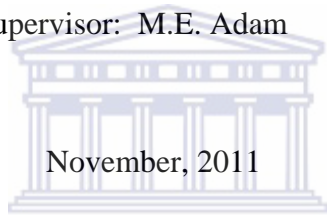


THE EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE-CLASS PROFESSIONAL WORKING MOTHERS  
FROM CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN CAPE TOWN  
WITH REGARD TO WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.Psych in  
the Department of Psychology, at the University of the Western Cape.

Supervisor: M.E. Adam



November, 2011

UNIVERSITY *of the*  
WESTERN CAPE

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**KEYWORDS**

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## ABSTRACT

Women's roles in the workplace have increased but expectations within their family roles have not diminished. Work-family conflict (WFC) occurs when work and family roles are mutually incompatible in some respect. Mothers' representations of their own particular personal contexts seem largely absent from the cultural iconography and so motivations for the study included bringing to light the phenomenological experiences of contemporary full-time working mothers by developing a rich description of their lived experience. These ideas have not been widely explored in South Africa. The study aimed to explore how full-time working mothers experience work-family conflict, including how they conceptualise their dual roles, how salient each role is to them, the factors in the work and family domains which are particularly pertinent for them and any coping strategies they might employ. The study used as a theoretical framework the model of work-family conflict developed by Greenhaus and Beutell in 1985, together with an extension from the work of Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering and Semmer in 2011. The study used a phenomenological methodology. Eight middle-class, professional, full-time working mothers from the Southern Suburbs and City Bowl of Cape Town were interviewed individually, using a semi-structured interview schedule. A qualitative paradigm was used to analyse the interviews. Emotional and cognitive repercussions of WFC were many, including feelings of unsustainability. Some participants acknowledged a need to compromise in order to cope, but the current normative messages are not conducive to this. Participants aspire, not to stop working, because the role of worker is regarded as important for self-definition, but to reduce their overall load. The generalisability of this study was reduced because of its localised ambit, its small size and some similarities in socio-economic profile among the participants. Future studies could further explore the choices or strategies which are successful in reducing WFC.

November 2011

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that THE EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE-CLASS PROFESSIONAL WORKING MOTHERS FROM CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN CAPE TOWN WITH REGARD TO WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

.....

Susan Margaret Drummond



November 2011

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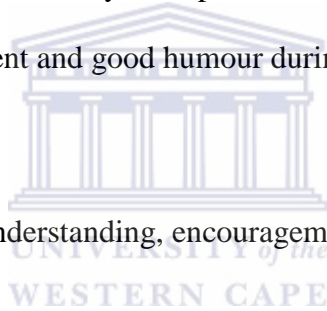
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Work-family conflict (WFC) is “a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role. Greenhaus and Beutell differentiated strain-based, time-based, and behaviour-based conflict in both the work-to-family (WIF) and family-to-work (FIW) directions.

Fuss, Nubling, Hasselhorn, Schwappach, and Rieger (2008) hold that women’s roles in the workplace have increased over the last years, but at the same time expectations within their family roles have not diminished. Coll, Surrey and Weingarten (1998) talk of “impossible ideas about motherhood” (p. 6) and of the unrealistic demands placed on contemporary mothers. Hill, Yang, Hawkins and Ferris (2004) talk of more egalitarian gender ideologies that are spreading from the West to other areas of the world, but note that women generally experience more family-work conflict than men and argue that women’s sense of being able to manage the demands of work and family life is therefore more likely to be negatively affected. For many, work and family roles are the most important and self-relevant life roles. Fuss et al. (2008) argue that when women are involved in multiple roles, they tend to become drained and experience stress or inter-role conflict.

Coll et al. (1998) suggest that the absence of the mother’s perspective and experience in clinical formulations, developmental theory and psychological research is striking. They suggest that mothers are seen as supports who develop children and are regarded primarily as *objects* not as *selves*. In such a paradigm, mothers appearing as selves with voices of their own are experienced as deeply suspect. They argue that mothers are marginalised through the



invisibility or absence of representation of their own particular contexts. Many mothers find their experience missing in cultural iconography.

## **1.2 Motivation for the Study**

In order to bring to light the phenomenological experience of contemporary working mothers, to attempt to redress their ‘voicelessness’ to some small degree, and to explore whether the purportedly more egalitarian gender ideologies are in fact making a meaningful difference in their lives, this study will aim to facilitate a rich understanding of the research participants’ subjective experiences of work-family conflict.

A review of the literature shows a number of studies which have been conducted overseas, in countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia, for example Cheung (2010), Dolcos and Daley (2009) and Wierda-Boer, Gerris and Vermulst (2009). These ideas have not been widely explored in South Africa. Hill, Yang, Hawkins and Ferris (2004) note that “relatively few work-family studies have surfaced from less affluent developing countries” (p. 1301). It is hoped to contribute, however marginally, to the body of knowledge by attempting a South African study.

Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering and Semmer (2011) note that work-related variables are the variables most often studied because WFC research is typically conducted in the arena of organisational psychology. They suggest that a direction for future research on WFC should include general well-being indicators. This study will attempt to do so.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

- 1) How do full-time working mothers experience work-family conflict?
- 2) How do they conceptualise the roles of mother and worker and how salient is each role?

3) What factors in the work and family domains are particularly pertinent for them?

4) What coping strategies do they use?

#### **1.4 Aim**

The aim of the study is to investigate the experience of middle-class professional full-time working mothers with regard to work-family conflict.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Themes emerged which will not only contribute in some small measure to the dominant discourse of motherhood but also help to ameliorate the situation of working mothers going forward. Hearing the lived experiences of working mothers and thus gaining a better understanding of the dynamics of work-family conflict may broaden society's perspective of women juggling multiple roles, and lead to greater flexibility and understanding being shown them by their families and 'better measures of prevention and intervention' in their workplaces.

#### **1.6 Overview of the thesis**

Chapter one provides the background to and motivations for the study, the research questions addressed, and the aim and significance of the study.

Chapter two comprises a review of the literature pertinent to the study. Topics include the consequences of WFC, WFC and the workplace, childcare as it relates to WFC, family identity salience, gender and FIW, household income and WFC, attributions of responsibility for WFC, interpretive habits, the role of personality in WFC and buffering factors and coping strategies. Also addressed are role construction and boundary management, cultural considerations with regard to WFC, WFC and a life-course perspective, a criticism of the

vectors within the earlier models of WFC, 'linked lives' and WFC, the 'depletion' and 'facilitative' perspectives of WFC, an attempt to 'rethink WFC', a theoretical framework for WFC and the implications of WFC for policy.

Chapter three describes the methodology used for the study. The phenomenological paradigm is briefly explored. The procedure used for the collection of information is described and the demographic details of the research participants and the criteria used in participants' selection are given. The interview procedure, the process of data analysis and a consideration of the ethical issues involved are all explained.

In chapter four I interpret the results of the study by explicating the various themes which emerged. I address in turn the ways in which the research participants conceptualise their different roles, how salient each role is to them, and the influence of both gender-role ideology and socialisation messages about role constructs. I explore the working mothers' accounts of their experiences of work-family conflict, looking at emotional and cognitive experiences of WFC, the times when juggling works and when it does not, experiences of overload and unsustainability, how husbands and children influence and are influenced by WFC, workplace issues and their relationship to WFC, coping strategies, practical support from the extended family and implications for policy.

In chapter five I draw together the central findings of the study and consider its implications and limitations. I also briefly explore recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Interest in work-family conflict (WFC) has been increasing over the last years as the number of dual-income and single-parent families rises and as working conditions diversify.

According to Dolcos et al. (2009), the relationship between work and family domains has been profoundly altered by these changes in the composition of the workforce and in work and life attitudes, and it has become more difficult for individuals to balance the demands of work and family. Blair-Loy (2003) found that for those parents experiencing conflicts between the work and family domains, not only were the conflicts intense, but the frameworks of each domain were often difficult to change.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010), in their overview of work and family research in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, noted that many researchers regarded men's changes in the home as of lesser degree than women's changes in the market place. Explanations for this have included the idea that men resist doing tasks perceived as feminine especially when this was felt to compromise their performance as a provider (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre & Matheson, 2003), and that women are reluctant to give up control, in other words, that women engage in *maternal gatekeeping*<sup>1</sup> (Gaunt, 2008). Wharton and Blair-Loy (2006) found gender differences in WFC when assessing men and women with similar job and family statuses, with women experiencing more WFC. Furthermore, according to Bianchi and Milkie (2010), meta-analyses showed that gender differences were more pronounced among people with children than among the general population, and mothers had more WFC than fathers (Byron,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Maternal gatekeeping' refers to mothers' attempts to inhibit the participation of fathers in family work.

2005). The consequences of WFC were found to be more closely correlated with well-being for mothers than for fathers. Bianchi and Milkie (2010) found that having a spouse who is not employed helped only men's but not women's careers.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) noted that men and women's time allocation in the home (although more similar now than in the past) is still very different, especially in families with children. In spite of the increase in the involvement of fathers in the home, mothers were found to be far more involved with child-care than were fathers. Another observation was one of gender inequality in paid work outcomes: women, and mothers in particular, continued to experience difficulties moving upwards in the labour market, and also, to suffer a *wage penalty*<sup>2</sup>.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) noted that in a much higher proportion of households in the 21<sup>st</sup> century all adults were employed and were therefore less easily able to meet family demands. Blair-Loy (2003) found that many occupations required total engrossment in the job and that this created problems for individuals who wanted to spend time with their children. Expectations of parental involvement were also found to be increasing, especially among well-educated parents. Hence, there are increasing pressures in both work and family domains.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) also noted that most often, WFC was seen as arising from job conditions and was assessed as a dependent variable, whose antecedents researchers would attempt to elucidate. They also found a larger body of literature on WIF, but as regards FIW, they found that clear antecedents for FIW were having young or disabled children or a pre-schooler with a difficult temperament. FIW affected job performance and was more pronounced for women.

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<sup>2</sup> A 'wage penalty' refers to the phenomenon of earning less pay for equal work.

Byron's (2005) meta-analysis of WFC showed that there are work and family factors that have simultaneously disruptive effects in both domains. An example might be that making arrangements for the care of a sick child could lead to complicated feelings of conflict – guilt for farming out the care of the child and frustration that it eroded work time and routines (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Further, WFC was also increasingly studied as a moderator or mediator in relationships between well-being and experiences within the family and within the workplace.

There is a range of studies in the literature, such as Amstad et al. (2011), Cheung (2010), Halbesleben (2009) and Dolcos et al. (2009), exploring, *inter alia*, the factors that contribute to WFC and the vectors within the construct, looking at buffering factors and coping strategies, highlighting the implications of WFC for women and for the broader society and making recommendations for healthy employment practices.

## **2.2 Consequences of WFC**

As regards the consequences of WFC, Major (2002) found that WFC was significantly positively related to employees' psychological distress and stress-related health problems.

Outcomes of WIF that have been identified include marital and family dissatisfaction, individual psychological strain, family strain, depression, burnout, somatic symptoms and reduced quality of child-care. Ford (2010) argues that individuals experiencing WIF are more likely to be unpleasant to or angry with their relationship partner and to make their partner's life difficult. They are also less likely to engage in social activities.

Outcomes of FIW include reduced work engagement, feeling more fatigued, irritable and distracted at work, diminished job performance and productivity, higher intention to leave and reduced commitment to the organisation (Brauchli, Bauer & Hammig, 2011).

Ergeneli, Ilsev and Karapinar (2010) attest that WFC affects job satisfaction negatively and that this effect has been found for a diverse range of professions, including accountants, health workers, teachers, small business owners, nurses, engineers and employees in communication and technology services. They cite meta-analyses, including those of Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton (2000), and Kossek and Ozeki (1998), which indicate a significant negative relationship between WFC and job satisfaction.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) hypothesise that mothers who 'solve' their WFC by working shorter hours or leaving the labour force will probably have problems re-entering the labour force or securing decent wages at a future date.

Health-related correlates of WFC include stress, burnout in response to chronic work-load stressors, increased substance use, depression and other mental disorders and various psychosomatic symptoms (Brauchli et al., 2011). Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner and Zimmerman (2010) argue that a combination of high workplace demands coupled with low support and low control are correlated with poor health outcomes. Burnout was found to have a significant place in the literature and will therefore be further illuminated.

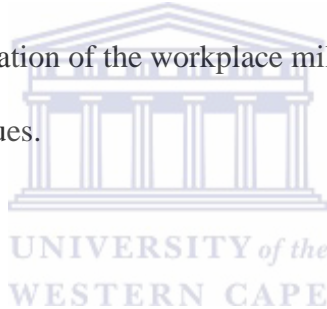
### **2.3 Burnout and WFC**

Brauchli et al. (2011) see burnout as a strain phenomenon occurring in response to chronic work-load stressors. Using theory regarding the conservation of resources, they argue that a finite pool of resources is available for both work and family domains and those resources may become depleted, resulting in burnout.

Their study found that time-based WIF is particularly associated with burnout. FIW, however, showed little correlation with burnout. Brauchli et al. (2011) suggest that this is because the impingements of private life on work generally appear to be less of a problem

than the impingements of work on private life and that burnout, by definition, is a problem emerging from a stressful situation at work.

Brauchli et al. (2011) further suggest that the association between WFC and burnout is reciprocal and that intervention strategies should be targeted at the prevention of WFC (and of WIF in particular) in order to disrupt this loss spiral. They suggest that successful intervention strategies could include reducing hours spent at work and increasing the time flexibility and job autonomy of employees. They posit that individuals should be able to combine their family and working life optimally, and not be forced to decide between them, as this will likely lead to WFC. They call for policy makers and organisations to create laws and provide infrastructures so that men and women are realistically able to completely share family and other work. An exploration of the workplace milieu would likely contribute to a deeper understanding of these issues.



## **2.4 The workplace and WFC**

### **2.4.1 Workplace practices**

Kelly, Moen and Tranby (2011) suggest that employers' workplace practices and expectations regarding work lead to WFC. They suggest that, for example, increasing employees' control over their schedules could ameliorate the strain that employees may experience.

### **2.4.2 Overload**

A study by Heponiemi, Elovainio, Pekkarinen and Sinervo (2008) found that work overload is the fundamental reason for conflicts between work life and family life. They note that as high job demands are strongly correlated with WFC, it is very important to find ways of



reducing an overly high work load. Furthermore, with respect to staff allocation, they suggest that staff be consulted about realistic staffing needs.

### **2.4.3 Time spent at work**

Research by Dolcos et al. (2009) suggests that organisations should be wary of practices requiring employees to work long hours or that otherwise interfere with family. Although employees may not quit because of such practices, they may stay because they feel they have no choice. Consequently, they are likely to exhibit weaker performance and be unwilling to exert extra effort as needed. Major (2002) found that organisational expectations for time spent at work as well as work overload had significant direct paths to WFC. Contrary to this finding, Ford (2010) found that work hours were not positively related to family strain and hypothesised that the negative effects of long working hours on family functioning may be offset by the benefits of those long hours, for example, a raised level of income. However, he concedes that his results were from data collected from a single source and at a single time. In other research with regard to the number of hours worked, Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) found that when women spend more hours on professional work, it is likely that their partners, confronted with relatively unfamiliar tasks at home, are placed under stress. It could be argued that this would then put the family system under stress, leading to WFC. To see whether this finding replicates in countries that are ahead of most others in adopting more uniform gender roles is a matter for future research.

### **2.4.4 The ‘virtual office’ and the ‘home office’**

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) argue that some job *resources* may have questionable benefits, as they may make it easier for job demands to impinge upon the family domain, in particular through technological change that allows professional work to be conducted at home. More specifically, a study by Hill, Ferris and Martinson (2003) found that the *virtual office* (using

technology to enable one to work wherever it makes sense to do so) enhanced work success but detracted from work-family balance, while the 'home office' (telecommuting from home) had a positive effect on work-life balance.

#### **2.4.5 Gender-discriminatory practices: the maternal wall and the motherhood wage penalty**

Moe and Shandy (2010) draw attention to the *maternal wall*, which refers to mothers experiencing workplace bias linked to their family responsibilities. For example, according to Cheung (2010), the presence of children signals stability and responsibility for men, who are assumed to be better workers because of their roles as bread-winners, but for women, the identical situation has the opposite effect.

*Motherhood wage penalty* is a term that describes the consistent finding that mothers earn less than comparable women without children and less than men in general.

These discriminatory practices could be argued to increase working mothers' experience of WFC as they attempt to juggle their dual roles on a playing field which may not even be level.

#### **2.4.6 Work-family supports**

As regards work-family supports, Ergeneli, Ilsev and Karapinar (2010) suggest that companies should take appropriate action to reduce the conflict between working women's family and work responsibilities, for example by providing day-care centres, job sharing and flexi-time. Dolcos et al. (2009) make further suggestions, including elder care resources together with referral services. Bianchi and Milkie (2010) found that workplace policies like telecommuting had a positive impact on the well-being of families and children, for example, parents being able to telecommute meant that children received less fast food.

It has been suggested by Dolcos et al., (2009) that informal characteristics of the workplace, such as support from supervisors and co-workers and a work-family supportive culture may be even more important than simply providing formal benefits. Greenhaus et al. (2006) corroborate this, suggesting that workplace social support, consisting of the general supportiveness of the work-family culture, support from supervisors and support from co-workers, is crucial for the ability of individuals to integrate work and family responsibilities and that this type of informal support contributes more to the achievement of work-family balance than formal support. Supportive work-family cultures have norms which ensure that supervisors remain sensitive to the needs of families, respect the family time of employees, and encourage the use of family friendly benefits. These researchers attest that recent research shows that if a work-family culture is perceived as supportive, work strain and turnover intentions are reduced and job satisfaction, organisational commitment and work-family balance are enhanced. Furthermore, they attest that previous research, such as that of Clark (2001), shows that the most important component of informal support is a supportive supervisor and that this leads to reduced WFC and positive work-life outcomes, particularly in private-sector employees.

Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner and Zimmerman (2010) ran a study on WFC and family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB). FSSB include emotional support (by listening and showing care for the work-family demands of employees), instrumental support (by *management transactions* which are responsive to an employee's work and family needs), role-modelling behaviours (by supervisors modelling behaviours at work which demonstrate how to synthesise work and family roles) and creative work-family management (consisting of supervisor-initiated actions to structure work in ways which facilitate employees being effective in all their roles). They anticipated that supervisors would need to be trained in order to better understand the rationale for FSSB. They argued that having a supportive

supervisor would reduce WFC as it would be easier for employees to restructure work so that they could handle the demands of their family roles more effectively.

Hammer et al.'s (2010) study argued that work-family interventions may be most effective if they target individuals who have greater need for the interventions, in other words, who have higher levels of WFC. They suggest that the individuals most in need of help may often not be those who are targeted for these policies, or the interventions may not in fact be appropriate to their needs. Hammer et al. (2010) posit that the less formal work-family intervention of training supervisors to use family-supportive behaviours is more beneficial for workers who are not able to take advantage of more formal policies such as flexible work schedules. These would include individuals such as teachers, who are obliged to work particular hours. Hammer et al. (2010) also caution that workers who are considered high on WFC may be marginalised by certain types of interventions and they encourage the development of work-family interventions that are so integrated into core organisational structures that such programs and policies are the norm more than the exception.

