time. [later] I've sent the au pair out with my youngest to split them up, oldest is now crying downstairs that its not fair – despite her being horrible and rude to her sister for the last hour when they were playing together. Sigh.

Sunday 10th

Lovely day with the kids – no childcare at all so work completely impossible but that meant I could just relax a bit and we had a busy and sociable and fun day in the sunshine – two parties and a funfair and no shouting or irritability. I was a good mother today. Managed also to speak to S and he skyped with the kids while I cooked dinner – childcare from across the ocean! Vie failed to stay in touch properly, its almost like it's another chore on my list – sad really as I'd probably feel less burdened and stressed if I shared it with him more.

Monday 11th

Final day of teaching for this year! Can't quite believe how fast it's flown by. I do feel quite unburdened and relaxed and carefree while i'm at university, its so very different to the rest of my life – it's the only time my head feels uncluttered. I don't think about anything other than that moment I'm in. I really enjoy the group of friends I've made, lots of laughter and common ground and silliness – something I seriously lack the rest of the time. So

more typos: less care taken ~ words

precious emotion - appreciates the space

1 although some of the teaching is frustrating poor, I really cherish the time I
2 spend there. I end the work day feeling happy and can return home in a
3 lighter mood be spend time with the kids. role crossover in a +ve way -
4
5 **Wednesday 13th** no intro - everytime or just today? present tense not sure if generalising
6 Last day before S comes back and we have all survived! I am exhausted and
7 a bit run down but the children are happy, no disasters happened,
8 everything ran smoothly, I even managed a couple of nights out and I have
9 hopefully done enough work to pass my exams... just need to welcome S
10 home and not get annoyed about him messing the place up!

emphasis - surprise + emotion? excitement? joke?

good work day impacts parent role + presence
clear delineation of roles leads to less role clash + confusion, stress, clutter?

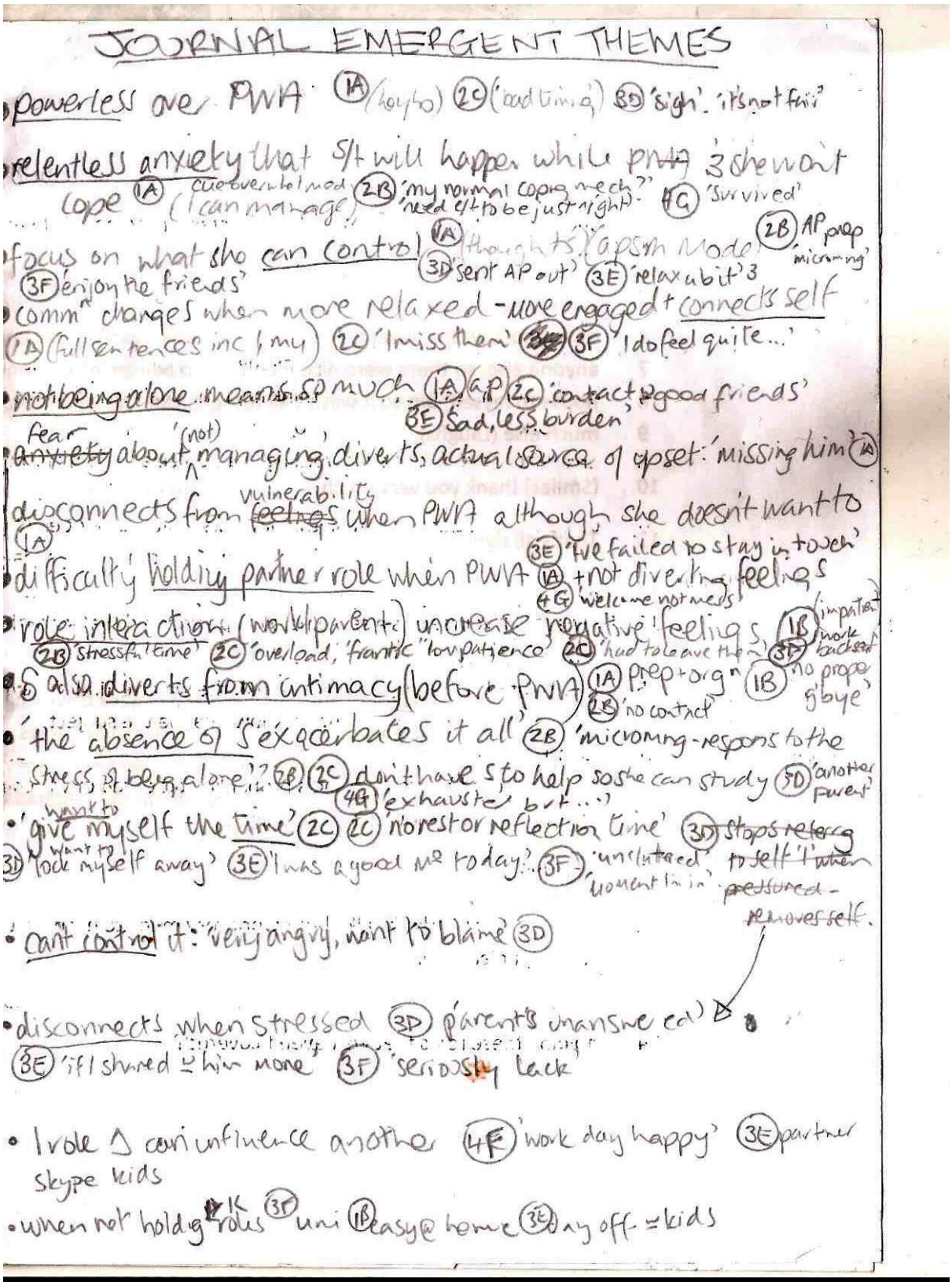
Reflect on period - has been hard but not terrible survived? - +ves - connections, achievements, kids ok.
-ves - exhausted, run down

emphasis - joke + serious?
Final dig @ partner for ruining the order (ie her control)
Another person +ve/c for.