Hammer et al. (2010) also found that there seemed to be some type of family-friendly policy *backlash* among individuals with low levels of WFC, who may have felt resentful that company resources and attention were being allocated to policies and programmes they were unlikely to need. They caution that there is a need for organisations to use strategies to reduce or avoid such potential backlash in response to the work-family interventions they employ.

Another cautionary note is set by Hammer et al. (2010) with regard to the focus of workplace interventions: individual or organisational. They contest that individually focused interventions will not ameliorate stressful organisational contexts. They suggest that changing the level of managerial support for employees' work and family demands is likely to be more

effective than training individual employees to solve their own problems and then sending them back to a system which is stressful and which has not changed.

#### **2.4.7 Organisational justice and interactional justice**

Heponiemi et al. (2008) argue that it is important to pay attention to *organisational justice* – the extent to which employees are treated with fairness at work. This includes fairness in decision-making procedures, such as having control over input into the process, and fairness in the interpersonal treatment of employees by their supervisors during decision-making processes, namely ‘interactional justice’. Heponiemi et al. (2008) suggest that organisations should invest in supervisor training because previous studies have shown that if leaders are trained to act in a more just manner, subordinates’ attitudes and behaviour improve. They also suggest that training should be offered for employees on managing conflicts between work and family lives. They argue that organisations with fair policies and fair supervisors will likely have lower levels of WFC. Their study found, however, that when job demands are high, even fair treatment was not able to buffer the negative effects, and they therefore argue that job demands are strong predictors of problems with combining a career and a family. In such a situation, employees become exhausted, sleep poorly and feel constantly time-pressured.

#### **2.4.8 Profile of companies more likely to respond to work-family needs**

Dolcos et al. (2009) posit that employer responsiveness to work-family needs may depend on strategic business factors, such as perceived costs and benefits of introducing work-family arrangements and the need to retain skilled staff. Another factor may be the degree of institutional pressure, which may depend on the employment sector, the size of the organisation and on workforce characteristics such as gender. They suggest that employers who feel they are more ‘visible’ and therefore subject to a greater degree of pressure, such as

some public sector organisations, may be more likely to provide work-family support initiatives and to engender supportive cultures. Larger organisations are more likely to be able to provide benefits. Moreover, posit Dolcos et al. (2009), organisations with a high complement of female staff are more likely to use family friendly policies so as to be more easily able to recruit and retain high calibre staff. Good-quality day-care, for example, can reduce absenteeism and turnover and increase productivity.

## **2.5 Childcare and WFC**

Research on factors contributing to WFC have included studies which suggest that merely having or not having children is not an accurate measure of care responsibilities and that factors such as the number and age of the children, or single parenthood, might be better indicators of the demanding aspects of childcare (Amstad et al., 2011).

Bellavia and Frone (2005) found that a key factor related to raised levels of WFC was having young children or several children living at home, while the role of other factors, such as social class or gender, was more complex.

## **2.6 Family identity salience, gender and FIW**

Family identity salience is the degree to which the family role is used for self-definition (Bagger, Li & Gutek, 2008). Identity theory proposes that when an individual finds meaning in any of his or her social roles, that role becomes part of his or her identity. Most people possess multiple identities because they occupy various social roles: these identities may vary in salience and are placed in a salience hierarchy. An individual is likely to commit more resources to an identity that is high in salience, and high-salience identities have more implications for the individual's well-being (Bagger et al., 2008).

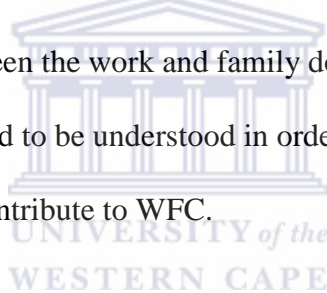
A study by Bagger et al. (2008) looked at the inter-relationship between family identity salience, FIW and gender, particularly in relation to two work-related outcomes: job-distress and job-satisfaction. Bagger et al. (2008) proposed that individuals high in family identity salience may feel a threat to their self-concept if they perceive themselves not to be performing well in the family role. On the other hand, for a person whose family identity salience is low, involvement in the family domain may lead to a sense of conflict with regard to the need to meet the responsibilities in the work domain. For such an individual, the greater the perception that family is interfering with work, the more likely they might be to experience less fulfilment at work, resulting in job distress.

Bagger et al.'s (2008) study found that for those low in family identity salience, increases in FIW were indeed related to a greater level of job distress and a lower level of job satisfaction, and that there was no such effect for those whose family identity salience was high. The effect on job satisfaction was stronger for women than for men, but for job distress there was no significant three-way interaction. So family identity salience had a buffering effect on the negative effects of FIW on job satisfaction, and this was stronger for women. Bagger et al. (2008) hypothesise that this may be because women who have a strong identification with their family role may be less concerned about the interference of family activities on their work. They posit that historically, men have been socialised to be more productive in the work domain than women, and women have been socialised to be more productive in the family domain than men. Researchers such as Gutek et al. (1991) have found that women tend to invest more in their family role than they do in their work role. Research by Maume (2006), for example, found that when both parents work full-time in a professional or managerial capacity, men made more than 40 percent fewer concessions in their work roles in order to accommodate family obligations than did their wives. Rothbard and Edwards (2003) found that women are more likely than men to invest time in their family role than in their

work role. For women, a focus on family is consistent with the role expectations prescribed for them by the gender role perspective. Bagger et al. (2008) suggest that for women who are high in family identity salience, the congruence between identity salience and gender role expectation may buffer the negative impact of FIW.

As a counterpoint, Bagger et al. (2008) hypothesise that work identity salience may *exacerbate* the negative impact of WIF on family outcomes. They argue that the boundary between work and family is asymmetrically permeable, and that work is more likely to affect family than family is to affect work.

Bagger et al.'s (2008) study argues the value of focusing more on the salience of a role to an individual, than on the mere possession of a role. Role occupation alone does not capture the intricacy of the relationship between the work and family domains. The meanings individuals attach to work and family life need to be understood in order to shed more light on how their ideologies in this regard might contribute to WFC.



## **2.7 Household income and WFC**

### **2.7.1 Access to formalised family-friendly benefits**

A study by Ford (2010) proposed that high-income occupations are more likely to have formalised family-friendly benefits than low-income occupations, although he conceded that formal work-family policies may vary in their usefulness and implementation and that individuals in low-income households may compensate for lack of formal work-family benefits by reaching informal arrangements with supervisors. In fact, he found that work demands create interference with one's family life in spite of the family-friendly benefits more often available to high-income families.



### **2.7.2 The demanding nature of the job**

Ford's (2010) study proposed that high-income positions tend to be more demanding in some respects and may entail greater involvement in work in general, resulting in greater pressure to delay the fulfilment of family responsibilities, resulting in higher levels of strain.

Individuals who earn well may have jobs requiring a higher level of cognitive complexity.

Hence their work performance may be more impaired by distractions, for example from the family domain, that take away from their cognitive abilities and these performance difficulties may lead to job dissatisfaction.

### **2.7.3 Flexible working arrangements**

Those in high-income positions are likely to have more flexible work arrangements than those in low-income positions and are likely to have more control over their work, according to Ford (2010), which, he proposed, is likely to enable them to take action to decrease the relation between stressors and affective strain. However he found that despite their greater flexibility in adjusting their work schedules, FIW is still associated with low job satisfaction for employees in high-income jobs, and he hypothesised that perhaps the responsibilities and cognitive demands of higher-level managerial jobs nullified any benefits of greater flexibility.

### **2.7.4 Improved family functioning**

Higher socio-economic status (SES), according to Ford (2010), which is largely a function of household income, is associated with better family functioning: better problem solving, communication, behaviour control and affective involvement. Furthermore, families of lower SES may have children with more externalised behaviour problems, such as aggression, and more parental mental health problems. Higher SES is also associated with fewer negative

health-related behaviours, meaning that there is less effect from these behaviours potentially spilling over into other domains.

### **2.7.5 Social capital**

Higher levels of social capital, essentially goodwill resulting from social relations that may be used to expedite a course of action (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), may help individuals who experience WIF to ameliorate family strain.

Those in low-income households, according to Ford (2010), have been found to have less social capital, making them less likely to be able to elicit emergency child care from others, for example, when needed. Further, individuals in low-income households have fewer of their own resources to assist them to fulfil their family obligations: for example, individuals in high-income households can afford better child-care arrangements.

Overly much time spent in the building of social capital may however have a deleterious effect. Ford (2010) also suggests that high-income employees may have stronger social networks at work and this may result in more time-involvement in a social life at work, to the detriment of family life.

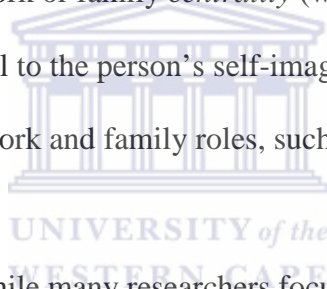
### **2.7.6 Interventions in relation to income bracket**

Ford's (2010) study showed that household income moderates the relationship between WIF and family strain and the relationship between family strain and FIW. So a higher income does not prevent WIF, but would appear to afford resources for attenuating its effects on family strain. In addition, a higher income affords access to more resources to lessen FIW in circumstances of family strain, but does not ameliorate the effects of FIW on job satisfaction. The relations for high-income households were small-to-moderate but were moderate-to-strong for low-income households. The implications of this are that while interventions in the

workplace may help reduce WIF and FIW for all individuals, work-family interventions targeting the family domain may most benefit low-income families.

## 2.8 Attributions of responsibility for WFC

Poposki (2011) looked at attributions of responsibility individuals make for WFC events. Results indicated that attributions were more often made to external sources (such as the work organisation) than to internal ones (such as the individual's ability to prioritise tasks) and that the family role is less frequently seen as being responsible for conflict than the work role. Poposki suggested that the family role is perhaps protected from attributions or not seen as a cause of conflict as often as the work role. Interestingly, in Poposki's (2011) study, this difference was not captured by work or family *centrality* (which she defines as the extent to which the role is viewed as central to the person's self-image) and she speculates that perhaps some other characteristic of the work and family roles, such as *role importance*, might do so.



Poposki (2011) also found that while many researchers focus on stable antecedents for WFC such as number of hours worked, supervisor support or family size, many study participants reported less stable antecedents, such as mix-ups in scheduling, as the cause of conflict. She noted that when external attributions are made, anger and frustration were the associated emotions and that this may be a key mechanism in impacting important workplace outcomes such as poor work behaviour.

Poposki (2011) argued that assessing WFC at the event level may not be appropriate and that individuals may not perceive conflict events as separable in time. She suggests that the more typical method of measuring stable antecedents is more appropriate, for example by considering family size or number of hours worked.

## 2.9 Interpretive habits

Ergeneli et al. (2010) argue that the level of WFC that individuals experience may depend on their interpretive habits. They refer to three dimensions of interpretive habits: ‘focusing on deficiencies’, ‘necessitating’ and ‘skill recognition’.

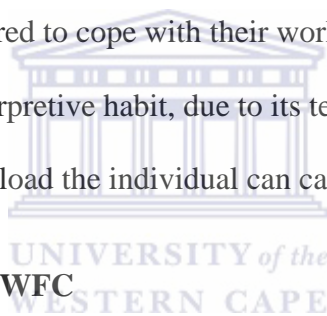
‘Focusing on deficiencies’ when evaluating one’s own performance may lead the individual to assume that being aware of the negative aspects of a situation facilitates their being ready to deal with problems, but this may in fact prevent the individual from making a realistic evaluation of the situation and may negatively impact their performance, resulting in job dissatisfaction, and hence in WFC (Ergeneli et al., 2010).

‘Necessitating’ alludes to the extent to which an individual feels that they are forced to act out of necessity. The more an individual ‘necessitates’, the more they are likely to exaggerate the cost of not performing a task. This negatively impacts self-determination and may reduce individuals’ sense of being in control over their life, thus increasing feelings of dissatisfaction and leading to greater levels of WFC (Ergeneli et al., 2010).

‘Skill recognition’, the tendency of an individual to attribute their successes to their own abilities and skills, is related to lower stress levels and higher feelings of competence. Individuals who are high in skill recognition, argue Ergeneli et al. (2010), are likely to perceive stressful situations as more controllable and to take appropriate steps to deal with role conflict.

Ergeneli et al. (2010) suggest that high levels of focusing on deficiency and necessitating and a low level of skill recognition are *stress-predisposing* interpretive habits. On the other hand, a high level of skill recognition and low levels of focusing on deficiency and necessitating could be seen as *stress-resilient* interpretive habits.

Ergeneli et al. (2010) proposed that interpretive habits moderate the effect of WFC on job satisfaction: individuals with stress-predisposing interpretive habits are likely to perceive their jobs as more unsatisfying as a result of WFC than those with stress-resilient interpretive habits. Contrary to their research hypothesis, their study in fact found that WFC has the strongest negative effect on job satisfaction for women with stress-resilient interpretive habits. Ergeneli et al. (2010) suggest that an explanation for this is that women who have high 'skill recognition' may well overestimate their ability to cope with task demands and may therefore overload themselves instead of asking for help and sharing their responsibility with others. Further, if women are less attuned to possible negative aspects of situations and do not prepare for setbacks and do not perceive the demands of role interactions as mostly inevitable, they will be less prepared to cope with their workload. So Ergeneli et al. (2010) argue that this stress-resilient interpretive habit, due to its tendency to be less prepared for setbacks and to over-estimate the load the individual can carry, may lead to WFC.



## **2.10 The role of personality in WFC**

Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) hypothesised that personality may directly relate to WFC as it influences individual's interpretation of situations. Furthermore, it may indirectly relate to WFC through its relation to stress, because personality affects people's typical coping strategies (for example, problem-orientated or emotion-orientated), which is likely to affect how people react to stressors. Stress may then increase experiences of WFC because a person's willingness or ability to meet the obligations of other roles may be reduced by a preoccupation with the source of stress or by lowered levels of physical and psychological energy.

Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) found, contrary to their expectations, that personality did not directly predict WFC, but that personality functions as an indirect predictor of WFC. They

found that dealing with multiple roles is easier for individuals who are able to remain calm under stress. The Big Five Personality Inventory, a five-factor model for studying personality traits, was used, and 'emotional stability' was the only personality trait which was found to be significant in terms of the study (Wierda-Boer et al., 2009).

This study found that among women, emotional stability was more strongly related to parenting stress than to job stress, whereas among men emotional stability was more strongly related to job stress than parenting stress. They argue that this supports the idea that personality influences affective reactions in the domain most highly valued or to which one is most strongly committed, and that this domain is likely to be the one traditionally linked with gender. They suggest that the mechanism by which this works is that individuals with low levels of emotional stability tend to experience their environment as more negative and may thus be more sensitive to incompatibilities between work and family life. Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) found that individuals with high negative affectivity reported more job stress and in turn experienced more WIF than those low in negative affectivity; in addition they experienced higher levels of family stress, which resulted in higher levels of FIW.

Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) suggest that although domain-specific antecedents are regarded in the dominant theoretical models as predictors of WFC, it is important to include more general predictors such as emotional stability as well, as this appeared to be a significant predictor of WFC, mediated via related levels of job and parenting stress.

## **2.11 Buffering factors and coping strategies**

### **2.11.1 General buffering factors and strategies**

Lapierre (2006) examines buffering factors and coping strategies: potential ways of avoiding WFC and of protecting one's well-being. He cites supervisor support, family support and problem-focused coping.

Bianchi and Milkie's (2010) overview of work and family research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century attests that there is insufficient recognition in the literature of how workers 'actively strategise to maximise work-family balance' (p. 715). One of the exceptions is the work of Becker and Moen (1999), which described strategies employed by dual-earner couples such as the scaling back of work to better accommodate family life, limiting the number of hours worked, giving precedence to one spouse's career or having periods where one spouse had a career and the other spouse had a 'job' (simply to earn income). Several participants in the study reported that they had moved from a fast-paced urban area to a more rural area so as to achieve better work-life balance.

### **2.11.2 Problem-focused, emotion-focused and avoidance-focused coping strategies**

A study by Rantanen, Mauno, Kinnunen and Rantanen (2011) sought to shed light on which kinds of coping strategies best ameliorate the negative impact of WFC on individual well-being. 'Problem-focused coping' is typically used in a situation which the individual perceives as being able to be changed, and is defined as behavioural coping, for example taking direct action or seeking help. Behaviours include defining the problem, generating alternative solutions and acting on the one which seems most appropriate. 'Emotion-focused coping' is related to emotional regulation and is defined as a cognitive process comprising stress-reducing strategies in situations in which the stressor is perceived as unchangeable.

Strategies include selective attention to specific aspects (which may or may not be related to the problem), distancing, positive comparison and the reduction of emotional distress.

Rantanen et al. (2011) posited that it is a less effective stress alleviator than problem-focused coping as it does not change the stressor, and hold that it has been found to have a negative correlation with an individual's health and well-being. They further suggest that individual coping is more complex than can be described by the simple dichotomy of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping and discuss a third coping strategy, avoidance-focused coping, in which people try to avoid stress or hope that time will bring about a solution: examples include seeking out other people as a social diversion, or displacement behaviour, like finding a distraction. Avoidance-focused coping also does not resolve the stressor, and in fact may lead to greater strain or impaired health or well-being (work engagement, job satisfaction and family satisfaction).

### **2.11.3 Emotion-focused coping, family and job satisfaction**

In a situation of high FIW, Rantanen et al. (2011) found that greater levels of emotion-focused coping resulted in lower family satisfaction. They argued that emotion-focused coping may have a deleterious effect on efforts to manage the imbalance between work and family. The findings for job satisfaction were different: in low FIW situations, a less frequent use of emotion-focused coping was associated with higher job-satisfaction levels, however in situations of high FIW, those who made a lot of use of emotion-focused coping tended to report more job satisfaction. They cite as corroboration a study by Pinquart and Silbereisen (2008), which found that distancing, a form of emotion-focused coping, buffered against FIW.



#### **2.11.4 Problem-focused coping, family satisfaction and well-being**

As regards problem-focused coping and family satisfaction, Pinguart and Silbereisen (2008) found no direct association. They hypothesised that perhaps well-being in the family domain depends more on internal family relationships and support than on individual coping strategies.

Rantanen et al. (2011) found, contrary to expectations, that problem-focused coping strategies were not beneficial in alleviating the detrimental effects of WIF or FIW on well-being. They suggest that this is because this strategy has been found not to work well in uncontrollable situations, of which WFC may be an example.

#### **2.11.5 Avoidance-focused coping and family satisfaction, job satisfaction and work engagement**

Rantanen et al. (2011) also found that avoidance coping was correlated with better family satisfaction in the short term, but not with job satisfaction or work engagement. They hypothesised that this might be because avoiding relates to less severe consequences at home than at work. They warn that avoidance has been shown to likely have detrimental consequences in the long term (Suls & Fletcher, 1985). More specifically, Rantanen et al. (2011) found that in a situation of high FIW, those who more often used avoidance coping seemed to be more family satisfied than those who less often used avoidance coping. (In a low FIW situation, avoidance coping made no difference.) They argue that in a situation of high FIW, there are usually high home demands and in such a situation, trying to be a perfect parent by performing every single duty may be a less beneficial strategy than minimising pressures at home by avoiding some tasks (or by delegating them to others). This would work better at home, where individuals may feel they have more control than at work.

In sum, Rantanen et al. (2011) suggest that a combination of different coping strategies, flexibly employed at the personal, family and organisational levels would work best to alleviate WFC. They note that the individual's capacity to interpret a challenging situation, for example to decide whether or not it is controllable, is very important, as is the ability to select and employ the most appropriate coping strategy for the specific situation. They suggest that information about coping should therefore be disseminated to employees.

## **2.12 Role construction and boundary management**

Ergeneli et al. (2010) argue that as society perceives women's family roles as more important than their work roles, working women who are performing both work and family roles simultaneously may experience guilt when they feel they are not performing their family roles adequately. They attest that gender role theory holds that women, more than men, see the family role as part of their social role identity.

Cheung (2010) discusses how women leaders are able to redefine their internal concepts of the roles of mother and worker to make them more compatible than how they might be seen by a larger society, but concedes that it was much easier for them once they were in positions of leadership and had more control over their work schedules. Juxtaposed with this, however, Schieman, Whitestone and Van Gundy (2006) argued that higher work status may bring increased levels of stress because some aspects of work which are often considered resources, such as job authority, do not always reduce WFC.

Marks and MacDermid (cited in Bulger, 2007) investigated role construction and boundary management and posited that not all individuals experience strain when juggling multiple roles. They suggest that the way individuals construct their roles together with differences in their ability and willingness to treat boundaries between family and work in a flexible manner might explain the positive and negative outcomes of attempts to balance multiple roles.

### **2.13 Cultural considerations with regard to WFC**

Research into WFC has been conducted in many different countries – Bellavia and Frone’s (2005) meta-analysis counted 37 different countries on all six inhabited continents. However, Bianchi and Milkie’s (2010) overview attests that there is little research that explicitly compares different cultures. An exception was a study by Wharton and Blair-Loy (2006) which focused on the hours worked for the same company by professionals in London, Hong Kong and the USA. This study found that workers in Hong Kong (the less individualistic culture) experienced many obligations to the extended family and greater levels of WFC. These workers more strongly articulated a need for reduced working hours than did the Western workers.

Roehling, Jarvis and Swope (2005) in a study in the USA found that among Hispanics there was a greater difference between the genders in ‘spill-over’ between the work and family domains than among blacks or whites, and attribute this to what they say is the Hispanics’ stronger traditional gender ideology, work and family roles that are less gender egalitarian, and what might be thought of as some degree of a cultural clash due to the Hispanics’ relatively recent entry into the USA’s labour market. Hispanic mothers were found to have the highest levels of WFC.

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) note the need to study the ways in which processes in the family and work domains vary across cultures.

### **2.14 WFC and a life-course perspective**

Bianchi and Milkie (2010) suggest that there are periods in life when more WFC should be expected, for example when there are young children at home and all adults are in the labour force. Where older children are concerned, the incompatibility of work schedules with school

schedules, such as holiday periods, makes arranging for care emotionally taxing and labour intensive.

There may also be cohort changes in ideals about how the work and family domains should intersect (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). For example, younger cohorts of finance executives, in a study by Blair-Loy (2001), were found to experience less WFC than older cohorts, partly because they outsourced some domestic responsibilities.

### **2.15 Criticism of the vectors within earlier models of WFC**

A study in 2011 by Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering and Semmer had findings contrary to the idea that the strongest outcomes for WIF would be in the family domain, and the strongest outcomes for FIW would be in the work domain, i.e. contrary to the cross-relationship hypothesis of researchers such as Ford, Heinen, and Langkamer (2007), and Frone (2003). Amstad et al. (2011) found that for both WIF and FIW, the strongest relationship was with domain-unspecific items, like life satisfaction, health problems, psychological strain, somatic/physical complaints, depression and substance use. Secondary to that were consequences related to the antecedent domain, for example work-related consequences (e.g. work related strain and absenteeism) for WIF and family-related consequences (e.g. family related strain and marital dissatisfaction) for FIW, and then consequences related to the other domain.

Echoing these findings to some degree, Rantanen et al. (2011) found that an individual's attribution process relates the conflict with the affective outcomes in the domain in which the conflict originates. WIF was more predictive of job dissatisfaction (an affective response) than FIW, and FIW was more predictive of family dissatisfaction than WFC. However, the construct of work engagement operated differently: FIW was more able to predict lower work engagement than WIF.

## **2.16 ‘Linked lives’ and WFC**

Some research has investigated the influence of a partner’s WFC on an individual’s personal sense of well-being and work-life balance. Work-related stressors of the father negatively influenced the mother’s subjective experience of balancing work and family (Fagan & Press, 2008).

On the positive side, some partners were able to provide supports which ameliorated WFC. Practical supports included child-care, housework and emotional nourishment such as showing interest in the partner’s occupation and supporting their career moves (Thorstad, Anderson, Hall, Willingham & Carruthers, 2006).

## **2.17 The depletion perspective, the facilitative perspective and an attempt to ‘rethink work family conflict’**

Bagger, Li and Gutek (2008) call attention to the ‘facilitative perspective’ on managing both work and family responsibilities. This is in contrast to the ‘depletion perspective’, which holds that engagement in one domain may reduce resources available for other domains as an individual has a fixed pool of resources like energy and time. The facilitative perspective suggests that participation in the work and family domains may have positive consequences in both domains in that skills and resources generated in one domain may enrich experience in the other.

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) suggest that engagement in one domain may facilitate performance in another domain, and argue that this can occur through the affective pathway, in other words, that the positive affect experienced in one domain may well improve the individual’s functioning in another domain.

A study by Gronlund and Oun (2010) on ‘rethinking work-family conflict’ theorised, *inter alia*, about the concept of role expansion – the hypothesis that the combination of dual roles in work and family is a source of well-being rather than stress – and that a high level of WFC is counterbalanced by high levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Gronlund and Oun (2010) attest that their research participants with high levels of demand from both work and home tend to experience both role conflict and role expansion, the latter being measured by indicators of life satisfaction and well-being. The role expansion hypothesis suggests that a role also brings privileges that are not accompanied by requests for performance and that feeling needed and appreciated in more than one context can raise self-esteem and make the individual feel more secure because successes and satisfaction in one role can counterbalance failures and problems in the other.

Gronlund and Oun (2010) concede, however, that the constructs, such as enrichment, produced by role expansion theory to describe positive work-family interactions among people with dual roles in work and family, have not in fact been related to the established concept of WFC and that measures of WFC are generally not included in these studies. Further, regarding antecedents, these studies typically focus on ‘resources’, e.g. workplace support and personality factors, while ignoring the ‘role demands’ focused on in research on WFC.

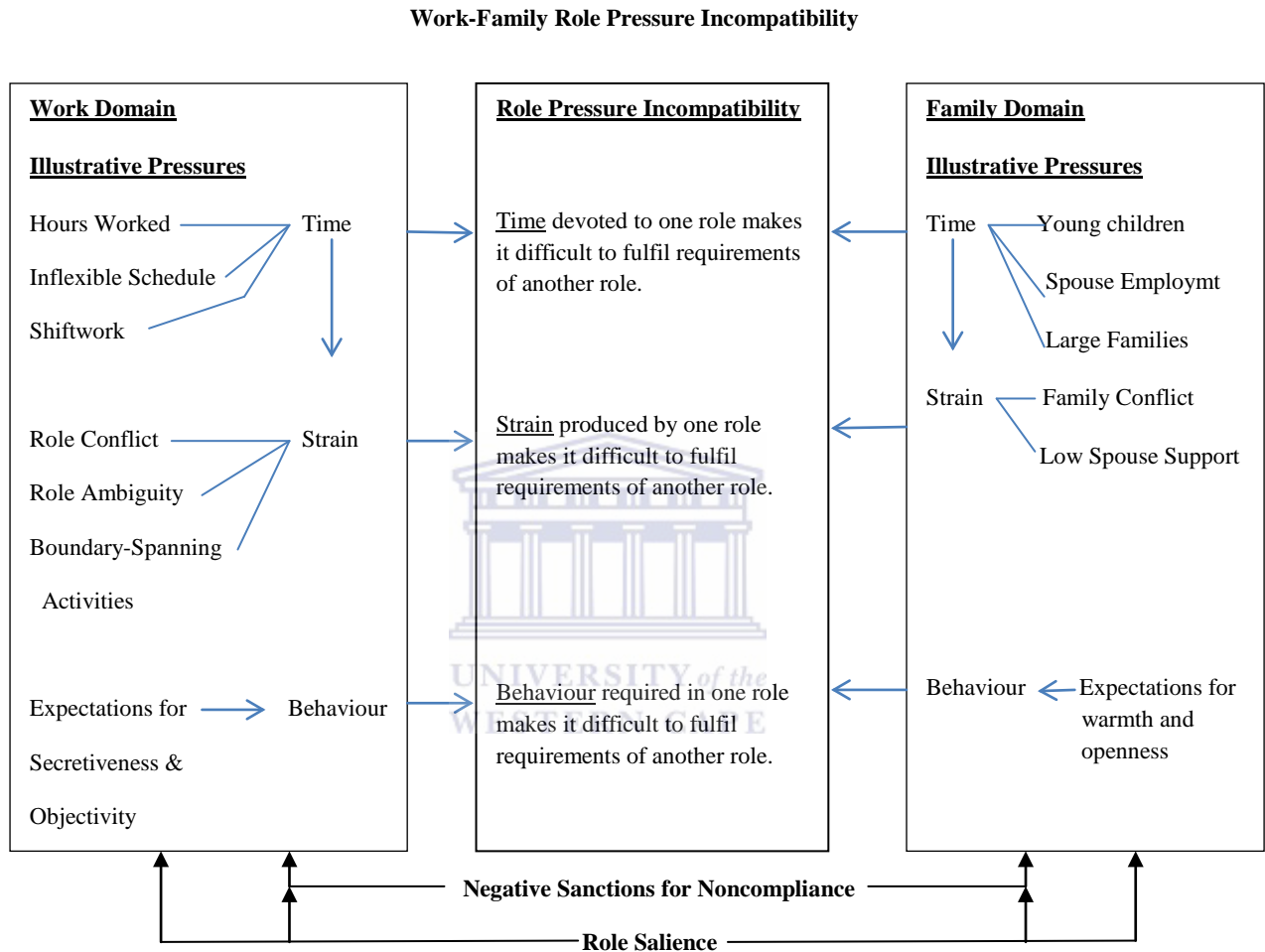
## **2.18 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is provided by the model of WFC proposed by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) in their seminal article on WFC, *Sources of Conflict Between Work and Family Roles*, together with an extension from the work of Amstad et al. (2011).

### 2.18.1 Model

Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) model of the sources of WFC is shown below.

**Figure 2.1 Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) model of the sources of WFC**



It suggests that any factor within either the work role or the family role that impacts on a person's time-involvement, strain or behaviour as s/he functions within that role, can produce conflict between roles. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) suggest three principle groups of WFC:

- (1) time-based (2) strain-based and (3) behaviour-based, each operating from the work-domain to the family-domain or vice-versa.

### **2.18.1.1 Time-based conflict**

#### **2.18.1.1.1 Work-related sources of time-based conflict**

Examples of work-related sources of conflict include excessive work time and schedule conflict (Pleck, 1977), role overload (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek & Rosenthal, 1964) and the number of hours worked or commuted in a week (Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981). Moreover, pressures from one role may make the individual preoccupied as they attempt to meet expectations from their other role (Bartolome & Evans, 1980). The flexibility or otherwise of working hours has also been a focus of research, with less control over one's work schedule producing greater work-family tension (Herman & Gyllstrom, 1977). Bohem and Viveros-Long (1981) suggested that limited schedule flexibility might not be enough to ameliorate the inter-role conflict of those employees who are mothers.

#### **2.18.1.1.2 Family-related sources of time-based conflict**

Bohem and Viveros-Long (1981) suggested that having the main responsibility for child-rearing contributes significantly to WFC. Further, Beutell and Greenhaus (1983) have found that parents of younger children experience more WFC and Keith and Schafer (1980) found that larger families are more prone to WFC.

### **2.18.1.2 Strain-based Conflict**

Strain, evidenced by symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, depression and anxiety make it difficult to comply with the demands of another role.

#### **2.18.1.2.1 Work-related sources of strain-based conflict**

Stressors contributing to WFC include: the rate of work-environment changes, having to participate in activities across boundaries, communication difficulties and appropriate mental



concentration (Burke, Weir & Duwors, 1980) and a low level of support from leaders (Jones & Butler, 1980). Bartolome and Evans's (1980) 'negative emotional spill-over' (factors such as a poor job-to-person fit), job burnout as noted by Jackson and Maslach (1982), as well as 'interaction fatigue' (the withdrawal of individuals in high-interaction occupations from contact at home in response to strain) noted by Kanter (1977), can all lead to WFC.

#### **2.18.1.2.2 Family-related sources of strain-based conflict**

Kopelman, Greenhaus and Connelly (1983) note that high levels of conflict within the family are associated with high levels of WFC. On the other hand, a buffering effect for WFC is given by spousal support (Holahan & Gilbert, 1979). Further, a high level of time commitment to the family, such as young children require, may also produce strain (Gove & Geerken, 1977).

#### **2.18.1.3 Behaviour-based conflict**

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) posit that inter-role conflict may be caused if an individual is not able to adequately adjust their behavioural style to fit the expectations of a particular role – as when work-related behaviours are brought into the more nurturing home environment.

#### **2.18.1.4 The model's suggestions for further research**

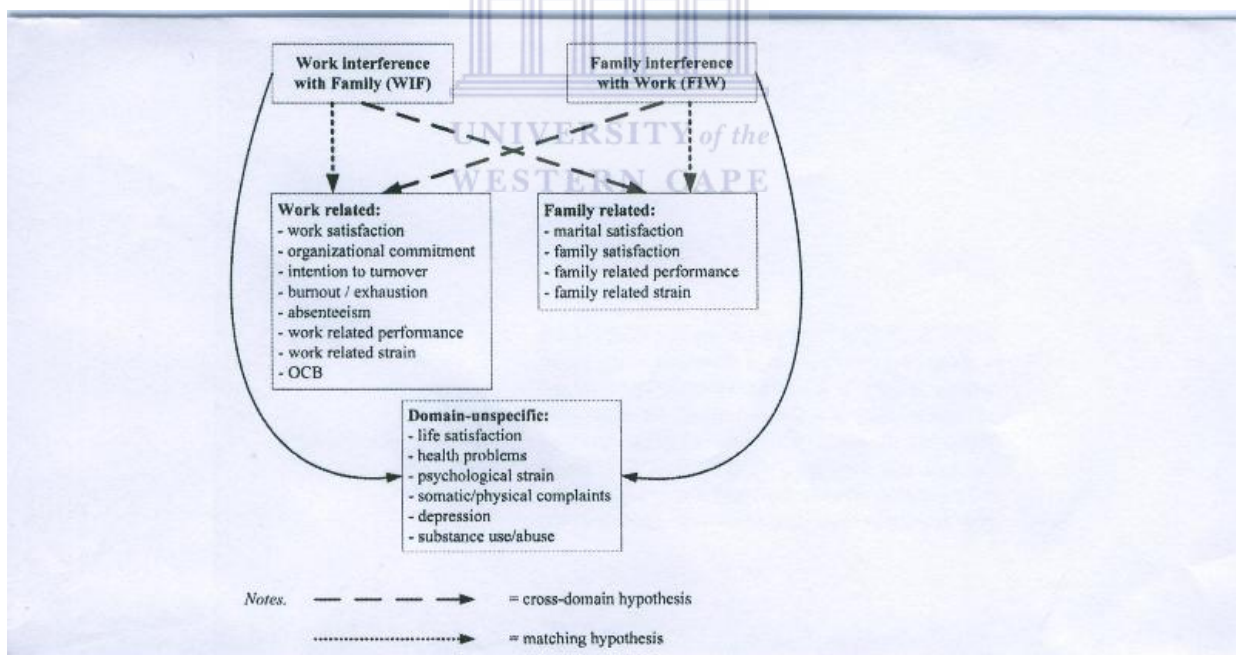
Greenhaus and Beutell's model (1985) makes suggestions for future research. These directions will be borne in mind during this study. They suggest that an individual's own construction of a particular role's requirements, which links to that individual's beliefs and values, can produce strain that leads to WFC, particularly if this construction differs from the expectations of important others. They also suggest that role salience can affect ego-involvement in the role which can affect behaviours within the role and therefore the pressures and conflict arising from the role. WFC is also likely to arise if the individual feels

likely to experience negative sanctions for non-compliance with role demands. Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) posited that marital well-being is enhanced when the husband facilitates and enables his wife's career involvement. Beutell and Greenhaus (1983) suggest that pro-feminist sex-role attitudes likely contribute to the support a husband is able to give his wife.

### 2.18.1.5 Extension of the model

Amstad et al. (2011) do not code WFC according to Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) model of time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict – a focus on the antecedents of WFC - but look rather at potential consequences of WFC, dividing them into three distinct categories: work-related, family-related, and domain-unspecific outcomes.

**Figure 2.2 Framework from the WFC study by Amstad, Meier, Fasel, Elfering & Semmer (2011).**



What is of particular interest is the greater elaboration of the outcomes or consequences of WIF and FIW. It could be contended that Greenhaus and Beutell's model has a rich and therefore very useful description of the antecedents of WFC, and that the two models taken in conjunction form a more complete picture of WFC, particularly for a qualitative study.

## **2.19 The implications of WFC for policy**

Gronlund and Oun (2010) look at three aspects of policy: *autonomy* (the idea that women's self-determination requires economic independence and affects their life choices by increasing their power within the family), *services* (such as public day care) and *normative messages* (the way people think about gender roles and gender equality that influence people's cognitions, behaviour and emotions with regard to combining work and family). These three aspects of policy may contribute to experiences of WFC by their impact on the degree to which individuals strive to combine dual roles as well as on their ideals and expectations.

Gronlund and Oun (2010) also note that policies expressing a dual-earner/dual-carer ideal may raise expectations that career and family could and should be successfully combined, and suggest that this gender-neutral ideal may not match a reality where gender and family still matter. In countries where policy does not fully support a dual-earner/dual carer model or where it is based on a traditional family model, dual roles are likely to be problematic because social rights, services and norms conveyed in policies are not as supportive of individual autonomy. Gronlund and Oun (2010) further argue that women still have the main responsibility for children and household and therefore, when women commit to work as strongly as men, they will be more exposed to WFC. They also attest that people with high ideals as regards gender equality experience more WFC than others.