allowed well on the whole but her wellbeing has suffered - Achieved as far as keeping it together but @ what cost?

is aware this is her response, patient wants to try sth diff.
would it Δ if she had more time to reflect?
it's abt him fitting in, not getting in the way -

7.16 Appendix P: New emergent theme process – Georgie journal



7.17 Theme development (spreadsheet): Georgie journal

	PAGE	LINE	KEY PHRASES - EXPLORATORY CODING FROM TRANSCRIPT	EMERGENT THEME	EMERGENT THEMES AMENDED
2	3	18-19	partner to parent 'Managed also to speak to S and he skyped with the kids while I cooked dinner'	1 role change can influence another	recognises that feelings related to one role can influence experience of another role
3	4	2-3	student to parent 'I end the work day feeling happy and can return home in a lighter mood be spend time with the kids'	1 role change can influence another	
4	1	11	changes to using full sentences including self-reference when beginning to talk about au pair being around	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	contact with others increase engagement with own experience
5	1	13-14	'just having another adult in the house does make life so much simpler'	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	
6	2	26	'I miss them' - old work colleagues	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	
7	2	26-27	'I need to remember how much better I feel when I've had contact with good friends'	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	
8	3	26-28	'I really enjoy the group of friends I've made'	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	
9	3	18-20	'he skyped with the kids while I cooked dinner – childcare from across the ocean!'	contact with others increase engagement with own experience	
10	3	8-9	'Have calls and emails from my parents unanswered because I just don't have the time'	disconnects from others when stressed	disconnects from others when stressed
11	3	21-22	'I'd probably feel less burdened and stressed if I shared it with him more'	disconnects from others when stressed	
12	3	30	laughter and silliness 'something I seriously lack the rest of the time' when not at uni	disconnects from others when stressed	
13	1	1	'was meant to be 3 days but hey ho!'	powerless	feeling powerless about a situation leads to anger and blame
14	2	18-19	'had to leave them to get home to make dinner for everyone'	powerless	
15	2	22	'This trip is really bad timing'	powerless	
16	3	6-8	'I feel very angry at everyone, want to blame them for me not being able to get anything done'	powerless	
17	3	10-12	'Sigh, eldest daughter crying because 'its not fair'. Wonder if G feels that way'	powerless	
18	1	8	'cue feeling overwhelmed within about 15 mins'	relentless anxiety that something will happen while SWA & she won't cope	relentless anxiety that something will happen while SWA that she can't control
19	2	8-9	'the need to micromanage - innate personality or response to the stress of being alone i.e. my normal coping mechanism?'	relentless anxiety that something will happen while SWA & she won't cope	
20	4	6	'Last day before S comes back and we have all survived!'	relentless anxiety that something will happen while SWA & she won't cope	
21	1	30	'found myself getting impatient at bath/bedtime for them to hurry up so i could continue working for the exam'	role interactions increase negative feelings	when roles interact, she feels more stressed about managing them all
22	2	2	'it's a stressful time anyway parenting at bedtime & needing to study'	role interactions increase negative feelings	
23	2	15-19	'Brain on overload from having to do exams, plus think about running of the house/family – inevitably means my patience is low and feel a bit frantic'	role interactions increase negative feelings	
24	3	2-3	'so clearly work will have to take a back seat again.' 'I feel very angry at everyone'	role interactions increase negative feelings	
25	1	20-21	'its all preparation and organisation from both of us'	S also disconnects from partner role when SWA	S also disconnects from partner role when SWA
26	1	27	'S left before we all got up so no proper goodbye'	S also disconnects from partner role when SWA	
27	2	12	'No contact from either side'	S also disconnects from partner role when SWA	
28	1	17-19	'I don't ever allow or acknowledge any feelings about missing him. i bet the fear of (not) being able to manage take over'	SWA makes it difficult to stay connected to partner role	SWA makes it difficult to stay connected to partner role
29	1	21-23	'I will try ... and not go into single parent mode'	SWA makes it difficult to stay connected to partner role	
30	3	20	'We (I've?) failed to stay in touch properly'	SWA makes it difficult to stay connected to partner role	
31	4	9-10	'just need to welcome S home and not get annoyed about him messing the place up!'	SWA makes it difficult to stay connected to partner role	
32	1	4-8	'I thought about a task spirals into 5 more immediately'	taking control of a situation to make it feel manageable	taking control of a situation makes it feel manageable
33	2	3-8	'need to have everything prepared for the morning for the au pair to take over' 'micromanage'	taking control of a situation to make it feel manageable	
34	3	9-10	'I've sent the au pair out with my youngest to split them up'	taking control of a situation to make it feel manageable	
35	3	15-16	'work completely impossible but that meant I could just relax a bit'	taking control of a situation to make it feel manageable	
36	3	28-29	'I do feel quite unburdened and relaxed and carefree while i'm at university'	taking control of a situation to make it feel manageable	
37	2	8-9	'response to the stress of being alone' is to micromanage	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	'the absence of S exacerbates...' 'the stress of holding her roles
38	2	2-3	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	
39	2	21	'don't have S to fall back on' so making time to study feels difficult	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	
40	3	4-5	'This is when another parent comes in handy!'	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	
41	4	6-9	'I am exhausted and a bit run down but..' 'no disasters happened'	'the absence of S exacerbates it all'	
42	2	19-20	'I just want to feel able to give myself the time I need'	'want to give myself the time'	'I just want to feel able to give myself the time I need' to fulfil her roles
43	2	24-25	'Everything is rushed and I feel like I'm running from one task to the next with no rest or reflection time'	'want to give myself the time'	
44	3	1-2	'I just want to be able to lock myself away to write this essay'	'want to give myself the time'	
45	3	18	fun day, no irritability - 'i was a good mother today'	'want to give myself the time'	
46	1	29	'an easy day as kids out and i'm at home working'	not holding multiple roles at once allows for presence	not holding multiple roles at once allows her to be present & enjoy what she's doing
47	3	15-22	'Lovely day with the kids – no childcare at all so work completely impossible'	not holding multiple roles at once allows for presence	
48	3	26-28	'I don't think about anything other than that moment I'm in'	not holding multiple roles at once allows for presence	