## **2.20 Conclusion**

The importance of the dynamics and implications of work-family conflict being thoroughly understood is clear and researchers continue to attempt to refine the concepts and explore both the antecedents and the consequences.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of full-time working mothers as regards work-family conflict. This chapter serves to explicate the phenomenological research paradigm employed, the procedure for the collection of information, the criteria for the selection of participants, the interview procedure and the qualitative analytical techniques employed. Consideration is also given to ethical considerations and to matters of reflexivity.

#### 3.2 The phenomenological paradigm

The study used a methodology informed by a phenomenological paradigm. Phenomenology is a philosophical method of enquiry whose most important proponent was the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). The root of the word 'phenomenology' is the Greek '*phainomenon*', meaning 'a thing shown'. Phenomenology focuses on the detailed description of conscious experience and requires the suspension of all preconceptions.

Moutakas (1994) explains how phenomenology uses only the data available to consciousness – only the things directly sensed or perceived. Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology emphasises subjectivity and the discovery of the essences of experience. It is transcendental because it looks to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective information.

Phenomenological philosophical enquiry has engendered a qualitative research method in psychology which focuses on the analysis or explication of mental experience through a praxis which focuses on understanding psychological and social phenomena "from the perspectives of the people involved" (Groenewald, 2004).

### **3.3 Collection of Information**

The study used a snowball sampling procedure. Mothers known to the researcher and to acquaintances of the researcher were approached to participate and they then recommended other mothers who could also be approached. A semi-structured interview schedule constructed by the researcher was used in individual interviews.

### **3.4 Criteria used in the selection of participants**

Eight research participants were selected from middle-class, full-time working mothers from the Southern Suburbs and City Bowl of Cape Town. Boyd (2001) regards two to ten participants as sufficient to reach saturation and so a quorum of eight was considered to be adequate.

The experiences of mothers are likely to differ depending on whether they are in part-time or full-time employment and on whether this employment is professional or casual. Further, as Amstad et al. (2011) note, better economic resources would likely ward off some of the consequences of WFC. Also, the experiences of mothers of younger children would likely differ from those of older children due to differential time demands. Therefore in order to make the development of themes more meaningful, all mothers had in common that they work full-time in professional careers, are middle-class and have young children.

#### **3.4.1 Demographic details of the research participants**

Participant A is in her early 40s, has two children at primary school and works as a senior accountant. Participant C is in her early 40s, has 3 children, one of whom is at primary school, and teaches at a girls' senior school. Participant D is in her early 40s, has two children at primary school and is a senior managing partner at a firm of attorneys. Participant J is in her late 30s, has a son at primary school and a daughter at crèche, and works as an asset fund

manager. Participant K is in her late 30s, has three children at primary school and works at a girls' senior school where she not only teaches but also has a senior management position. Participant L is in her late 30s, has two children at primary school and works at a girls' senior school where she teaches and manages an academic department. Participant S is in her middle 30s, has two children at primary school and works as a medical receptionist. Participant T is in her late 30s, has a son at primary school, and runs her own business designing and manufacturing clothing.

### **3.5 Interview procedure**

Individual interviews were held in an environment comfortable to each participant, and as free as possible of background noise. Each interview took approximately 1 ¼ hours. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

### **3.6 Analysis**

The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis according to a phenomenological methodology. This was achieved via a coding of the raw information for patterns and motifs, attempting to identify the most salient themes. Each cluster of themes was explored in detail and critically analysed and then relationships between the themes and clusters were explored. The following steps or processes recommended in the phenomenological methodology by Moustakas (1994) were used.

The first phase of the phenomenological methodology is that of 'Epoche' (Vale, 1998), from the Greek word meaning *to abstain* (Moustakas, 1994), and this involves the suspension of the researcher's preconceptions. This first phase is followed by 'Phenomenological Reduction' in order to obtain textural descriptions of the mothers' experience: the 'full quality' of what they are going through. Giving every statement equal value, invariant

qualities of the experience are sought and these are clustered into themes for each participant. An individual textural description is produced for each participant by integrating their themes. The individual textural descriptions of all participants are then integrated into a universal textural description. The third phase is that of 'Imaginative Variation' in which the phenomena are considered from different perspectives. The possible structural qualities that evoke the textural qualities are freely considered. Examples are time, space, relationships, and structures of cause or intent. These structural qualities are clustered into themes. For each participant, an individual structural description is produced by integrating the themes. A group structural description of the experience is created by integrating all the individual structural descriptions. The fourth phase is that of the 'Synthesis of Meanings and Essences', which involves the integration of the group textural and structural descriptions of phenomena into the essence of the experiences of the participants.

### **3.7 Reflexivity**

Holliday (2002) suggests that the qualitative researcher should come to terms with the fact that s/he is unavoidably a part of the research setting, should not pretend to escape subjectivity, and should, wherever possible, account for it. The researcher has herself, for a number of years, been a full-time working mother, and reflected upon her own agendas and biases in advance in order to more effectively bracket them before beginning the study. The study made her more aware of the high levels of strain that other full-time working mothers experience. There was a need to bracket her affective reactions of solidarity with these women in order to be sure to deliver a study which was a valid reporting of the participants' experiences and not simply a work filtered through and unconsciously attempting to confirm the researcher's own experiences.

The researcher is also aware that the research participants of this study are, like her, urban, and well-educated. There was a need to bear in mind that that women with different socio-demographic characteristics may have somewhat different motifs in their stories than those which came to light in this study.

The researcher also reflects on the fact that this study was conducted in a developing country, while much of the literature sourced in order to make a context for the study is from more developed, western nations. The researcher has attempted to be very alive to possible disjunctions between academic arguments and research findings sourced from abroad and findings arrived at from the stories of local women.

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

The research process and motivation for the study were explained to all participants. Participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw at any time. The procedures used to ensure confidentiality was explained: the participants were assured that the interview would be destroyed at the end of the study and that anonymity would be maintained by the use of codes instead of participants' names. The participants were informed that counselling would be made available after participation, should it be needed. Informed consent was obtained, which included permission to audio-record and transcribe the interviews.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The focus of this study was the lived experiences of a group of eight middle-class, professional full-time working mothers from the City Bowl and Southern Suburbs of Cape Town as regards work-family conflict. When analysing the interviews, some strong themes emerged, such as the perceived lack of sustainability of the participants' situations. Some gaps in the reporting also became clear, such as the health outcomes of work-family conflict,



pointing to possibilities for future research. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four, and the key findings are highlighted and drawn together in Chapter Five. My interpretation of the findings was informed by a body of literature on family, gender and occupational issues, *inter alia*.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to order the information derived from the interviews in terms of the various themes which emerged, so as to give texture and substance to the participants' lived experiences of work-family conflict. It seeks to explore these themes in some detail, grouping and highlighting the more convergent ones and also allowing to emerge, themes which were divergent, or experiences which, though raised by only a few participants, provided perspectives which were interesting and important in terms of the discourse of working motherhood as a whole.

The limited space constrained me to constrict my findings, but it is nonetheless hoped that I have allowed some valuable motifs to come to light. The main themes which emerged were: roles (with sub-themes including the role of mother, the role of worker, role salience, gender role ideology and socialisation messages about role constructs), work-family conflict (with sub-themes including emotional experiences linked to WFC, consequences of WFC, cognitive experiences of WFC and a description of how juggling both roles works only some of the time), overload and unsustainability, linked lives (with sub-themes of husbands and children), the workplace (with sub-themes of workplace parameters, supervisor behaviours and the backlash against a family-supportive work culture), coping strategies (with sub-themes including recuperation time, delegating, having a routine, making lists, planning and time management, living close to work and schools and mixing emotion-focused and avoidance-focused coping strategies), practical support from the extended family and implications for policy.

## 4.2 ROLES

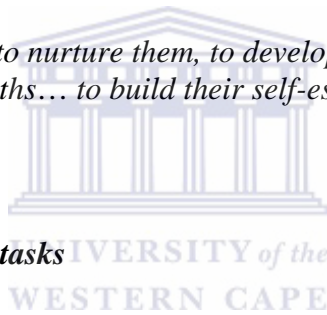
### 4.2.1 The role of mother

#### 4.2.1.1 *Nurturer, educator, role model and guide*

Participants are of the opinion that the mother's role is to provide nurturance, love and support. She should facilitate her children's education, the building of their self-esteem and the drawing out of their strengths. She should be a source of discipline, and a role-model of good citizenship.

*Loving them and educating them and being there for them ... It's all about love, giving them self-esteem and giving them a good way to grow up ... you need to be that disciplinarian when it's important. [J]*

*My role as a mother would be ... to nurture them, to develop them to good citizens, good people, and to ... find their strengths... to build their self-esteem and all of that. [L]*



#### 4.2.1.2 *The sharing of parental tasks*

The question arose of whether parenting tasks which have traditionally been considered part of the mother's ambit could or should be shared. It might be argued that these tasks need to be divided between spouses due to mothers taking on additional responsibilities, such as income generation, which have traditionally been considered part of the father's ambit.

In counterpoint to this idea, 'maternal gatekeeping' could be conceived of as a mother's attempting to keep traditional mothering tasks almost exclusively within her own portfolio. When mothers are juggling a full-time work role as well, apparent maternal gate-keeping seemed to be motivated by concern about the husband's effective completion of parental tasks. There were divergent perceptions and experiences among the participants as regarded task sharing.

#### **4.2.1.2.1 'He's probably more of a natural mother than I am!'**

Several mothers felt their husband's parental role to be just as, or even more important than their own and effectively rejected any notion or approximation of maternal gatekeeping.

These were, however, women whose husbands participated meaningfully in parenting tasks and these women were very comfortable with their husband's competence at parenting.

Participant J is, moreover, quite clear-sighted about the innate capabilities of spouses, arguing that they are in fact 'more than capable'.

*He's more of a mother than I am, because he is very nurturing and very loving to the kids ... I'm not a feminist by any means, but I have always believed that the roles should be shared. There's no reason why one person should be more of a parent than the other person. It should be a shared role. [A]*

*I think of the mother/father as one role ... I don't see me in that role alone ... He's probably more of a natural mother than I am ... I do think women are their own worst enemies when it comes to that. Obviously men are more than capable; we just don't let them be capable. When you complain about your husband I go, 'Well then make them do it! Bye, I'm walking out the house now – the children are yours, I'm gone. Sink or swim, you deal with it'. We are too soft on them, I think ... We marry them because they were intelligent, they could do these things. Why when it comes to children can't they do anything? Of course they can ... the fact that I gave birth to the children doesn't mean I am better at changing nappies than he is! [J]*

#### **4.2.1.2.2 Husbands who are perceived as less capable than wives**

In contrast, participant L experiences her husband, a professional, as likely simply unable to fulfil household tasks such as cooking and shopping. This leaves her with a heavier burden, even though he does take on some other responsibilities in part compensation. Rapoport et al. (1971) identified the 'facilitating husband' as very important for marital well-being and it could be argued that participant L might experience lower levels of WFC were her husband able to take on a more equal family role.

*I think he hasn't caught up ... and maybe he can't, cause he can't cook, he's not a great shopper, and those are crucial things – cooking for your family, shopping ... but having said that, I find that ... he will, certainly when it comes to exam time, sort of take the kids for the*

*whole weekend so that I can work ... He takes care of the admin of the house ... I still don't think that it's equal – it's certainly not equal. [L]*

#### **4.2.1.3 Is 'maternal gatekeeping' due to concern about dereliction of duty by the father?**

In keeping traditional 'maternal tasks' primarily within their own preserve, some participants seemed to be motivated by concerns about the effective completion of these tasks by their spouses, rather than by traditional role concepts. Participant D, frequently worrying that her (supportive) husband might not actually have fetched her children on time, might be perceived as indulging in 'maternal gatekeeping', but her cognitions seem to fall on the same continuum as participant T's concerns, which are quite clearly that parenting tasks will not be appropriately completed by the spouse, leading mothers to try 'to do the male's job as well'.

*No matter how supportive your husband is, you'll always feel 110% responsible for your children ... Even if he's got them, I'm still thinking, 'It's 12h00, have they been fetched?' [D]*

*[Mothers] are responsible to make sure it happens. Whether it's asking men to do it or doing it ourselves – if we don't plan it and put it down on pen and paper, 'This is the schedule' and this is what needs to be done – it won't get done ... There's so much that children need from the male, but then we try ... to do the male's job as well because ... the father isn't giving everything ... I definitely don't do it because I think I can do it better ... but I do think we do automatically jump in because ... [my husband] will sit back and then I'm just doing the role ... He's that type of guy. He will take the easy way out. [T]*

#### **4.2.2 The role of worker**

##### **4.2.2.1 Mothers work to provide financially for their families**

Participants most commonly interpreted the role of 'worker' as being the role of 'financial provider'. They typically see their roles as workers as making an essential contribution to the financial support of their families. Although participant L, for example, has existential reasons for working such as contributing to South African society by educating girls for empowerment reasons, her most pressing reason for working is to generate income for her family.

*Being a worker is basically just being a provider ... Making sure my kids can get things that we never had and to have a better future ... Financially – we can't do it on one salary. [S]*

*As a working mother, the main aim is to get bread and butter for the family. That alone drives my life as a working mother – to get money for food, for the mortgage, for petrol. [C]*

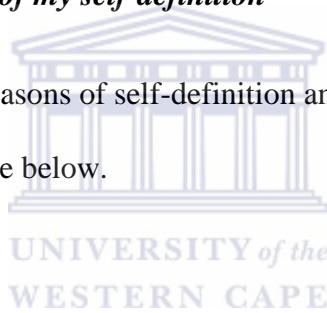
*I have to work to get by every month. [J]*

*L and I often talk about the fact that we don't really have a choice to work. It's not an option for us – it's a necessity. [K]*

*My role of worker is to teach children and to ... contribute to South African society by educating children, especially girls ... for empowerment purposes and to make them critical thinkers ... [However] I think my role as worker has sort of changed since I've had children ... I see it more as a job now ... it's become a way of making money so that I can support my family as well. [L]*

#### **4.2.2.2 'The worker role is part of my self-definition'**

Most participants also work for reasons of self-definition and this will be discussed more fully in the section on role salience below.



#### **4.2.3 Role salience**

Working with Bagger et al.'s (2008) definition of family identity salience as being the degree to which the family role is used for self-definition, role salience could be seen as the centrality of a particular role to a person's self-definition. Some participants experienced both the roles of mother and worker as being highly salient, while for other participants, one role was quite clearly more salient than the other. Some participants had even experienced a shift in role salience over time.

##### **4.2.3.1 When the roles of mother and worker are both essential to self-definition**

For several participants, both roles are experienced to be vital constituents of their self-concept. Participant K comments that her 'sense of herself' and her self-respect would be missing were she not working: she would feel that she was not fulfilling her potential and she

could 'not imagine doing one [role] without the other'. Participant D also experiences her role as a worker to be an essential part of her identity and she 'can't really imagine not being an attorney'. Both roles are, however, very important to her and the worker role does not supercede her role as a mother. Participant S found that her role as a worker brought her mental stimulation and financial independence, helped her to retain a sense of being her 'own person', and created a balance against which she could enjoy spending time, albeit limited, with her children. Both roles are therefore highly salient to her.

*Both [roles] are critical. I couldn't imagine doing one without the other ... A couple of years ago I wasn't working ... and I loved it but there was the realisation that 'if that was it, always', then ... a sense of myself would be, my self-respect, I think, would be missing ... I would have ... had a sense ... that I wasn't actually fulfilling my potential ... that's about maintaining my own self I suppose ... And I [also] assumed I would have children ... I think it's part of my self-concept ... [K]*

*I think each role is very important ... I think [work] becomes part of your identity – you can't really imagine not being an attorney ... I've watched with friends of mine that have stopped working, how they didn't realise how much of it was linked to their ego. And when they stopped working they suddenly weren't that person any more ... I've come to realise that if I gave up work I would have a big part of my identity taken away ... [D]*

*[Working] gives me the balance of enjoying my time with my kids (even though it's limited) but also ... having some mental stimulation ... When I wasn't working ... you actually lose yourself because you don't have your own finances, you have to rely on your husband if you want anything ... you want to be financially independent. And also it makes you a bit who you are (sic) – you are a mother, but you're also your own person ... And being a stay-at-home mom ... you forget who you are ... [S]*

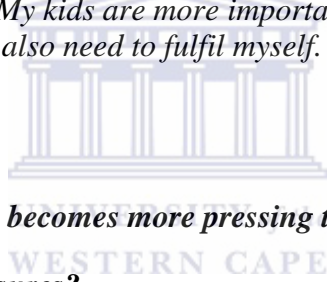
#### **4.2.3.2 When motherhood becomes more salient than the worker role**

Some of the working mothers to whom motherhood had not initially been a highly salient role found motherhood becoming increasingly important to them. These women, although still very committed workers, now experience their roles as mothers as more important to their self-definition than their roles as workers. Participant L, for example, found that having children caused a shift in role salience, and the worker role, although still important for her self-fulfilment, was no longer seen as essential to her self-concept.

*I never sort of thought of myself as, 'One day I'll get married and be a mother'. I thought, 'One day I'll get married and work and make my own money'. So working came first ... I kinda thought [motherhood] was a necessary evil as in ... you have to have children because everyone else is having children. Having said that, it's the best thing that's ever happened to me ... I need to work for me, but I love being a mom... It's by far the best thing you can ever do with your life ... If someone had to say to me I couldn't be a mother anymore ... that would destroy my life. If I lost my job I'd be fine ... But if I had to choose between the two, I'd be a mom first ... [J]*

*I first saw myself as a career person before I saw myself as a mother ... I never thought of myself as married and having kids – that was very far removed from me ... Then for me kids suddenly became a very important thing ... I love both roles and I can't imagine my life without either of them ... I love working, I love the stimulation it gives me, I love the satisfaction it gives me. And my family is the most important thing to me in the world ... more important than my job ... But I also know that if I didn't have my job I wouldn't be the mother that I am - I would be frustrated and I would get irritated and I wouldn't have an outlet for my own stuff ... It's important to give me that balance, so that I can come home and enjoy my kids, enjoy my family ... [A]*

*I think that my needs to use my career as a way of expressing who I am ... that's changed ... Since I've had children that has changed and I don't need my career to prove to me that I am a success or anything like that ... My kids are more important, my family is more important than that ... Having said that ... I also need to fulfil myself. It's not that I don't want to work ... I like working ... [L]*



#### **4.2.3.3 When the role of worker becomes more pressing than that of mother: role salience or life pressures?**

There were various reasons for some participants finding the role of worker coming to the forefront more than the role of mother.

##### **4.2.3.3.1 When the worker role is simply more important for self-actualisation**

Participant T was the only participant who identified with the role of worker more than with the role of mother. Although she feels guilty about it, she comments that she does not 'have that same type of passion' for the mother role as she does for her work role.

*It's just that inner desire to work ... It's that inner need to ... an accomplishment thing. It's who I am, it's what I am. It's, it makes me who I am, really. If I need to be at work, I need to make a plan with [my son]. It's never kind of '[My son] needs me much more than work needs me'. I do feel guilty about that ... I love ... sorting out my patterns or checking out how wide my fabrics are ... but to get into the nitty gritty of the kids ... I don't have that same type of passion. [T]*



#### 4.2.3.3.2 *When the exigencies of life make the work role more pressing*

For participant C, the exigencies of financial pressures and fears of job loss had brought the role of worker to the forefront. She seems however to *identify* more with the mother role, which, would in fact make the mother role more salient to her. She describes with some sadness how her initial primary ideals in life of being a mother and making a family have necessarily been displaced due to financial exigencies by a pressing need to perform well in her job so that she can retain it and generate income. So although the mother role is perhaps more salient to her true self-definition, the worker role is more pressing and she dedicates more of her resources to it, at the expense of her performance in the mother role.

Bagger et al. (2008) proposed that individuals high in family identity salience might feel a threat to their self-concept if they perceive themselves not to be performing well in the family role. It seems that participant C is indeed experiencing this kind of threat to her self-concept for she describes how cultural expectations from her Shona community to provide also for extended family members put her under such enormous financial pressure that out of necessity the worker role comes to the forefront and consumes most of her personal resources. This is at the expense of her needs for self-actualisation through academic study.

*It seems it's work first then motherhood second. My role as a mother comes in second. I don't know how that happened ... Before you get married you have these ideals of what you want in your life – mainly as a mother to make your family. But down the line, the pressures of life, the demands of trying to provide for your family seem to take over slowly and you just lose ... these ideals – you lose them along the way somewhere ... I have to make sure I'm up to scratch or else I'm out [of my job] ... If I'm out then the family will suffer. [C]*

*I've been feeling that I've kind of let myself down – by not taking advantage of the opportunities that I've found here. But the pressures of family, extended family have been such that I was just concentrating on just providing, providing for other people. And I was neglecting that part of my life where I really need to keep on studying ... [C]*

#### **4.2.4 Gender role ideology**

It is informative to look at some of the factors that may have shaped conceptions and constructions of the roles of mother and worker in the participants' contexts. The traditional gender role ideology casts the wife as assuming responsibility for the running of the family and domestic arrangements in general and casts the husband in the role of breadwinner (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1994) with the idea that he is largely free of other responsibilities.

##### ***4.2.4.1 The experience of gender inequity in parental roles***

Participant K felt that the societal conceptualisation of appropriate gender differences in parental roles led to working mothers being burdened with more work than fathers.

Participant J experienced some vexation with societal messages about gender roles, which she felt to be weighted in men's favour, and she joked about the privilege of having a wife who would have made sure the children were clean and everything done.

*Men have children, women have children – why must men have any ... why is there a special dealing for women? Because I think that ... nobody should actually work as hard as a lot of us work ... [K]*

*Very cynically, I do think a man who has a woman looking after him is a very lucky man ... If you come home and a woman's there and everything is done, the shopping list done and the children clean ... The perfect old 'Stepford Wife', it would be fantastic. Wouldn't you love to have a wife? Because when you're both sharing it, there isn't that person who is doing everything for you. [J]*

##### ***4.2.4.2 Changing norms in parental gender role ideology***

Participant D felt that societal parent gender role ideology was changing to some degree and that both genders were more overtly keen to play active parenting roles, with working mothers becoming more easily able to give expression to this than working fathers. As Cheung (2010) suggests, it may however be easier for someone like participant D to control

her own schedule as she has a position of considerable authority as a managing partner in a firm of attorneys. Participant D also seems to experience the cohort changes in ideals noted by Bianchi and Milkie (2010) about how the work and family domains should intersect. She finds that as the men she works with have become more involved with their families it has become easier for all employees in her workplace to merge work and family roles.

Participant J experiences her manager, a New Zealander, as being more realistic and gender-fair as regards family-supportive supervisor behaviours than would a South African manager.

*At work, I'd say [that] as the guys have become involved with their families it's become much easier. When I first started working here, I'd feel guilty ... I was the first woman partner to have a child, and ... to begin with you think, 'Ooh, what will the guys think if I go off and whatever?' And then you start seeing the guys around you, especially my age, I'm 42, starting to say, 'Actually, we're going off to watch our son play rugby' or, 'So and so is singing in the choir and I'm going off to watch her,' and you realise that actually, they're itching to do just as you are ... [D]*

*The guy I work with - he's a New Zealander – and you couldn't get a better boss ... 'Cause in New Zealand men and women are completely equal ... he never says a word if I've got to leave now, gotta pick up the kids. He never ever says to me, 'Oh no, you're not! What's going on?' ... He's 41, 42. Look, I would struggle with a South African boss. Because I don't think they get it in quite the same way. And he often leaves to go and pick up his kids and no one says a word. [J]*

#### **4.2.5 Socialisation messages about role constructs**

Not only gender role ideology, but also various other socialisation messages, may have helped to shape the ways in which the participants view mother and worker roles.

Furthermore, several of the participants had ideas about socialisation messages that they would like to pass on to their children, and to their daughters in particular.

#### **4.2.5.1 Socialisation messages received**

In exploring what has shaped the beliefs of the participants about the roles of parent and worker, some emphasis was encountered on what the participants had observed of their own parents' experiences.

##### **4.2.5.1.1 Financial considerations and career ambitions are important**

Determination not to be placed in an invidious financial position or to have her own career ambitions stifled were significant consequences of participant K's observations of her mother's life experiences. Participant J, also having grown up in constrained financial circumstances and in a broken home, experienced very direct socialisation messages that her role as a worker was to make money.

*I think ... my socialisation plays into that a lot ... I grew up with a mother – my father wouldn't let her work ... my mum was a bright woman who ... was deeply resentful of that and deeply resentful of my father. He then managed to kind of lose his job and lost a big family home and still he wouldn't let my mother work and so there was this dual combination of there always being financial problems and always the sense of frustration, resentment my mother had ... of not having been allowed to work and make a difference. That played hugely into my and my sisters' upbringing ... That's why I won't have a joint bank account and ... you know I am absolutely clear about financial autonomy. Because actually, if ever I needed to leave, I would want to be able to support my children, be independent, be able to look after them, so in terms of work – work has very much been a functional necessity ... [K]*

*My parents never had a bean to rub together. I was absolutely convinced that was never going to happen to me. I had, 'Go and make money!' ... It was never ever going to be a hippie degree for me. ... I kind of think of degrees like that as something I might do in my 60s, out of amusement ... A luxury ... A BA is 'bugger-all' in my head – it was the way I was brought up ... You had a commerce degree or an engineering or law degree, or became a doctor ... [J]*

##### **4.2.5.1.2 Cultural role models**

In a divergent theme, participant C, who is of the Shona culture, experienced a great deal of pressure to conform to cultural role models. In her culture, the expectations are that a woman should be a 'wife and mother first', and that this role should be far more salient than that of a

worker. However, participant C experiences the irony of also being expected to provide for extended family members from the proceeds of this ‘unimportant’ worker role.

*His [role] was to wake up, go to work and come back and sit and relax, and if he is hungry, eat ... And then in my culture you have to run the bath for him and then say ‘Daddy, come and bath’. Yes, you spread the bed: he is king of his house ... I mean it is hammered into you. And you see it with your own mother – the way she treats your dad ... In the end you don’t quite see anything amiss with your mom doing everything for your dad ... Things have changed, but ... at the back of our minds people will be watching you to see how far you go incorporating the western way of doing things: you do it in such a way that you don’t let the western way overlap too much – you still give the husband his position as the head of the house ...*

*Wife first ... you choose to be a worker, fine, but remember, be a successful wife and a daughter-in-law before you ... talk to us about you being a worker ... The issue is you’ve been married, lobola [the bride-price] was paid – for what? For you to have one kid? No way! Give us grandchildren, look after our son, look after us! ... Only when they want something [do] they see the benefits of you working. [C]*

#### **4.2.5.1.3 The importance of children and family**

For participant K, happy childhood experiences with her extended family were also very important: she wanted to recreate these happy times to ‘set to rights’, in some measure, her own childhood experiences of a broken nuclear family.

*Kids and family were important ... it was a good thing, it was a positive thing to be part of. And ... also having come from a sort of fairly dysfunctional, broken family in terms of the nuclear family, I think it was a sense of sort of wanting to recreate some of that happiness that I had as a child, with cousins and grandparents and aunts and uncles and that kind of thing. [K]*

#### **4.2.5.1.4 Parental role models of effective functioning**

Participant K’s stepmother was an important role model: she was both ‘in tune’ and an effective and respected worker. Participant D’s mother provided a role model of being both a mother and a worker, and her father had a 25-year history of employment with the same company.

*For me it was ... [a] role model: I could really, really respect someone who was both in touch and in tune and who has had children, but also managed to have respect in the workplace and [was] just being valued ... [K]*

*She worked, so I always had that role model in a sense ... and my father is an extremely devoted loyal person ... so I think I already had the role model of the work environment, you know you go and you do your work and you're loyal ... [D]*

#### **4.2.5.1.5 “Girls’ careers are not as important as those of boys”**

For participant L, there was little helpful career guidance. Advice and guidance which, with hindsight, she feels she badly needed, were not given. This could be regarded to have ‘set her up’ for a career below the level of her abilities and for concomitant financial difficulties. In contrast to the way her brothers were socialised, there was an implicit assumption by her parents that she would ‘meet somebody’ and would not really need to equip herself for a worker role that could provide her with financial security, among other things. Career guidance at school played into the socialisation messages that women’s worker roles should be fairly low-level.

*My folks sent me to university so that I [could] make a living for myself. I suspect that they also thought I’d meet somebody ... [They] encouraged my brothers to have studied accounting – just to make sure they could ... whereas I ... could choose what I wanted ... There was no, ‘Don’t become a teacher, because you are not gonna earn that much money ... So that was my socialisation ... If I look at career guidance ... when I was at school, we had travel agents coming in and secretaries and those were traditionally female-dominated roles ... If I look back now ... maybe I could have chosen to study law, or I would’ve liked to have been exposed to more of what was on offer and wasn’t. [L]*

#### **4.2.5.2 Socialisation messages which will be passed on to the children**

##### **4.2.5.2.1 The importance of financial autonomy**

The most important theme was that of financial autonomy. The reasons were various: participant A felt that one ought not to rely on being supported by a husband or by elderly parents and participant J had watched her divorced mother struggling in constrained financial

circumstances. Participant D wanted to convey to her daughters that both partners should contribute to financial security in a marriage. To this end, she feels it is important to guide her daughter to give due consideration to her ambitions and to make realistic plans for bringing them to fruition.

*I would tell [my daughters] that whatever you end up doing, you have to bear in mind that you can't really count on marrying a man and he supports you, because you don't know what's going to happen. And you need to be able to stand on your own two feet. What happens if you can't? You can't come and live with me – you're out of the house now! [A]*

*I think I learned some great lessons from her. Like always control your own money – and I will always control my own money. Because my parents ultimately got divorced and I think I saw her struggle and I thought 'No ways!' ... My parents got divorced and she didn't have a lot left – and I thought, 'Never will that happen to me!' And I suppose in the back of my head I'm never going to need a man to support me, because I'll have my own money – that will never change and I want my daughter to have the same. [J]*

*I think they're already starting to get the concept that they have to be financially independent ... we are starting more and more to say 'If you want x, how about handing over your pocket money?' And I think they would have been brought up to know that I don't for example rely on [my husband] to buy the things that I want and he doesn't rely on me ... It's very much a joint thing that we are able to afford this because we both work ... They would have that message. [D]*

*And she's starting to get her own ambitions about what she wants to do ... Then I'll say to her, 'Fantastic, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to get to it?' Then she'll realise that she might in fact also be working one day ... They'll grow up with the subtle and not-so-subtle messages that moms do work – from my experience ... [D]*

### **4.3 WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT**

There were many experiences of work-family conflict, and emotions and cognitions were often interwoven. Nonetheless, some patterns became evident.

#### **4.3.1 Emotional experiences and consequences of WFC**

##### **4.3.1.1 The widespread nature of emotional experiences of WFC**

All the participants experienced work-family conflict (WFC) very directly, and guilt was an emotion that was often mentioned. Other feelings noted were anxiety, fear, exhaustion,

underachievement, worry, unhappiness, a feeling of constantly struggling and feelings that life is 'slipping by'. Some participants felt that their lives were not their own. Other consequences included sleepless nights. When asked if she experienced inter-role conflict, participant K replied:

*Oh who doesn't? [K]*

#### **4.3.1.2 Guilt and concomitant emotions**

The experience of guilt was widespread. Participant K described a constant struggle. She finds herself always feeling guilty that she has underperformed in one of her roles and suffers from feelings of underachievement, exhaustion, inadequacy and anger. Participant T's guilt was experienced mainly in terms of not giving sufficient time to her work (she is self-employed). Participant A's guilt was due to not giving her children enough time. Participant D, who has a position of considerable authority at her workplace, is better able to manage the guilt by virtue of the self-confidence afforded her by her position. This particular example runs contrary to the argument of Schieman et al. (2006) regarding the 'stress of higher status' which posits that some aspects of work which are often considered resources, such as job authority, do not always reduce WFC.

*It's an endless struggle ... I mean absolutely – you feel guilty always: that you don't give as much as you could to work; that you don't give as much as you could to the children. You don't ever do anything as well as you could ... You always have that sense of not finishing, lack of completion, underachievement, ja, it's a constant, constant struggle ... [I feel] exhausted, inadequate ... challenged. Angry at times. [K]*

*I would be lying if I said I don't have guilt on both sides. [J]*

*I just have to deal with my own guilt and my own feeling of pressure of, 'I've got to get back!' because there's so much to do ... I often feel guilty especially when it's on weekends ... if I have to go and work ... [And also it's] evenings .. where sometimes you have to work and I try not to when [my son] is awake ... exhausting, so it's that guilt that I'm not working and I should be ... [T]*

*Sometimes I just – I almost have to time-out myself and go, 'Okay, just count to 20, take a deep breath, put work behind you, you can worry about work tomorrow,' and then I come out*



*and then I'm fine again. But the kids also pick up on it and I hate that because then it's the guilt that goes with it ... Oh there's a lot of guilt ... Sometimes I'll realise after a week that I haven't actually spent time ... play a game or sit outside in the garden and look at the flowers ... Then I just have this horrible sinking feeling of, 'The years are rushing by and I'll never get them back! [A]*

*To begin with, I think I felt the guilt, and I'd go out and I'd think, 'Ooh, I don't want anyone to know that I am with my kids' (when I was younger). And as I get older and I get more senior in the firm, it's just tough: they must deal with it. [D]*

#### **4.3.1.3 The most profound experiences of guilt**

Participants typically found that their uncomfortable feelings of not adequately fulfilling role requirements were most profound, if not necessarily as broad, in relation to the mother role.

This is well expressed by participant K:

*I probably feel more regularly guilty about what I haven't done at school. I mean I feel anxiety about what I haven't done at school – I have sleepless nights and I stress about what I haven't done, but it's not that same level of guilt that you feel for your own children, that fear that ... you know how quickly it goes and how critical the early years are ... [K]*

#### **4.3.1.4 Exhaustion and feelings of stress**

A common theme was exhaustion due to juggling so much. Participant C articulated experiences of feeling profoundly drained in every dimension – emotional, physical and spiritual.

*It's also very tough because we're multi-tasking and we're all just getting so exhausted and so stressed out. And ja, it's hectic ... [T]*

*There are times when I feel so emotionally, spiritually, physically drained! I mean right to my bone marrow ... [C]*

#### **4.3.1.5 Unhappiness**

So great is her sense of struggling with juggling dual roles that when asked to rate her level of happiness, participant S, reflecting the tenor of several other participants, said:

*Terrible! [S]*

#### **4.3.1.6 'My life is not mine'**

Participants C and S experienced their own happiness, well-being and sense of themselves as being swept aside in the demands of coping with role pressures.

*My life is not mine ... Your life just ceases to be ... You're a mother, you are a worker, you are a daughter, you are a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law. [C]*

*Sometimes you do put your own happiness aside for the sake of your kids. As long as they are happy and they are comfortable ... and you don't even consider yourself ... you don't consider yourself at all. [S]*

#### **4.3.1.7 Pressure to excel: trying to make everything perfect**

For some participants, feelings of pressure to excel in both worker and mother roles heightened their feelings of work-family conflict. Participants reported experiences of tremendous pressure to be the best at everything or to make everything perfect. Pressure to do everything perfectly led to several participants taking on too much and never having time to recuperate, which ironically meant that they could not perform optimally in many aspects of their lives as a result. For participant S, the sense of having finite resources heightened these feelings even further, which concurs with the findings of Brauchli et al. (2011).

*Of course – you've got to be the best at everything – absolutely. It sort of kills me, the thought of not being the best at anything ... You want to be the best possible parent ... There's a much larger element of 'I'm doing it for me, it's for my own achievement' with my career, but your children are ... these are your responsibility ... you've got to do right by them. [K]*

*Trying to make everything perfect ... So much so that you take on too much, and never give yourself time to recuperate or rejuvenate or whatever. And anyway, there is no time for you to regain any energy ... It's draining and as a result you find that so many facets of your life are not as successful or as perfect as you would want them. And that's stressful. [C]*

*I push myself a lot ... and I do more than I think I should be doing ... Sometimes you feel that you are not giving your utmost 100% to both – to each one. Or you give 100% to one and then [to] the other one you don't give as much. It's difficult. I mean you've only got a certain amount of time in the day. [S]*

### 4.3.2 Cognitive experiences of work-family conflict

When asked about their experiences of juggling the roles of mother and worker, participants noted, apart from the emotions experienced, some significant cognitive dissonance.

#### 4.3.2.1 *Women's liberation: what did we win?*

Participant K noted the irony in the contrast between her mother's situation of having had her opportunities for fulfillment frustrated by not being allowed to work and her own situation of being expected to 'be everything'. She reflects on whether or not the contemporary context of employment and family in which many women find themselves attempting to function really does constitute 'women's liberation'. Participant L also finds that women's historical struggle for more gender-egalitarian treatment has brought with it some problems. Her experience is that contemporary working mothers are expected not only to continue to provide exactly the same level of parental contribution as previously (with no reduction in their burdens by virtue of fathers' increased contributions), but also to prove themselves to be equal to, or even better than, men in the workplace. She finds that the workplace 'playing-fields' she has experienced and observed lack any kind of appreciation of the fact that working mothers are already loaded with the same level of traditional duties as of yore and that workplaces fail to provide any appropriate concomitant flexibility.