7.18 Appendix R: Cross analysis - combined emergent themes on wall (beginning)

7.19 Appendix S: Cross analysis – combined emergent themes on wall (four circles)

7.20 Appendix T: Cross analysis – combined emergent themes on wall (final themes)

PUBLISHABLE JOURNAL ARTICLE:

EXPLORING EXPANSIONIST THEORY: A COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES ALONGSIDE PARTNER WORK-RELATED TRAVEL

1. ABSTRACT

Family structures and career paths have changed significantly in the last 50 years, yet women still seem to shoulder the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities, often alongside pursuing their own career. If women also have a partner who travels regularly overnight for work, research shows that roles and relationships are impacted. Very little UK research has focused on the experience of individuals and families affected by work-related travel, despite its increased prevalence in recent years. The study discussed in this article sought to qualitatively explore a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional, and partner when her partner travels overnight regularly for work. A multi-perspectival Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was conducted using semi-structured interviews, journals and a visual prompt, collecting data from six women with preschool-age children, careers and a partner who travels for work. Three master themes emerged, each with two to four subordinate themes describing the participants' ongoing movement between engaging with the uncertainties of their context and active choice-making, influenced by and influencing a conflicted self as it interacts with the external world. The experience of holding roles is influenced by the changing nature of the partner's absence, impacting how participants understand and express their identity. Another finding, that the study appeared to offer further insight into the processes and moderating aspects of expansionist theory, is the focus of this paper. Implications for applied psychology are also discussed.

Keywords: IPA; expansionist theory; Counselling Psychology; work-related travel; multiple roles

2. INTRODUCTION

Literature has outlined how much family structures and career paths have changed in the last 50 years (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Shields & Dicicco, 2011), yet women still seem to shoulder the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities (Casinowsky, 2013; Hochschild, 2002; Swenson and Zvonkovic, 2016; Thompson, 1993). This seems to indicate a conflict. UK government has introduced policies to help close the gender pay gap, but these have not brought the promised change; and it continues to cut mental health resources and support for new parents, including affordable child care.

Studies citing categorical role differences due to gender, for example psychological research by Abele and Spurk (2011) and Roehling and Bultman (2002) or sociological papers (Casinowsy, 2013; Gustafson, 2006), have been challenged by further studies which, when controlling for particular elements, find little or no psychological gender-related difference (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Hyde, 2016).

2.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF HOLDING MULTIPLE ROLES

The vast majority of research found on holding multiple roles is quantitative. For example, the UK studies mostly make use of the British Household Panel Survey and attempt to make sense of people's experiences from there (Berrington et al, 2008; Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; Schober & Scott, 2012). There is a consensus that the role/s an adult holds does impact their life, yet there remains a lack of research into the qualitative experience of this. Most studies have focused on role overload, role conflict or role enhancement. Barnett and Hyde (2001) have offered a theory which appears to consider the nature of holding multiple roles. This has recently been reviewed by Hyde (2016).

The present article has chosen to focus on the extent that the author's research into holding multiple roles in the context of partner work-related travel (WRT) supports or challenges expansionist theory (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). This angle has been developed as a result of the inductive, qualitative study uncovering themes that appeared to have some relevance to the theory, and as such, the findings led back to a consideration of the two together. Knowledge of existing theories and literature were bracketed during the data collection and analysis phase in order to stay as close to the data as possible (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

2.2 EXPANSIONIST THEORY

A review of this theory and related research has very recently been published by Hyde (2016), updated to include same-sex partnerships, intersectionality and the impact of today's global, 24/7 work environment. In addition to the studies Hyde (2016) reviews in her updated chapter, the expansionist theory has been considered by other researchers in their investigations of multiple role impact, with differing results. Where Nordenmark's research in Sweden found marginally more support for role stress rather than expansion hypothesis, while pointing to some of the processes outlined below as being potentially relevant (Nordenmark, 2002), Rao and colleagues (2003) were able to identify several moderators and processes in their research on Indian women holding multiple roles. Roehling and Bultman (2002) also referred to the theory when exploring WRT and marital satisfaction in the US.

Expansionist theory recognises the complex nature of holding multiple roles and seeks to consider them within its structure. It also encompasses many of the conflicting terms found in the literature and discussed above into four principles,

offering an overarching psychological approach to this phenomenon (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

1) That multiple roles are generally beneficial and commitment to one role does not preclude another.

Hyde's (2016) review describes experience-based studies that cite the work-family enrichment of holding multiple roles appears linked to better mental and physical health.

2) A number of processes contribute to what makes multiple roles beneficial for people.

Buffering continues to be seen as a positive way of managing multiple roles. Hyde (2016) reported that, in work and family conflict, the stress from one role could be moderated by experience of the other, leading to less damage on health and relationships. Marshall & Barnett (1993) refer to job quality, partner support, marital satisfaction and relationship quality as positive buffers.

Added income, on both a practical and egalitarian level, remain an important contributor. Hyde (2016) found that, especially when the couple saw themselves as co-providers, marital satisfaction was enhanced. It was also recognised that, in many cases, a second income was essential for families to manage.

Social support is seen to be an important process for enhancing multiple role benefits. If work conflicted with family life, social support helped to reduce the impact. If family was felt to be negatively impacting work life, the support was still seen as beneficial but not as strongly related, work-family specific support being of greater benefit than general support (Hyde, 2016).

Increased self-complexity can come from holding multiple roles and be beneficial for people to do so. Hyde (2016) reported conflicting research to surround this concept, as seen in Koch and Shepperd's 2004 review. Hyde (2016) describes that, on one hand, if an individual possesses a number of identities, they are more likely to have a form of protection against difficulties if the identities are harmonised. On the other, she refers to a study (Hodges & Park, 2013, cited in Hyde, 2016) that found women to hold their career and mother identities separately, which can either deplete their energy when moving between the two, or enable them to shift from one to the other to retain a positive sense of self when experiencing difficulty.

Three other processes outlined in the original theory remain of interest to Hyde, but no further research has been published. She concluded that the first, *opportunities to experience success* may be a specific example of how role quality is needed to ensure holding multiple roles are beneficial. A second process suggested that by holding multiple roles, an *expanded frame of reference* is offered. The third of these unsubstantiated processes, *similarity of experience,* suggested that a shared frame of reference within a partnership is beneficial for holding multiple roles in a positive way.

Although Hyde struggled to further substantiate these processes with her updated literature review, these points seem salient to practicing psychologists, especially applied psychologists. When working with stressed, anxious or depressed clients, empowerment and growth facilitation alongside authentic relating with another is incredibly important (Cooper, 2009). Holding multiple roles allows for more experiences to build an individual's picture of their life world, and therefore resilience. Being able to connect, developing a shared experience and supporting each other is a fundamental element of being-in-the-world (Spinelli, 2005). So, although Hyde

may conclude that lack of research undermines the validity of these processes, it feels important not to discard them yet.

3) The benefit of holding multiple roles is conditional: elements such as role quality and observing the upper limits of one's capacity are crucial.

The original expansionist theory (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) named *gender role ideology* as a process but, on review, Hyde (2016) decided it was more suited as a moderator. This is because it is believed that a more traditional ideology will not find multiple roles beneficial, for themselves or for their partner. Conversely, a more liberal gender role ideology would be enhanced by holding multiple roles.

It is also understood that there is an *upper limit* to holding multiple roles in the form of quantity or demands of the roles. For example, if a role is added to someone's load without warning, or the expectation from a role increases dramatically, the ability to hold those roles in a beneficial way may be compromised, leading to increased distress or reduced wellbeing and health. Thoits (1983) first investigated this, finding no point where multiple roles induced distress. Psychological research since this time has demonstrated otherwise, including how it can be a nuanced balance to achieve and relating to the final condition, *role quality.*

4) Psychological gender differences are not large or immutable and it is not necessary to force differentiation.

Hyde (2016) refers to the meta analyses used to support her 2005 hypothesis of gender similarities, to demonstrate how few psychological differences there are between men and women, that could be considered relevant to create distinction. This is not to say that men and women are the same but, in holding multiple roles,

the case for maintaining traditional differentiation has no place and people can be supported to pursue multiple roles without limitation due to gender.

Roehling and Bultman (2002) explored this situation in relation to the elements of expansionist theory, finding that the relationship between WRT and marital satisfaction was moderated by gender, gender role ideology and parental status. In particular, the difference between higher and lower marital satisfaction for both partners when the male partner travelled was related (respectively) to whether 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' roles were held. They conclude that 'for working parents, the strain of the husband's WRT cannot be absorbed without cost when behaviour does not equal a couple's gender role ideology' (Roehling & Bultman, 2002, p. 290).