*Just the sort of sense that maybe we were conned ... I teach women's liberation every year ... in history classes at school and you know sometimes you want to say 'Well, what did we actually win here? What did we win?... And then I look at my mother and I think of that sense of unfulfilled potential and ... of not having been given the opportunity to show what she was capable of and how that actually covered (sic), basically, her entire rights ... Very often it was that way – sort of deeply frustrated ... But the way that we are now expected to be everything. Like you've got to be the domestic goddess and you've got to be the brilliant manager and all the rest of it ... To do them both at the same time is hard, hard work. [K]*

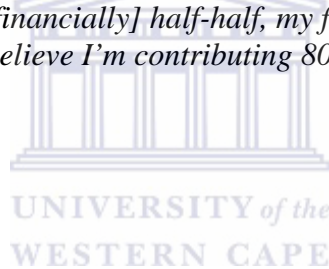
*I think in some ways we've shot ourselves, women have shot themselves in the foot, because society's attitude of (sic) a mother has not changed ... Mother is there as ... the person who holds the family together, the giver – the emotional giver, the support structure and all that. But they've also, women now have to be equal, not equal, but sort of function at the same level – if not better – than men do. And so it's very difficult to have those two roles existing*

*concurrently ... I think the traditional understanding of a mother has not changed. The understanding of the worker is ... you are competing ... on an equal field. [L]*

#### **4.3.2.2 The ‘invisible’ worker**

For participant C, there is a particular meld of cognitive incredulity and emotional frustration in her experience of work-family conflict. She feels that, despite giving her all to both the roles of worker and mother, and despite the fact that she is providing half of the financial resources for the family and performing 80% of the domestic duties, her role as worker, due to cultural norms (she is of the Shona culture), is ‘invisible’.

*I don’t think people really look at my role as a worker to be that important. In my culture they think, when they’re looking at our house, they only see my husband – they don’t see me ... They actually see the ‘bread-winner’, the ‘head of the house’, as the person who is doing everything ... [I am contributing financially] half-half, my friend, but I am kind of invisible in a way ... Physically ... I want to believe I’m contributing 80% to that home, to our life. [C]*



#### **4.3.2.3 The price you pay**

Participants L and K found that ironically, the price they paid for being mothers as well as heavily loaded teachers was that their own children were suffering, and were not receiving the level of maternal input that they badly needed and which, under less pressured circumstances, they might have expected. Participant L experiences a sense of regret that she is ‘dropping the balls’ when she is juggling, and reports that the ‘bigger picture’ does not make her feel good at all. She feels that her children are ‘missing out’, which saddens her. Participant C finds that amongst other tolls taken on her by role pressures, intimate time with her husband is negatively impacted due to feelings of stress and exhaustion.

*[My son is] repeating Grade 1 and [having] loads of reading and needs an enormous amount of input, so you can’t help but think, ‘If I were there all the time, I’d be able to do this, I’d have the energy to do this – willingly’. I’d be able to support him and particularly having done this Masters in Education and just realising ... how critical and crucial all the*

*stuff that comes from home is. And as a teacher, you're pouring your heart and soul into other people's children and meanwhile your own children are just going – are having to just manage for themselves half the time. [K]*

*They're missing out on having a mom to do homework with them in a leisurely fashion, not in a stressful [fashion] ... I would have liked to do the library reading, worked in the school library, given my services or my skills as a teacher to their education ... so I feel ... that sense of regret that I juggle and I'm dropping the balls when I'm juggling ... So, ja, I do feel saddened by it, saddened ... If I look at the bigger picture, it doesn't make me feel good. I would like my home to be a lot more relaxed and my kids not to have their mom shouting at them all the time ... I think that my kids are missing out and that saddens me. [L]*

*Even intimate time is less than we used to have. You are not inclined to, because you are too tired, too stressed – it's rare that you just flow into it. [C]*

#### **4.3.2.4 A 'double bind'**

Participant K notes the 'double bind' inherent in the simultaneous demands of the roles of mother and worker: the child-bearing years coincide with the critical career years, making it very difficult to do them both to the best of one's ability.

*If you're between 25 and 45 ... those are your child-bearing years, those are your critical career years. If you're going to do them both, it's virtually impossible not to do them at the same time. So it's very difficult to know how to manage it in a way that allows you to do both to the best of your ability. [K]*

#### **4.3.3 Sometimes juggling works and sometimes it does not**

Participants reported that there were times when they were able to manage the demands of both roles simultaneously, but equally, there were times when this was not possible. It could be argued that the unpredictability of this uneven 'tempo' could exacerbate feelings of work-family conflict. Participant D's senior position at work affords her enhanced flexibility and opportunities for schedule control which greatly increase her ability to juggle both roles in parallel. Nonetheless, she too sometimes has the experience that things are in 'complete chaos'. Furthermore, she describes how she sometimes experiences days where 'it's completely out of kilter' and she feels 'torn in two directions'. For her, sometimes 'that

juggle is perfected' and sometimes 'you just can't catch the balls – they're all over the place'.

Hence, even her more fortunate position of being able to sculpt her time to a greater degree than many does not exempt her from experiencing work-family conflict, although, as mentioned earlier, it does ameliorate her situation.

*It also just depends what's happening. Some months work really well, some don't. And it's the same at home. [J]*

*I have specially lately decided ... [the children] come first, so if I've got a board meeting ... I went and watched the hockey match then raced back to the end of the board meeting and for the items that could wait for me to be there. I'm doing more and more of that and 99% of the time it works... and there is that 1% of complete chaos ... [D]*

*They're getting a better service because when I am here, I'm like 100% here. I'm not worrying about my kids because I've been with them and I've seen them and I've settled them ... I'm not sort of torn ... It doesn't always work that way ... I have flexibility ... because I work a full day and because I have a full fee to target, I can be absolutely flexible within those hours ... There are some days where it's completely out of kilter – you know you are being torn in two directions when there is a lot of work going on [and] there is a lot of need for you to be at home ... That juggle is perfected sometimes, and sometimes you just can't catch the balls – they're all over the place. [D]*

#### **4.4 OVERLOAD AND UNSUSTAINABILITY**

Almost all participants experienced feelings of being severely overloaded, and three participants felt that their current contexts of juggling work and family roles were unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. Some participants expressed their feelings of desperation in the form of exhortations to the Almighty. They felt 'expected to be everything', from 'domestic goddess' to 'brilliant manager'. Even participant D, whose very senior position at her workplace increases her autonomy and schedule control opportunities, experiences feelings of her context being unsustainable. What the participants said they needed was not necessarily to stop working, but to reduce the load.

*Ja, I worry about that, just about the sort of ongoing exhaustion. Just before I got shingles last term, I was starting to think, 'I don't know that I can carry on doing this much longer' ... I don't know how sustainable it is, I really don't. I mean it worries me, the lack of ... in the long run, you take all your vitamins and you squeeze your sex life into the available spaces,*

*but I don't really think it's a particularly healthy way to live ... The way that we are now expected to be everything. Like you've got to be the domestic goddess, and you've got to be the brilliant manager and all the rest of it. It's unsustainable, actually ... I don't know that I could not work; God knows it would be nice not to have to work quite so hard. [K]*

*Sometimes it gets to that point where you just say 'Lord, I can't do this anymore! I can't do this anymore!' ... People ... are not really understanding that women are suffering all round. No one really appreciates what a woman has to go through ... Just think of it. The juggling ... At work - 110%, you come home - your daughter is ill, this one has failed exams, this one wants to go and visit a friend, your husband is calling you in the bedroom, your sister has just called 'Please can I, please help?' ... You are pregnant, six months or seven months pregnant, but you are still going to work ... [C]*

*I become quite neurotic as well. I just lose it ... Eventually it got to a point where we spoke about it and maybe he had to pull more weight on the home front, because I can't do it all ... It's not that I don't want to work, I mean I like working ... I don't want to work as hard. [L]*

*Sometimes I think I'm being pulled in two directions. I'm being spread too thin ... It's really - it's hard. [S]*

*My environment makes it a lot easier and there are times when you're just so tired – you think, 'Can I keep up this juggle?' ... 'Can I get off this rollercoaster - just spinning round in circles?' [D]*



## **4.5 LINKED LIVES: HUSBANDS AND CHILDREN**

How do the participants negotiate their multiple roles with their husbands? How do the children experience their mothers working? As with all family dynamics, these dynamics are not linear, but are both impacted by and have an impact on the participants' experiences of being working mothers.

### **4.5.1 Husbands**

#### ***4.5.1.1 The sharing of parenting role demands***

For participant L, the focus of discussions with her husband has completely changed, and she no longer receives verbal support for her worker role, even though, due to a change in workplace management, her workload has grown. Discussions now focus almost exclusively on the children. She feels that, despite his avowed guilty feelings, her husband leaves more of

the parental responsibilities to her, most likely, she feels, due to his socialisation of not having had a mother who worked. She experiences their respective role pressures as unequal, and certainly not weighted in her favour, and she notes that overly heavy roles pressures negatively impact her family life. She makes the point very clearly that she would like to work, for reasons of self-fulfilment, but that the difficulty she is experiencing is overload. The excessive demands of her teaching job, including a heavy additional workload over weekends, are important contributory factors. Another factor is insufficient support and role-sharing from her husband.

Participant K has a different experience. Her husband, an academic, does not 'help out', which would imply that responsibilities for parenting and general domestic arrangements all rightfully belong to participant K and that he is generously 'assisting': rather, he 'co-parents', with all its implications of an equal role. Beutell et al. (1983) note that a husband's pro-feminist sex-role attitudes are an important contributory factor in the 'support' a husband is able to give his wife, but participant K's husband's attitude seems to have evolved even further because he assumes an equal, not merely a supportive role in family responsibilities. He has created his own 'script' of what needs to be accomplished so that their shared lives run relatively smoothly and equitably, and is able to assist participant K with her 'script' when needed. There is a thorough understanding on both sides of each other's lives, which participant K believes has stopped them taking on 'different roles' which might have led to alienation.

For participant A, a professional in a managerial role whose husband has previously had more flexibility, the increasing demands of his job have 'opened her eyes' because she has had to take over some of the parenting responsibilities which he had previously been covering. Interestingly, it would seem that she nonetheless still sees the parental role as



actually being primarily her responsibility: 'he's been *supporting me* in all these ways'. This intersects with the theme of maternal gatekeeping.

*Before I had children, my relationship with my husband ... in terms of our work progress ... there was a lot of debate and discussion and support, mutual support and all that ... When the children came along ... our discussions have become more focused on the children ... My workload is heavier than before I had children ... it's enormous. I rarely discuss what is happening in my work life with my husband anymore ... He sort of left a lot of the kiddie work to me ... I think he comes from a family where the dad worked and the mother didn't work. And I don't think the roles we play are equal ... the main core stuff I still do ... I know he feels guilt ... And ... I think things in our family would be a lot, lot more relaxed if I didn't have to work ... Having said that it's also ... I need to fulfil myself. It's not that I don't want to work, I mean I like working ... I don't want to work as hard ... I'd like to be able to work hard at work, finish it off there and then come home and have time with my children. [L]*

*In terms of ... parenting: very, very much a co-parenting. ... He's not so much 'help out' as 'co-parent' in the sense of ... thinking things through in terms of what is required on any given day, and as opposed to being told 'so-and-so is going to need to be collected at such and such a time' ... very often I look to him for a script, actually. There are times in the year when things are unbelievably hectic. I don't have a clue what time the kids finish and he's got all that, and it's the same for our domestic arrangements ... We've managed things together: there isn't a sense that one of us doesn't understand the other, either at work or at home. We have a very, very good understanding of each other's lives, and so we don't get that – I think what often happens in marriages when children are born, that people start having different roles and therefore they become increasingly alien to each other. [K]*

*Now he's got this office ... and I forgot actually, all these years, he's been doing, he's been supporting me in all these ways – I just didn't conceptualise properly. I didn't really think about the time that he spent. Now suddenly we're sort of sharing the role of picking the girls up and extra-murals and making sure that they get home and there is someone there to look after them and all that stuff and it's sort of given me a bit of a wake-up call, actually. [A]*

#### **4.5.1.2 Managing both roles**

Participant A from time to time feels a need to re-negotiate roles with her husband. She experiences a pleasing level of communication and mutual support and they find themselves able to resolve issues successfully.

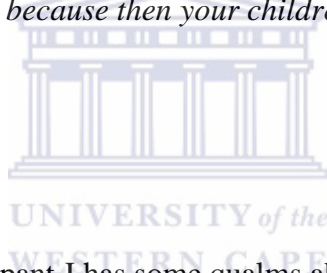
Participant J feels that the key to women being able to manage the roles of both mother and worker is to marry someone who understands their context. She believes that for mothers to

successfully manage substantial work roles, both partners need to be prepared to compromise, and both partners should have a similar conception of balance.

*So we've had our fair share of conversations where maybe one person feels like they're not putting in enough, but it's never been an issue. It's never been, 'This is a real problem: we actually need help to sort this out'. We've always been able to just sit down and just say, 'Hey, stop doing that! ... And we move forward and you change things – whatever's broken you change and you move on and it's fine ... He is wonderful. I couldn't have this life without him ... He's very supportive of my job as well and you know we often talk ... and then he shares stuff about his day ... It's wonderful, it's really, really nice. ' [A]*

*That's the big challenge here, I think, for working women today ... making sure they marry well, in terms of a husband who understands them, because I think that's the key ... I do think women can have both [roles] – having said that though I think there is a huge amount of compromise ... I'm only able to do this in my life because my husband and I play a very even role – so we can both be academic, both have good jobs, but neither of us will work all ends of the hours ... The ... key message: If you're going to be a working mother, make sure your husband understands that and he's there to support you because that's hugely important ... I've got lots of friends whose husbands work very long hours and they can't be working moms – it's actually that simple – because then your children lose out too much ... We both kind of want balance. [J]*

#### **4.5.1.3 Unconscious voices?**



It is interesting to note that participant J has some qualms about whether her husband is as satisfied as she is with their distribution of role responsibilities, despite her avowed satisfaction with the way they have managed to effect sufficient compromises to make their situation relatively workable. This disquiet may possibly be explained by unconscious voices from the more traditional gender role ideologies. This echoes to some degree participant A's comments mentioned earlier that her husband has been 'supporting her' all these years, as though, even though she is working full-time and is the principal bread-winner, the family responsibilities are rightly primarily hers.

*He cooks lovely meals, and you know, if you ask him the questions, he might be saying it differently. It worked out for me: might not have worked out for him quite as well. [J]*

## 4.5.2 Children

The circularity of family dynamics is a factor to consider when reflecting on work-family conflict. How do the children experience their mothers working, and what impact does this have on their mothers' experience of work-family conflict?

### 4.5.2.1 Communication

Participants' experiences of attempting to communicate with their children have been mixed. For participant D, constant communication with her children has meant that they have a better understanding of her reasons for working, and also of the importance of the work that she does. She is an attorney who has worked, *inter alia*, on human rights issues in relation to government housing projects. This has led to them being proud of her and more accepting of her absences. This family norm of effective communication helps to ameliorate her experience of work-family conflict. Good communication also helps her to chisel out some time for herself and thus contributes to her being able to balance her load more effectively.

Participant C has found that her attempts to communicate particular family values to her daughter have been compromised by the encroachment of external influences. She attributes this to her reduced availability because of work responsibilities.

*My girls, luckily for me, talk to me a lot ... You know they obviously don't like me going off to work, but at the same time they are starting to appreciate that that's a part of my life. Especially the older one; she will say to me, 'Ooh, Mom, that work you do is so important. Whereas before, it was, 'Don't go, Mom' .... In a sense, the girls love telling people that I work and they love hearing about my work ... My oldest one ... she's now 10 and ... she can understand how things work ... I'll explain to her, 'Right, there was a housing project that was going pear-shaped ... and I had to go to court and sort it out so that those people could now get their houses ...' I think a lot of it is about communication to them of what we are doing and that we're not just trying to deprive them of their time. [D]*

*It is about ... explaining to them that ... 'Because I'm going to my friend now doesn't mean now I don't want to be with you.' It's a balance. [D]*

*Sometimes I pick up that I haven't really managed to help the girl – because I haven't been there for her, and I get the feeling that other influences have been creeping into her life which I wouldn't have welcomed had I [had] the time ... I try to talk [to her] but most of the time, I think she feels that I'm trying to impose my mother's life, my life, on her life, which is way past its 'sell-by date' ... I have found the value of what my mom taught me and I am trying to teach it to her ... [C]*

#### **4.5.2.2 Socialisation**

For participant A's children, having a working mother is an accepted way of life. This may in part be because most of their peers' mothers work. In contrast, a number of participant L's children's peers have non-working mothers. Her children are therefore likely to have observed the experiences of contemporaries who have greater access to their mothers. She gave voice to experiences of fairly severe work-family conflict when asked whether her being obliged to work as a teacher has impacted her family. Participant L's children miss her, but she needs them to adapt to her working situation.

*I think it's just accepted ... They've never said to me, 'Why do you work, Mom?' It's just what they've always grown up with, I suppose. So for them, it's nothing new. [A]*

*I work most evenings and over the weekends. That time you should be spending with your family and you are conscious of the fact that you have work to do ... So it does impact on the family completely. And to the point that my kids – they're only 7 – they comment on it. They just say, 'Can't you just mark – give lots of ticks and let's go play?' But they just need to understand that Mommy needs to work. So it does impact hugely on the family ... [L]*

#### **4.5.2.3 Spousal support in matters of discipline**

Participant S, whose husband, due to limited employment opportunities, works in another city, finds herself functioning almost as a single mother, and experiences her children as taking advantage of her lack of immediate spousal support when it comes to matters of discipline. In spite of this, her children, at a school where most of their peers' mothers work, understand that their mother is obliged to work and are not resentful. It would seem then that

one of the big contributory factors to her experience of work-family conflict is a lack of spousal support, rather than her children's resentment at her having to work.

*Now that they are 11 and 6, they are getting personalities and you know, they're becoming more assertive, so for me, emotionally and dealing with all of that, it's hard ... It's extremely hard and I'm doing it by myself and ... because ... they know I'm a 'single' mom – they take advantage of that and they know there's no one else to back me up. ... My kids – they've got a full understanding why mom has got to work ... so there's no resentment in that way. [S]*

## **4.6 THE WORKPLACE**

What of workplace parameters? Which factors are experienced as helping to ameliorate inter-role pressures, and which factors exacerbate them? What of supervisor behaviours? Which supervisor behaviours or workplace norms are seen as supportive of working mothers, and which are experienced negatively? Are there any other noteworthy factors in the workplace which may have a bearing on the experiences of working mothers?

### **4.6.1 Workplace parameters**

#### **4.6.1.1 Flexibility, flexi-time, work ethic and productivity**

Participants A and J, who are both in senior positions, enjoy concomitant flexibility which facilitates their giving time to family responsibilities when necessary.

Participant J feels strongly that flexi-time is what contemporary working mothers particularly aspire to, but stresses that they should have a good work ethic and should understand the importance of productivity for flexi-time to be practicable. She perceives some cultural differences between South Africa and 'overseas' countries as regards the expression of a work ethic. Participant D, a senior manager, also stresses the importance of productivity to make a family-supportive workplace sustainable.