2.3 WORK-RELATED TRAVEL

In 2015 it was estimated that UK spending on business-related trips abroad increased by 30%, and the number of visits also grew by nearly 6% compared to 2014. More striking, is that the amount of money spent on business-related trips in 2015 increased by 30.2% (ONS, 2016). This data suggests that the importance of WRT may have increased for employers, given this significant rise in spending.

However, very little UK research, compared to the US and Sweden, has been conducted on the psychological impact of WRT on families. It is important to consider this from a UK perspective as the culture of work-life balance, family support (such as parental leave and childcare costs) and gender pay gaps differ, which affects people's choices and experiences (Gil Sola, 2016; Hyde, 2016).

Makela, Bergbom, Saarenpaa and Suutari (2015) cite reasons for WRT to include international business, virtual, computer and project-based assignments in addition

to expatriation. Lirio (2014), after conducting research on the overnight traveller's experience recognised the importance of also looking into what work-family functioning was like for the family members. Similarly, Swenson and Zvonkovic (2016) recognise the growing trend of WRT, and suggest that work-family research reflects this.

3. AIM OF RESEARCH

Hyde (2016) reflected that much of the research on holding multiple roles tries, and struggles, to make causal explanations in order to help reduce distress and improve coping. Given the scarce recent psychological research on the experience of WRT, despite its growing prevalence and impact on family roles in the UK, it feels important to ask a qualitatively different question. Previous research has often used data and constructs that do not necessarily access what it is like for people to live this experience, and so new, rigorous psychological research is required. Phenomenological researchers often quote Husserl when describing the underlying process of researching the lived experience and it seems apt here. Going 'back to the things themselves' (Husserl, in Finlay, 2011, p. 3), the question was asked from a Counselling Psychology perspective: what is a woman's lived experience of holding the roles of parent, professional and partner when her partner travels regularly overnight for work?

The methodology of this research will now be described briefly, and then the findings will be compared to the expansionist theory (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) using Hyde's recent review (2016). It will conclude with consideration of some implications for applied psychologists.

4. METHODOLOGY

The phenomenon of holding multiple roles could be seen to relate to Husserl's intrapsychic approach, Merleau-Ponty's more embodied understanding or Heidegger and Sartre's existential take on experiencing (Smith et al, 2009). The research question required an idiographic approach, aiming to understand each participant's experience in its own right without attempting generalisations. Knowledge acquired from drawing on an individual's experience was dependent on how they thought about that experience. By privileging the subjective reality that each participant constructed, a very different approach to that within a positivist paradigm was employed, by not assuming a defined path or seeking to prove or disprove it (Smith et al, 2009). In contrast to other qualitative methodologies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) accounts for the inevitable impact of the researcher and makes the double hermeneutic a strength of the approach (Smith et al, 2009). It has also been suggested by Willig (2013) and others that this methodology has a more psychological underpinning.

4.1 DATA COLLECTION

Six participants were recruited through existing networks, all of whom had two preschool-aged children, were pursuing careers and had a partner (mostly husbands) who travelled regularly overnight for their work. Semi-structured interviews were held in which open-ended questions were asked and three common objects (an iPhone, 'To Do list' notepad and Mother's Day card) were shown to participants to stimulate discussion around their experience. Journals were collected from five participants about what holding multiple roles was like *in vivo*, during a period their partner was travelling for work. Using three different ways to explore the participants' experiences was seen to increase the quality and rigour of the research

via triangulation. All aspects of this study were conducted in accordance with BPS ethics and ethical approval given by City University.

4.2 REFLEXIVITY

Personal, epistemological and methodological reflexivity were considered throughout the study, with the author keeping a journal of their own to record reflections. In addition to bracketing the previous literature relating to the question, an awareness of the author's demographic and experiential similarity ('insider' position) to the participants was held in order to ensure their impact on the research process was always considered. Because IPA allows for the double hermeneutic to be engaged with (Smith et al, 2009), this enabled the author to acknowledge their own subjectivity and consider its influence over the data collection and analysis stages.

5. ANALYSIS

The qualitative exploration of this question gleaned three master themes and a number of subordinate themes as seen in the following figure (see end).

The author understood it that the women participating in the research experienced ongoing movement between engaging with their uncertainties and active choice-making, influenced by and influencing *The Conflicted Self*. The internal process of self-understanding through their interaction with others seemed to influence the choices the participants made about their responsibilities and looking after themselves in a protective and empowering way (*Making Choices*).

Battling with Uncertainty represented a different side to the participant's experiences from those described in *Making Choices*. The precarious nature of holding multiple roles, the difficulty making sense of their interactions, and the confusion of feeling responsible and alone when PWA; yet driven to be recognised and validated are a

stark contrast to times when they felt more control over their situations. These experiences then fed back into *The Conflicted Self*, influencing the part that tried to make sense of how to express herself: honouring role or identity, external behaviour versus internal valuing, and how context impacts her sense of identity.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO EXPANSIONIST THEORY (BARNETT & HYDE, 2001; HYDE, 2016)

It is far from the case that the research findings map neatly onto this theory. There are numerous similarities as well as differences, and the current research question does not seek to obtain a categorical answer so any comparisons are tentative, aiming to help interpret the study's themes and suggest areas for future research.

Multiple roles are generally beneficial, and commitment to one role does not preclude another

All participants described at least one other role in addition to parent, professional and partner. These included other variations on 'housewife', family roles, friend, colleague, volunteer and creative. Although these roles felt important to the women, they did not share the central importance of the other three. Martire et al (2000) explored a concept referred to as either role centrality, salience or commitment. The findings from this study showed all participants to consider their career as a central role, which they were committed to, regardless of whether they were able to actively work in their chosen profession at that point in time.

They also spoke about the importance of their parent roles, and of the lesser salience of their partner role at that time, to the extent that some struggled to separate their partner and parent roles. Thoits (1983) suggests that when role partners overlap (i.e. partner/parent) the intensity of the relationship and loyalty

increase. This could be seen with the participants in their commitment to their relationship (‘We’re in it together’ Donna, *Making Choices: Empowering self*), even if their partner was regularly absent (‘every aspect of this is a struggle’ Tanya, *Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling ‘solely responsible’ when PWA*), the relationship itself was not functioning terribly well (‘I can’t tell him how hard this is’ Karen *Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others*) and they felt unsure as to what the relationship consisted of (‘I genuinely don’t know what my wife role is!’ Erica, *Battling with Uncertainty: Holding roles is a “house of cards”*).

Some women described their career commitment as helping them to be a better parent, not only because it made them happier and more fulfilled, but it also showed their children the importance of working hard and being fulfilled. It is unclear whether holding both professional and parent roles centrally was contributing to psychological wellbeing as the difficulties with not being able to invest in their careers as they would like was a significant conflict for the participants (*The Conflicted Self: Conflict of expressing self in the world*).

A number of processes contribute to what makes multiple roles beneficial for people

Buffering: in order to hold their multiple roles, the participants tried to keep them separated as much as possible, thus enabling any stress from one to be buffered by another without interference, most commonly between work and parenting by taking back control or maintaining their barriers ("I think you need to protect your family quite a lot whether it’s, in terms of time spent with them or quality time spent with them" Erica, *Making Choices: Empowering self*). Although the women maintained this separation in their conceptualisation of the roles when PWA, in practice this was much harder. Subthemes like *Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause*

confusion and *Holding roles is a "house of cards"* highlight this and the subsequent increased stress (*Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling 'solely responsible' when PWA,* and *The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world*). Additionally, the women either absorbed their partner role into the parent role or kept their partner role separate by allowing distance to build up in the relationship, described for example in *Making Choices: Keeping self safe*.

Added income: this factor was not spoken about much by participants. Their career being something that gave them a sense of value was a more prominent contributor to their multiple role commitment. This could be seen in *The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world*, where participants expressed the importance of their profession as an expression of identity. Some stated that there was no financial need to work, and in relation to PWA, would prefer their partner's presence over the added income: "to me it is more around having him present, more present and and more of an active parent than it is us being able to afford to go on holiday you know, twice or three times a year" (Lizzie). Any protective factor of being a co-provider, as suggested by Hyde (2016) was challenged by the lack of influence over PWA (*Battling with Uncertainty: Role interactions cause confusion*).

Social support: an aspect of PWA that the participants struggled with was the sense of isolation. In most cases they appreciated the support from work colleagues, which protected against the loneliness of PWA, (*Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling solely responsible' when PWA*) but being able to access other social support, including family, was difficult due to time and locality constraints, and prioritising other roles ("it does create you know tension with uh, sort of your personal time and and balancing everything" Lizzie, *Making Choices: Recognising responsibilities*). Most participants also found it easier to keep their distance from others in order to cope when PWA,

even if they recognised how beneficial it would be to access support (*Making Choices: Keeping self safe*).

Opportunities to experience success: all of the participants were very clear that their sense of worth came mostly, or in some cases, exclusively, from their professional role. Without this, they would struggle greatly much more with holding a parent and partner role. To feel like they were experiencing an element of success in one role enabled the women to hold other roles they felt less confident with. *The Conflicted Self: Conflict of expressing self in the external world* demonstrates the struggle the participants have to prioritise those roles that boost their self-worth while maintaining their responsibilities to others: "I get my, a lot of my self-worth from work and I don't get it much from being a mother or a partner so it's very important for me to have that kinda separate side" (Georgie).

Expanded frame of reference: Tanya describes the importance of taking opportunities and encouraging her children to do the same: "it's through those talks that they'll learn things it'll give them the opportunities when they're bigger". Despite the challenges associated with PWA and holding multiple roles, the participants continue to manage it, talking about their experience not just in a negative way, but also as an empowered, responsible adult. The subthemes of *Making Choices: Empowering self* and *Recognising responsibilities,* and *The Conflicted Self: The process of understanding the self* all show how the participants continue to reflect and engage with their roles, balancing the difficult experiences with positive ones. This ongoing movement between the themes contributes to a constantly expanding frame of reference.