*Our time is quite flexible – that’s why 08h00 to 17h30 is a sort of a misnomer. Sometimes I start work at 09h00 and then I work maybe a bit later ... and then on other days I’ll leave at 14h00 because I’ll just say I’ve got to go sort out some things. [A]*

*I’ve got this ridiculously fortunate position, that I don’t miss out on any things. If there is stuff at the school, I can generally go, I can help out; I help out in the tuck-shop. [J]*

*I think women today are saying ... ‘We want flexi-time!’ ... The companies that are allowing people to do that are getting much more staff loyalty. They’re saying, ‘We understand that you want a work-life balance’ ... You have to ... do it with ... people [that] have the right work ethic, and unfortunately ... South Africa doesn’t have that. A lot of people here want a job ... and [you must feel] lucky that you’re employing them ... That’s not the case overseas. A lot of the younger people are saying, ‘I’m lucky to actually have a job and therefore I am going to respect it and it’s all about productivity’. And it’s very much that – productivity, not hours worked ... [J]*

*Fortunately for me I’ve got a very supportive group of colleagues – even the guys are big family people and 99% of them are very happy for you to go off and whatever. And you know, I still bring in the same fees they do, so they can’t complain that I’m coming and going and not putting in fees ... I think they’ve learned to realise that it makes no difference to the bottom line. [D]*



#### **4.6.1.2 Autonomy and schedule control**

Participant K, as a teacher, has no control over her work schedule, to the extent that she feels that she would not be able to sustain her position at work were it not for her husband’s workplace’s flexibility. This facilitates his being able to take on additional family responsibilities when she is unavailable. It is noteworthy that she experiences that ‘teaching fills every available space’. Due to very high workplace demands, she is unable to treat the boundary between family and work in a flexible manner as Marks and MacDermid (cited in Bulger, 2007) argued might make for more positive outcomes in the attempt to balance work and family roles. For her, the boundary between the two could be argued to have been almost totally obliterated, so that her home life is to a large degree swamped by work demands.

In contrast, participant J, a financial asset manager, has a high degree of autonomy as regards when and where she works and also as regards her reporting structure. This makes a ‘huge difference’ to her in juggling the demands of two roles.

*Teaching ... fills every available space and you can't work to rule and you can't not bring work home ...the deadlines are – some are within your control and many aren't ... We only manage because I happen to be lucky enough to be married to an academic who has hugely flexible time. [K]*

*It's a bit unfair – I do think I have one of the best jobs in the world in terms of I can work anywhere in the world, I can choose my hours ... I don't have to be at one place at the same time, I don't have people that I have to report to, I have people who report to me. That makes a huge difference. [J]*

#### **4.6.1.3 The home office**

Participants J and D, having senior positions, are able to create the opportunity for themselves to work from home. Hill et al. (2003) attest that the 'home-office' has a positive effect on work-life balance. Participant J works from home on a regular basis, and participant D's work constraints typically allow her to do this only once a week. Participant J finds it distracting hearing her children fighting in the background, but has created a family ethos where the nanny is in charge while she is working, so that she is not disturbed too often. Participant D feels that it is important for her presence to be felt in the house, even though she is not necessarily interacting directly with her children.

*I work in my bedroom ... you hear them fighting in the background – that's not great. But I've been quite good at '[Nanny] must sort it out,' and she knows, even though I'm 'here', I'm 'not here' ... [J]*

*I try once a week to work at home, so that I fetch from school and I am at home. You know they usually have friends or I'm dropping at extra-murals or something, but at least I'm around. [D]*

#### **4.6.2 Supervisor behaviours – family-supportive, or not?**

Heponiemi et al. (2008) argue that 'organisational justice' – the extent to which employees are treated with fairness at work – is an important consideration. They suggest that organisations with fair policies and fair supervisors will likely have lower levels of WFC. Greenhaus et al. (2006) corroborate this, suggesting that the general supportiveness of the

work-family culture, support from supervisors and support from co-workers contributes more to the achievement of work-family balance than formal support.

Some participants in this study reported some experiences of supervisor behaviours and workplace culture and policies which were less than ideal and which raised their levels of WFC.

#### ***4.6.2.1 When staff are seen as expendable work-horses***

Participant K, a teacher who is on the management committee of a leading girls' private school, has experienced a substantial change in supervisor behaviours with the arrival several years ago of a new headmistress with a very different concept of how the workplace should be run. Participant K is able to contrast previous-supervisor and new-supervisor modus operandi, and their implications for working mothers in that milieu. Staff no longer have a sense of being valued for themselves and their individual contributions, and feel expendable. No longer are attempts made to adjust the working environment to accommodate working mothers. These factors have led to a reduction in loyalty and to an undermining of morale. What is not commented on but what could be argued to be a consequence, would be that unhappy staff are not able to give of themselves to the pupils in important but unquantifiable ways. In consequence, the lack of family-supportive supervisor behaviours is likely, ironically, to be counterproductive to the very values, standards and quality of education that the school would surely wish to make its own.

Participant L experiences herself as being dispensable in the workplace and to be regarded simply as a workhorse. Participant C too feels that at work she is not seen holistically, as a worker but also as a wife and mother.

*When the children were very little ... there was far more flexibility around, but also a willingness to make a plan ... the management was different at that time. I felt valued. My*



*role in the school, my contribution was of value, and me as an individual. And ... there was a lot of loyalty because of that and timetables were adjusted so that I didn't have to teach in the afternoons ... And I think now with the change in [management] ... if you can't fit in then there's no place for you. So there's less, far less of personal value, and basically you are replaceable by any other person who can fit the slot ... I think that's another reason for undermining morale, actually, because you then don't actually feel that it matters if you are there or not because anybody can fill your place so long as they can do the hours and be there at the right time ... [K]*

*You are dispensable and you are there to work hard. Very hard. [L]*

*On that campus, I cease to be C the homemaker. I am just now C the worker. So, the fact that I am a mother of ten or twenty – that doesn't count. I am there to work, full-stop. [C]*

#### **4.6.2.2 Staff experience of exploitation**

Participant K notes a managerial tendency to rigidly enforce 'contractual obligations' with no attempt to conceive of how far beyond the call of contractual duty the staff are routinely going. The result for the staff is a great deal of stress, and the supervisor-behaviours are seen as lacking humanity or trust in the staff's professionalism.

Participant C experiences her actual working hours as being treble what she signed for, which could also be argued to be exploitative.

Participant L, a teacher, and the head of a department, feels that teaching, by its very nature, does not lend itself to a balanced life. It however could be argued that staff are entitled to have balanced lives, and that it is incumbent upon the employer to increase staffing levels so that the workload of each staff member is fair and conducive to the experience of a balanced life. Anything else could be argued to smack of exploitation. It is noteworthy that participant L feels she has to accept the status quo. She too experiences a dearth of family-supportive supervisor behaviours in her workplace, including a start-time which she finds heartless.

*And an example of a recent meeting over the exams and the head wanted to know, 'How could you be sure that teachers weren't going to the bank or their hairdressers on their marking days?' And I said, 'Well, why does it matter if they go to the bank or the hairdresser on their marking days? Because they're going to be working till 01h00 in the morning to get*

*their marking finished. So if they want to go to the bank when it's open, why is that an issue?' And [she said], 'No, it's a contractual thing – they are contracted to work from here to here; they must!' But I said, 'They work way beyond those parameters!' ... And that was another example of the rigidity of thinking ... that causes an enormous amount of stress on a day-to-day basis ... For a lot of people who don't feel as confident or who feel undermined, those sorts of dictats cause a great deal of distress. You know, it's actually like actually having the humanity ... you know, kids are sick or whatever – there are times when you've got to trust their professionalism. [K]*

*On paper, you have signed for so many hours ... but practically it becomes work overload, because .. you are trying to mark, you're trying to record, you're trying to give extra lessons, you're trying to do A, B, C – which is expected ... That would be work overload for me ... theoretically on paper you are supposed to be working so many hours, but in reality it's three times ... [that] you end up putting in. [C]*

*I think the work norms and all of that – doesn't facilitate ... the nature of the job itself does not lend itself to a balanced life at all. [L]*

*It's less understanding ... the mere fact that you have to be at the school at 07h30 in the morning ... There's no sympathy shown there. [L]*

#### **4.6.2.3 Supervisor understanding of family needs**

Participant S is a medical receptionist. Although her employer makes some attempt at family-supportive behaviours, her experience is that these do not effectively meet the needs of her family routine. He is blind to the fact that she needs to leave work in time to fetch her children by 17h30 and begin her evening family responsibilities. This adds greatly to her feelings of work-family conflict, and to an overwhelming sense of trying to please everybody else and there being nothing left over for herself.

For participant A, who is a chartered accountant with a senior managerial position, her experience of supervisor behaviours is somewhat different. Her manager seems to understand and accept that she has to attend to family matters at times.

*I get an afternoon off on a Wednesday, which really helps me ... if I need to leave work to go and fetch the kids or there's an emergency, it's never a problem. But ... I'm expected to stay until the last patient. So that might be close to 17h30 and I've got to fetch my girls at 17h30 and my boss knows my circumstances but he doesn't fully understand ... they go on as if they don't see it, they don't think about it – it's just expected. And he doesn't realise that I've got*

*to get my girls still, okay? Before the after-care closes. After they get home, we've still got homework to do and ... I've still got to cook, I've got to clean, I've got to do ironing ... [S]*

*So I'm doing everything for everybody else but there's nothing for myself. So I'm trying to please him, my boss, trying to please my kids ... and there's really no time for yourself. And you get tired. You get frustrated ... I think employers should be more understanding. [S]*

*I'm also lucky in the respect that my boss is two months older than I am – he's got two kids – so he understands about kids and he's very relaxed about that kind of thing ... My boss, he doesn't even ask questions, I'll say, 'I need to go,' and he'll say, 'That's fine,' and then I'll make up the time somewhere else and he knows that I'll do my job ... [A]*

#### **4.6.2.4 Creating a family-supportive work-place ethos**

An interesting divergent theme was provided by participant D who, as a managing partner in a firm of attorneys, is in the position of being able to spearhead changes in the culture and norms of her workplace. She has gone out of her way to introduce a family-supportive workplace ethos and finds that it attracts workers who are seeking a balance in their lives.

She is attempting to create workplace norms which are more attuned to the needs of working mothers and makes an effort to set clear and reasonable parameters around the use of time. She aims to ensure that while employees are given the flexibility to dovetail the demands of family and worker roles, the work is still done effectively.

In a further effort to create a family-supportive environment, participant D is encouraging her employees to create support structures for themselves at work so that any gaps or difficulties which might arise should they become parents, would be covered for. She does not expect her employees to be 'everything to everyone', and does not attempt to exploit them by creating a culture of unreasonable expectations.

She is furthermore pragmatic about the possible abuse of the family-supportive workplace norms which she is attempting to create, and remains alert to those who might misuse the

system. The culture she has created seems to be effective, and helps to ameliorate any negative experiences of inter-role pressures.

*We're finding now, young people saying, 'We'd rather be here and earn slightly less because of the environment' ... We're finding that we're now getting the people [for whom]... the balance is more important than the money ... [D]*

*I do think that this firm is quite unique. Other law firms, I don't think, are quite as understanding of women in the workplace and we are consciously trying to create an environment where women feel free to actually go... I will be very clear to them. I'll say to them, 'We obviously expect you to do your job, but at the other end of the scale, I don't mind if you do it at home, at night when the kids have gone to sleep or when you – whether you do it during office hours, as long as clients aren't running around wondering where you are cause they never see you ... [D]*

*And I don't mind if you train someone under you to do that work and you're supervising it, but get something in place so that you're not under huge pressure when you have your child ... If there is someone under you they can catch you and say, 'Okay, let me [do it].' ... So I'm trying to get everybody to ... realise that they can't be everything to everyone and that they also need to have a support structure at work as well as at home ... [D]*

*You know pretty soon which people are going to take advantage of the kind of environment we are trying to create ... [D]*

#### **4.6.3 Backlash against a family-supportive work culture**

In another interesting divergent theme, participant K noticed that as regarded the workplace culture at her school, some staff members who did not have children did not understand or were not sympathetic to the constraints of inter-role pressures on working mothers. This backlash against a family-supportive work culture surely runs counter to the enlightened education and subsequent meaningful and fair employment of future mothers such as those the school is attempting to educate. It is also profoundly anti-feminist, which participant K experiences as a paradox in a school which not only has a female manager but also sees itself as being at the forefront of the education of female 'future leaders'.

*... A real sense of divide in the staff ... there are those people who don't have children who feel that those who do have children, who, for example, ... can't be away for a week [on a field trip] or whatever – [that] they're not pulling their weight, as opposed to accepting that everybody has different things to offer ... It's important for school girls [that we teach] to see*

*that working women are able to operate and that they aren't kicked out of the profession when they have children because they can't conform to these rigid requirements ... If actually what we are saying to them is, 'Okay, we're going to give you this great education, but at the point at which you have children, I'm sorry, no workplace is going to be able to accommodate you', then what are we doing? [K]*

## **4.7 COPING STRATEGIES**

### **4.7.1 Recuperation time**

Recuperation time ranges from an inadequate two hours a week of 'me' time for the less well paid to exotic overseas holidays for those in more lucrative employment. It also includes relaxing with friends.

#### **4.7.1.1 'Me' time**

Participant K talks wryly of her very limited amount of 'me' time, and says that apart from also taking vitamins, she has no other coping mechanisms. Participant S manages an hour late at night. The other participants did not mention 'me' time at all.

*I religiously go to yoga on a Saturday morning ... That's my time. My two hours of the week. Ja, I worry about that. [K]*

*It's a long day for me: I get into bed at like 10 at night. And then once the kids are sleeping, I have a bit of 'me' time for an hour, whether it's reading or TV ... And that's it. [S]*

#### **4.7.1.2 Holidays**

For participant D, leaving behind telephones and emails and bonding as a family provides an important balance. Participant J tends to work through most school holidays and finds that she experiences heightened work-family conflict during this time.

*We spend a lot of money on travelling ... they'll go to a new country and realise how people live completely differently ... And it's for downtime we go away – there are no telephones, there are no emails there – it's just the four of us – because even if I am at home on leave*

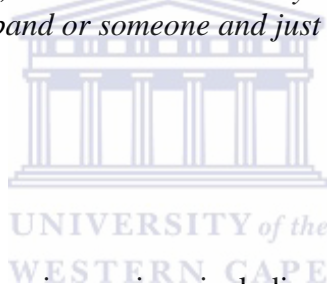
*then ... there's always distractions. So to go away and have that downtime as a family I think is very important to us. [D]*

*The holidays are much more difficult because then you're thinking, 'I really should be out doing mommy things with them' and I feel guilt, I feel like it's not fair to them – it's the holiday. [J]*

#### **4.7.1.3 Relaxing with friends**

Participant D finds that being able to share her experiences with friends, or to have a good laugh, is one of her principal ways of reducing her stress levels and hence ameliorating the effects of work-family conflict.

*[I] spend some time with my friends to go and also tell them things that I need to get off my chest or just to have a good laugh, because that's the way I de-stress to a large extent. I either sit with my friends, my husband or someone and just have a good laugh and talk about things. [D]*



#### **4.7.2 Delegating**

Delegating was a theme that took various guises, including delegating in the workplace, giving over some of the responsibilities for child-minding to nannies, 'delegating' some child-care responsibilities to mothers of the children's friends, employing domestic help and empowering the children to do more for themselves.

##### **4.7.2.1 Delegating in the workplace**

As a senior manager, participant D feels able to delegate responsibilities in the workplace.

Participant T, on the other hand, 'delegates' by outsourcing work and finds this to be a vital component of effective workplace functioning.

*I can delegate the work quite a lot to the younger staff members – I can say to them, 'This is a late night thing, you know I've done my dues, your time to do it now' or 'It's weekend, your time to do it, you guys don't have young children ... I do have a strong support system in terms of doing the work if I have to get home or I'm sick or whatever ... [D]*

*I think the success in my business, the one very, very good thing that I've done is to outsource most of my work within the production ... from start to finish ... any garment is outsourced.* [T]

#### **4.7.2.2 Child-minding**

Having employed a nanny since before her oldest child was born has enabled participant J to work, largely from home, in a highly lucrative business. The nanny lives with the family, which participant J also finds extremely helpful.

It was found to be important for nannies to be able to take on responsibilities in addition to child-minding, such as driving and being able to do water-rescue. Participant D has a nanny who drives and finds that this eases her load.

There was some hankering after further extending the nannies' roles by getting them to cook, but ironically, the participants seemed to experience themselves as too stretched to do the organising they needed to relieve their role pressures.

Participant K employed a child-minder when her children were very small, but only during her working hours. As the children have grown, she finds that she would like to 'have an army of nannies' or at least a nanny who could drive in order to have some assistance with the complex logistics of managing her roles.

*I have a very good nanny. My nanny has been with me since before my son was born and because I went back to work after ... I think he was six months old ... I'm here if there's something really awful happening, but she basically controls this house ... I chose to have someone at home ... if [the children] are sick ... there'll be somebody to look after them. It just takes that stress off.* [J]

*I've got a nice support system there where I have a nanny who now drives – which is fantastic and she's been there since Amy, the eldest, was born – so she can do lifts to and from school ... She's an amazingly bright intelligent woman and she had done a first aid course and we'd taught her to swim ... so if they hit their head or fell into the swimming pool she could jump in after them ...* [D]

*Increasingly as they get older, and just the logistics get to be more complex, it would be nice to be able to afford a driver ...* [K]

*We're lucky we've got a nanny ... She comes in every day till I get home ... I should plan it that she gets the meals prepared. [S]*

#### **4.7.2.3 Sourcing help from other mothers**

Participant D felt she could always rely on the other non-working mothers in her network to take her daughters home with them to be fetched later. Participant L also relies on another mother to help at times.

*'Would you mind just taking her home with you? And I'll fetch her after work?' And that's never a hassle. [D]*

*Pulling in ... resources like mothers ... I've got a mother that can sort of help out at times. I think developing good friendships ... with other moms who don't work so that we can combine a little bit ... [L]*

#### **4.7.2.4 Employing a domestic worker**

For participant L, an important coping strategy is to employ a domestic worker. Although participant A also employs a domestic worker once a week, participant L was the only mother to mention having a domestic worker as an essential tool for ameliorating the effects of inter-role pressures.

*I think employing a domestic [worker] helps. It's one way of kind of cutting down on cleaning time and all that. [She helps] every day ... it's needed. [L]*

*We have a woman who comes once a week ... the big cleaning stuff. [A]*

#### **4.7.2.5 Empowering the children by teaching them to cope**

Participant D was the only participant who mentioned the importance of teaching her children to cope with most contingencies. She finds that the knowledge that 'they are learning those



tools' means that she need have fewer concerns about their well-being. Furthermore, they have become independent and responsible.

*They know where they stand ... they know they can pick up the phone if ... they're distressed or something is not going according to plan ... They're now learning those tools, which is making it a bit easier because I don't have to sort of panic that they're up to their own devices. [D]*

*[My children] tend to go for children whose moms work for some reason ... Both of them are very independent and they tend to do things for themselves ... they're so much more used to having to take responsibility for things. [D]*

### **4.7.3 Having a routine**

For participant D, a routine enables her children to feel contained and secure and likely gives her more freedom to perform her worker's role. For participant S, a clear routine is experienced as an essential factor in being able to perform both roles.