Similarity of experience: this is a significant process for the present study when thinking about holding multiple roles. Some participants found that working in a similar profession to their partner enabled them to hold a sense of shared experience, which they recognised as positive. If they also worked away overnight, they recognised this. When Georgie began working her overnight work, she reported a shift in her experiencing of her roles and relationships. Conversely, those who felt there was a considerable lack of shared experience spoke about their relationship as being much more distanced. Additionally, not having a similarity of experience with others regarding PWA was difficult, and in those situations, participants often looked for other ways to connect. The attempts to find a similarity of experience is held in *Battling with Uncertainty: Seeking her validation in others (*"all we women could've stuck together and helped each other out" Donna*)*; and when this is realised, in *The Conflicted Self: The process of understanding the self,* and *Making Choices: Empowering self (*"it's nice that I've got someone at home that I can bleurgh to and he'll sort of understand what I'm talking about" Erica*).*

Increased self-complexity: Although Hyde (2016) took Linville's original definition of self-complexity (1985, 1987) for this theory, Koch and Shepperd (2009) highlighted the many other ways that the concept was being used in research, as discussed in the literature review (chapter 1). In the present study, it can be seen that determining a person's level of self-complexity and subsequent related wellbeing is difficult, as the self-aspects that make up self-complexity can comprise things other than roles. As this is not an area that was explored in detail during data collection, it cannot be commented on here. It can be assumed that there is a level of self-complexity given that at least three different roles, and up to ten, are being held by each participant. It can also be seen that the other element of determining self-

complexity – level of independence between self-aspects – is difficult here, as the participants attempted to hold their roles separately, but were often unable to. It is not clear how to make sense of the conflict, or incongruence, involved with holding multiple roles while experiencing identity differently. Perhaps participants attempted to understand their 'Conflicted Self' by actively 'Making Choices' or through interactions with others. The fluctuation in self-complexity caused by PWA could be seen by Barnett and Hyde as negatively impacting wellbeing in relation to holding multiple roles (2001).

The benefit of holding multiple roles is conditional

Considering role ideology, the recurrent subject of conflict returns, which is seen throughout and amongst the themes in the analysis. *Battling with Uncertainty* is a very different set of experiences to *Making Choices*. It could be suggested that *Battling with Uncertainty* draws together when participant's ideology of holding multiple roles is incongruent with how they are experiencing them ("It never occurred to me that actually, if it doesn't fit in with family life or if it's not gonna work in terms of the childcare situation back home, then no, it may not quite go the path that you want it to" Donna). Conversely, in *Making Choices,* participants recognise the incongruence and take action to realign their situation with their ideology ("it took yeah, being depressed and doing something about it, changing, taking a risk on moving careers" Georgie).

The Conflicted Self holds both internal understanding of their sense of self and role ideology, with the impact of the external world influencing the participant's process on how to express this ("…to not be able to work is like losing a piece of yourself because it's so tied up with your identity" Karen). In light of the expansionist theory,

if the gap between ideology and experience widens too far, the benefit of holding multiple roles is questioned. As can be seen by the present study, the participants are in constant negotiation with their role ideology and identity, trying to find a way to hold this and the experience of PWA in a more congruent way.

Role quality is another moderator for determining the benefit of holding multiple roles. Often, the participants in this study spoke of the difficulty when feeling their roles were of lesser quality at different times. Acknowledging that *Holding roles is a "house of cards"* (*Battling with Uncertainty*) suggests that it feels largely out of their hands at times and this could impact their experience of them ("I'd like to not work for this period of my life (to raise the children) but I'm too frightened that my value as an employee will just disappear if I just take five years out" Karen).

Wanting to experience their roles as of a higher quality than they are is held in *The Conflicted Self: Conflict between internal self and external world* as the participants try to work out how to honour their roles within their context. *Making Choices: Empowering self* shows how participants find a way to improve the quality they are experiencing. For example, taking back control over how they approach their roles to enjoy them when they are engaged with them.

The final moderator identified by Barnett and Hyde (2001) is that there is an upper limit to the number or type of demands on a person's roles, which when reached, can reduce the benefit of holding multiple roles. When PWA, the parent, professional and partner role demands change – often the partner demands all but disappear, and the parent demand increases. This impacts the professional role as there is very little room for negotiation so although the role doesn't change, the space to perform that role may have diminished.

If this remains manageable, the participants in the study described PWA as a process to manage, and the role demands required prioritising but could be done ("…we've (her and her husband) tried to work it between us that they (the children) see us as much as they can", Tanya *Making Choices: Recognising responsibilities*). If the role demands reach the upper limit of the participant's ability to hold them, they experienced them as a hard and consistent impact, as in *Battling with Uncertainty: Feeling 'solely responsible' when PWA* ("It's a stressful time anyway but the absence of S exacerbates it all" Georgie).

The analysis of the present study identified the impact of PWA on holding roles even when the participant's partner was present, and all of the themes were represented across the current moderators. Considering PWA as a separate moderator, and conducting further research with regards to this may be something worth considering. The idea fits with Hyde's 2016 update including the 'New Economy' where people are expected to work differently and hold their roles differently.

Psychological gender differences are not large or immutable

It is not possible to comment, as the study explored only women's experiences.

6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

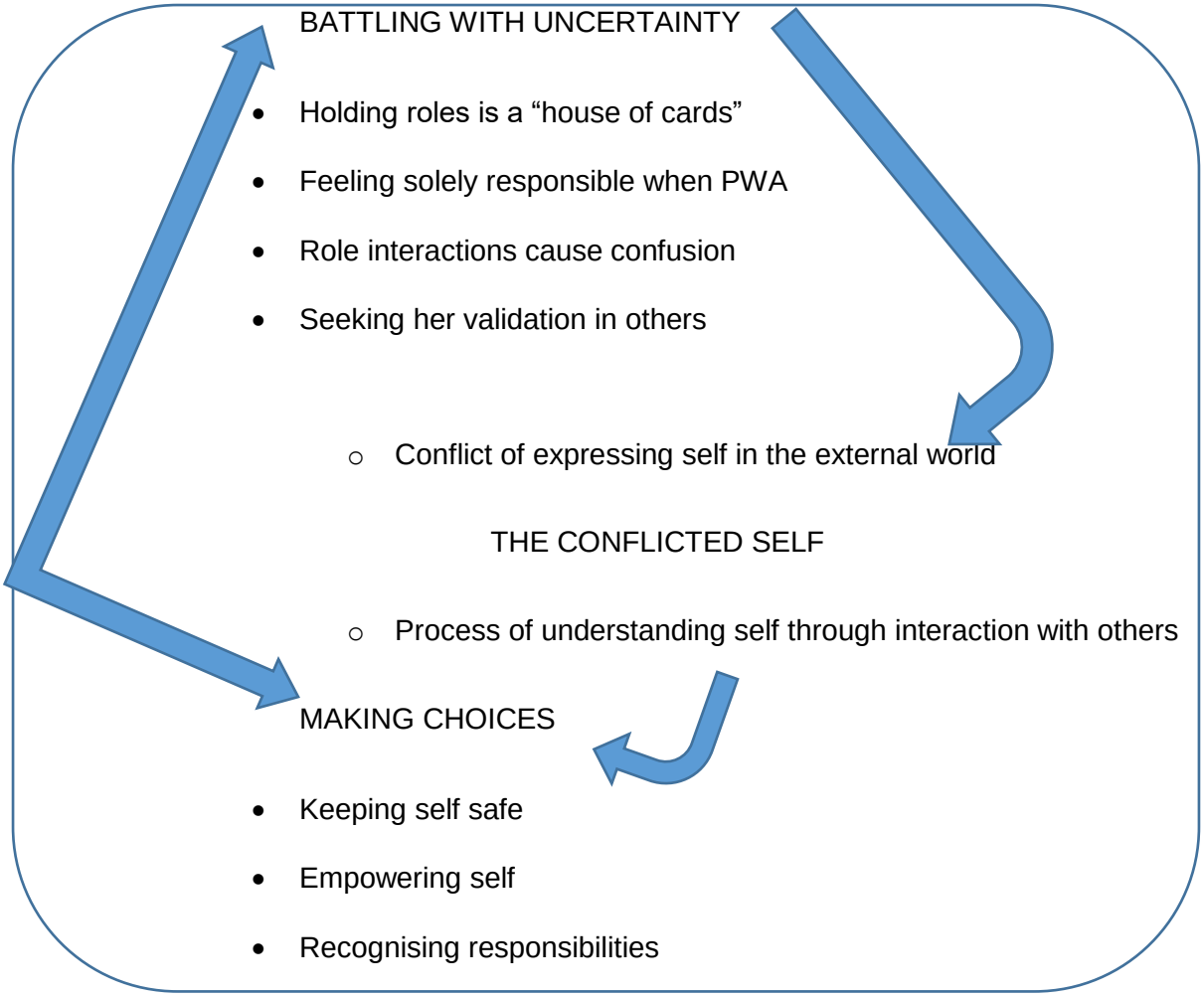
The findings from this consideration of expansionist theory in relation to the research question can have far-reaching implications for Applied Psychology and the people we support. The three processes that Hyde (2016) questioned given the lack of empirical evidence to support them, have been demonstrated to be relevant in this study. Further exploration of opportunities for success, expanded frame of reference and similarity of experiences is recommended, in addition to the idea that PWA be a significant enough complication to be considered as a potential extra moderator.

People are holding conflicting selves and continuing to function in almost all settings that Applied Psychologists work. It is important to consider that any woman with ambition and an interest in developing herself must make these decisions and most manage. These findings will further enable Applied Psychologists to acknowledge the challenges highly functioning people also face in holding the unknown or managing recurring, constant change.

Some of the participants have seen coaches and counsellors, been assigned mentors or their partner received counselling. They demonstrated that it does make a difference and that they were open to doing what can help, if they can fit it in. Often women would not use these options, dealing with their stresses as best they can 'on the go'. Encouraging women to support each other, for example with systems like Lean In (worldwide), Cityparents (London-based), or MediaParents (UK) offers the opportunity for sharing similar experiences.

Having to manage PWA removes some of the coping strategies women employ when they first have children. The context pushes stress and roles to limits that expose vulnerability so support with that vulnerability or recognising that the vulnerabilities exist at all is also important. In addition to primary care, specialist or secondary care health services, Applied Psychologists may encounter this phenomenon in private practice, within school or nursery settings, in national or multinational organisations via Employee Assistance Programmes health insurance referrals, coaching or return-to-work services. In workplaces where psychologists are also line managers, their staff, including other psychologists, may disclose this experience of holding multiple roles. Finally, women may present in military, FIFO (fly in fly out) or academic settings, as a result of their own or their partner's career.

7. FIGURE FOR ENTRY IN ANALYSIS SECTION



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