*I think also the routine has got quite important for them. So sometimes, when I'm home unexpectedly, it kind of throws a little bit as well. So if I'm there with my nanny, they're not quite sure who's in charge. And they're sort of, 'What's going on here?' So I think that to a certain extent they've got used to the routine. [D]*

*They do to an aftercare after school ... so everything is structured. So they know they're at school [then] they go to aftercare, [then] I fetch them. So everything is sort of set ... We are very structured ... we've got a lot of routine ... .It becomes almost like an obsession ... and that's what sort of binds both my work and my motherhood together ... If didn't have that I think things would just be chaotic, they would fall apart and I wouldn't be able to deal with it. [S]*

### **4.7.4 'Notes about notes': making lists**

Notes-to-self and lists for others were a theme among participants, who used them to try to impose some sense of coherence on their lives.

*I've got notes on my car dashboard, on my fridge ... on my hand ... I've got notes about notes ... [D]*

*I do write lists: 'So-and-so needs to be picked up at this time and this one needs to be picked up at that time ...' [J]*

#### 4.7.5 Planning and time management

Effective planning and time management were felt to be important in order to be able to cope with role-pressures. Some working mothers felt they needed to be more focused than non-working mothers due to limited time resources. Multi-tasking was noted as important. The intelligent scheduling of geographically clustered tasks was also mentioned as a strategy: doing tasks from both role domains if the task parameters happened to be located in the same geographical area. Rescheduling of activities when necessary was also mentioned.

*And complete time management ... You do definitely ... work a lot more effectively and productively. [D]*

*We plan, we plan properly and we know what's happening ... I plan everything and I don't procrastinate on anything ... If we're going somewhere in two weeks' time, I have to put it in my diary then and there ... everything is planned ... I find that if I don't organize my life properly then everything just goes out the window. [A]*

*We plan the week, we plan the term, we work out ... who is fetching the kids ... and who is taking them there ... [L]*

*As a working mom you are a lot more focused ... I realise my time here is limited if I want to get home, so I tend to pump work out a lot quicker than most people will – well the non-working moms or the people that are working that aren't parents ... You become so much more productive. [D]*

*That whole multi-tasking thing ... When I get home from work, then it's cooking supper and doing homework at the same time ... I find [that] I'll cook on the stove and while Holly reads her story to me I'll say 'Okay, come with me to the fridge' ... so I mean it's hectic ... [A]*

*You tend to try and work around timing and locality ... I'll go and see a client near the Waterfront and I know I need to pick up my daughter's birthday present for example ... I'll pick it up ... I don't ... go and make another trip on another day. [D]*

*We'll just have to shuffle things around ... you'll change your life to fit in with [the children] because they are the most important thing in the world. [J]*

#### 4.7.6 Living close to work and to schools

At least two participants had moved closer to their workplaces and to their children's schools in order to cut down on commuting time and to facilitate reaching the children quickly in the event of a crisis.

*I work fairly close to home ... [and] close to the girls' school ... I was working in town before ... and I felt very marooned ... you know, you go to work and if there's some sort of crisis you can't do anything ... [A]*

*We've actually moved closer [to] our school. We bought a house which is closer to where I work and where the kids go to school. So that helps a lot ... [L]*

#### **4.7.7 A mixture of emotion-focused and avoidance-focused coping strategies**

Participant A and her husband use a flexible mixture of emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies, which is in line with Rantanen et al.'s (2011) arguments. This seems to work best for them in helping to alleviate work-family conflict. Participant A tries to stay calm, thereby reducing her emotional stress. Her husband avoids talking about issues which are troubling him until he is ready to discuss them.



Participant S used emotion-focused coping in the face of pressures that she perceives as fixed, by having realistic cognitions as to what she can expect in order to reduce her stress. At other times, she avoids thinking about her situation because it would be too overwhelming.

*I try to be calm about things because I do tend suddenly to go off the handle, but I've learnt over the years that it doesn't help. So now I try to be calm ... We know when there's an issue ... We'll sit down and talk about it. We aren't the kind of people that will stand up and have a screaming match ... I even know when [my husband] doesn't want to talk about it. And then I leave it and 'I don't say anything and he knows that I know ... When he's ready he'll come to me ... and we'll talk about it and it's resolved that way. [A]*

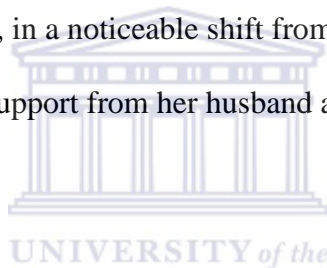
*Most of the time I really don't think about what I'm doing. I just get on with it. Because I think if I had to sit and think about it, I would be a very angry person, you know? I think 'cause you know, men just don't really get it ... You can't expect your days to be just always simple and routine and structured because it doesn't always work that way. [S]*

#### **4.8 PRACTICAL SUPPORT FROM THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

What are the participants' experiences of practical support from their extended families as they juggle their roles of worker and mother? A common theme was that participants feel that they simply would not manage without support from their extended families. The three

women in the most well-paid jobs all noted that they have a great deal of support from their parents and experience this support to be vital.

Participant D has a ‘very tight family network’ and says that she would never move because she needs her mother’s support: it makes her feel her children would be taken care of in a crisis and also makes it ‘easier to go off’. Participant J has support from her parents and her husband’s mother and feels that such support is vital because ‘you cannot do it on your own’. Participant A notes that her mother is able to teach her daughters to bake and knit, which she says are not skills they would learn from her. Participant S has the support of both her mother and her aunt who live close by, but she is reluctant to be a burden and does not want to ‘keep on asking’. Participant C, in a noticeable shift from the traditions of her Shona culture, receives some domestic support from her husband and from one of her older children, a young man of 20.



*I do think I wouldn't be able to do it without the support structure. My mom and dad are amazing, they're around and they fill in whenever they need to ... So there is a strong support structure ... I do think the support structure absolutely vital ... I am not moving ... cause I wanted to be with my mother when I had children because I ... needed that ... support and also to know that she was there also made it easier to go off. If there was a crisis and I couldn't get home on time ... [D]*

*I've got a lot of support ... I think for working moms who don't have any help, I think that's a very difficult job ... My mom helps a huge amount ... my husband's mom helps ... My dad lives quite a bit further [away] but he also helps if we need him to ... So I do have a lot of support. I think that's key to this, being a working mom. You need support. You cannot do it on your own ... I think that does actually destroy you after a while, because you become totally grizzled – you work all the time [and] you're being a mom all the time: you never have time for yourself. [J]*

*My mom ... she is very involved with the kids ... They live very close to us ... She picks them up every Friday ... she'll spend every Friday afternoon with them ... She does the baking with them ... My mother will teach [them] how to knit ... They do a lot of babysitting for us .. my mom will sleep over ... We get a lot of support from them ... [A]*

*I'm very lucky to have family support ... I've got my mom and I've got an aunt. So they are my base, my centre – if anything goes wrong, they're there for me. If the kids are sick I can*

*drop them off by either one of them. School holidays, they're there for me ... They are not working ... I don't think I could really do it if it wasn't for them ... But it's not easy because you also don't want to feel like a burden. So you don't want to keep on asking ... [S]*

*I think that by doing some of the chores that I used to [my husband] now sees that things don't just happen automatically ... Now he does his own ironing, washing of clothes and sometimes even cooking of sadza [maize meal pap] ... So I think we appreciate each other more ... My son – the 20 year-old one, he's quite helpful. He'll say, 'Mommy, don't do this, I'll do it ... Go and mark, just tell me what to do – what do you want me to put on the stove? ... And even the washing of clothes, because I don't have a washing machine – he helps me. [C]*

#### **4.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY**

In a divergent theme, only participant K referred to policy issues. She feels that it is a great irony that in South Africa, while the vast majority of people are unemployed, many of those who are working are so overloaded that they are “doing two jobs”. She feels that this state of affairs is structurally incorrect: “We've all lost the plot”.

It could be argued that because, at the time of writing, South African policy does not fully support a dual-earner/dual carer model and leans more to a traditional family model, South Africa could be regarded as one of the countries where, as suggested by Gronlund et al. (2010), dual roles are likely to be problematic because social rights, services and norms conveyed in policies are not as supportive of individual autonomy.

Participant K suggests that South Africa might perhaps look to the policy models of some of the European countries where “value is given” to the early childhood years, and that South African policy could be better structured, including policy with regard to maternity leave and early childhood. She asserts that if one wants “a society that's going to function properly, where children are going to be properly looked after and properly nurtured, then you [the parent] have to be given space and time to do that”.

Participant K believes that ‘public responsibility for childcare’ (by virtue of government programs and policies) seems almost non-existent. She feels that this adds greatly to the burden of parents who are taking on responsibilities in areas where the state could play a greater role. This links to Gronlund and Oun’s (2010) discussion of policy and its implications for WFC, in which they note that inter alia, policies provide services, such as public day care, which facilitate female employment and provide a buffering factor against the daily friction between conflicting demands from work and family.

Lewis and Campbell (2007) note that in the United Kingdom, government has developed a range of work / family-balance (WFB) policies which include child care services and flexible working hours. For example, parents with a child of up to 16 years old have the right to ask their employer for flexible working hours and the expectation is that if this is practicable, the request will be granted. The rationale is not that women are asking to work all hours of the day and night, but to be able to have more control over their pattern of work. It could be argued that such policies represent change not only at the level of the actual policy instruments themselves, but as regards ideas of how people think about gender roles. This is echoed by Gronlund and Oun (2010) who talk of ‘normative messages’ about gender-roles and gender equality which influence people’s cognitions, behaviour and emotions with regard to combining work and family.

*We’ve all lost the plot ... the vast majority of people don’t work in this country, and those who do work are like doing two jobs ... And there are certain things around maternity leave and around the early childhood years that could most definitely be done more sensitively ... as they are in some European countries: value is given to that time ... If you want a society that’s going to function properly where children are going to be properly looked after and properly nurtured then you have to be given space and time to do that ... There’s a sort of privatisation of childcare to a greater extent, whereas there was a greater public responsibility for childcare which is also gone ... And it adds to the burden of parents now taking responsibility for an enormous amount of things ... [K]*

#### 4.10 CONCLUSION

The lived experiences of the participants with regard to work-family conflict were many and varied. Some distinction was seen between the participants who had greater levels of seniority and who worked in commerce or law as opposed to those in teaching, albeit that two of the teachers held management positions in parallel with their teaching portfolios. The former enjoyed considerably more autonomy and were less stressed (although still experiencing fairly high levels of WFC). This raises questions of choice of career for work-family fit which could be considered in future research. Nonetheless, a number of strong themes emerged, together with some experiences which, although raised by only a limited number of participants, added value to the discussion of WFC as a whole. These findings will be drawn together in the following chapter.



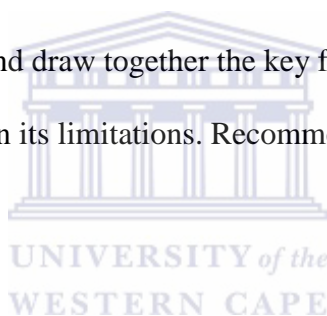
## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The researcher's original perception that contemporary working mothers are not well represented in the cultural iconography seemed to be borne out by the hunger that the study participants evidenced to be given a voice. They wanted to speak out about the endless juggling of their dual roles in which they engage and how this affects the texture and fabric of their daily lives.

This chapter serves to highlight and draw together the key findings of the study, to consider its implications and to reflect upon its limitations. Recommendations for further research are also addressed.



#### 5.2 Central findings

It was found that there is a disjunction between the theoretical discussion in the literature of the positive aspects of work-family conflict (for example, Gronlund & Oun, 2010) and the actual lived experience of women who are juggling dual roles on a daily basis. Participants reported experiencing pressure to be everything to everyone and found that this was unsustainable. Personal emotional and cognitive repercussions were many and varied and there were also noteworthy consequences of WFC for spouses and children. Some participants acknowledged a need to compromise in order to cope, but the current normative messages are not conducive to this. The general consensus was that participants aspire, not to stop working, because the role of worker is regarded as important for self-definition and financial autonomy, but to reduce their overall load.



### **5.2.1 The theoretical ‘re-thinking of work-family conflict’ versus lived experiences of overload and unsustainability**

A clear finding from this study was that participants typically feel overloaded, and as though their situations may well be unsustainable, despite an intricate web of coping strategies and at least some measure of practical support from their extended family. Experiences included feeling emotionally, spiritually and physically drained, not knowing whether they could carry on much longer or how sustainable their situations were, feeling pulled in two directions and spread too thinly, and wanting to ‘get off this rollercoaster – just spinning round in circles’. These experiences resonate with Brauchli et al.’s (2011) couching of burnout as a strain phenomenon occurring in response to chronic work-load stressors where the finite pool of resources available for both work and family domains may become severely depleted.

In contra-distinction to the ‘facilitative perspective’ on managing both work and family responsibilities posited by Bagger et al. (2008), where it is suggested that skills and resources generated in one domain may enrich experience in the other, this study has found that women seem too overwhelmed by the exigencies of their dual roles to experience a facilitative perspective. Greenhaus et al. (2006) had also suggested that positive affect experienced in one domain may well improve the individual’s functioning in another domain. However, the most typical affective experiences of the participants of this study were not positive and ranged from feelings of guilt, stress and exhaustion to feelings of anger and lack of sustainability. It seems that the participants experience the pace of their lives to be so relentless as to preclude having much time to enjoy any positive affect generated by either role.

Ironically, Gronlund and Oun (2010) concede that measures of WFC are in fact generally not included in studies describing *positive* work-family interactions among people with dual roles in work and family. They also acknowledge that these studies tend to focus on ‘resources’ like workplace support while ignoring ‘role demands’ focused on in research on WFC. It could be argued that a largely theoretical engagement with positive aspects of work-family interactions should be balanced by a study such as this one which explores the actual experiences of women who are juggling dual roles on a daily basis.

### **5.2.2 Noteworthy consequences of WFC**

Several participants experienced enormous pressure to excel on both fronts: “You’ve got to be the domestic goddess and you’ve got to be the brilliant manager and all the rest of it”. The pressures experienced by the participants seemed to be both internal, as regarded personal standards of achievement, and external, as regarded societal and workplace expectations.

The personal repercussions of WFC included many emotional experiences such as feelings of guilt, anger, stress, unhappiness, underachievement, inadequacy and exhaustion. Cognitive experiences included wondering what mothers really have won through ‘women’s liberation’ as there seems to be little or no reduction in their traditional roles while they are expected to function at full stretch in the workplace. Another cognitive experience mentioned was that of a participant from a very traditional culture who experienced incredulity that although she was contributing 50% of her household’s financial income, her worker role, due to cultural norms, was regarded as ‘invisible’.

Several participants found that there were additional repercussions for their spouse and children involved in their performing the dual roles of mother and full-time worker. These

included perceptions that they were neglecting their children as regarded educational support and recreational time, while the years ‘flew by’ irretrievably. There was also the experience that the transmission of important family values was compromised and replaced with less desirable influences due to the mothers’ lack of availability. It was also reported that intimacy with the spouse was negatively impacted due to feelings of exhaustion.

### **5.2.3 Compromise and the need for more helpful normative messages**

Some participants, notably those who had more control over their own working schedules, acknowledged the need to compromise because it was not possible to work ‘all hours’. It should be noted, however, that for those participants who had no control at all over their schedules, there was little that they could do to ameliorate workplace demands.

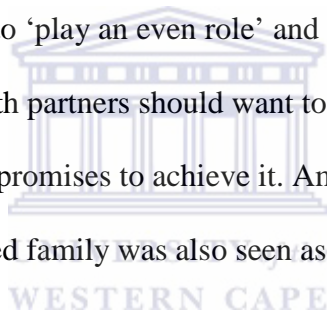
Some participants seemed to have no conscious perception that workplace parameters could or should be adjusted and seemed unconsciously to accept that work-role overload was simply part of the job. There was no cognitive experience that staff were entitled to work-life balance. This ties in with the study by Heponiemi et al. (2008) which, in asserting that overload is the fundamental reason for WFC, urges that staff be consulted about realistic staffing needs. It would seem that societal and workplace norms need to be adjusted to allow for a more realistic load in both roles for working mothers in order to reduce internal and external pressures due to role expectations. It could be argued that this should be done without countenancing a drop in standards, but rather so as to provide a reduction in the volume of output required.

#### **5.2.4 Not to stop working but to reduce the overall load**

There was a general consensus among the participants that they wanted, not to stop working, but to reduce their overall load. Most participants reported that both the roles of worker and mother were important for their self-definition, personal autonomy and ability to contribute to the financial support of their families and so giving up working was not really desired. The difficulty they report is with the load which they experience.

#### **5.2.5 Managing both roles as effectively as possible**

It was felt that one of the keys to women being able to manage both worker and mother roles relatively effectively was for them to have spouses or partners who ‘understood’ their situation and who were prepared to ‘play an even role’ and make an equitable contribution in the work and family domains. Both partners should want to have work-life balance and be prepared to make reasonable compromises to achieve it. Among the general coping strategies mentioned, the support of extended family was also seen as vital.



### **5.3 Implications of the study**

This study serves to highlight the situation of full-time working mothers by giving voice to their experience. It is hoped that this study might contribute in some small measure to the dominant discourse of working motherhood and hence facilitate a richer and clearer understanding by employers and families of the challenges faced by mothers who are in full-time employment. This may lead to greater flexibility and understanding being shown by their families and ‘better measures of prevention and intervention’ in their workplaces, thereby ameliorating the situation of working mothers in the future.

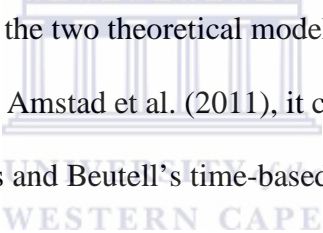
As regards implications for policy, Gronlund and Oun (2010) argue that in nations which lean towards a more traditional family model, dual roles are likely to be problematic because social rights, services and norms conveyed in policies are not as supportive of individual autonomy. South Africa seems to be such a country. There is a clear need for normative change, including the way people think about gender roles and gender equality, because this influences people's cognitions, behaviours and emotions with regard to combining work and family (Gronlund & Oun, 2010). Government policies, workplace practices such as supervisor behaviours and workplace culture, and interpersonal interactional norms are all included. In line with these ideas, it was suggested in a divergent theme within the study that South Africa should perhaps look to countries abroad where there are work / family-balance (WFB) policies which include child care services and flexible working hours. The underlying principle is that women should be able to have more control over their pattern of work, not that they should work all hours.



Findings of the study as regards the emotional and cognitive consequences of WFC mentioned earlier, dovetail well with the suggestions of recent researchers for addressing WFC and thus give added weight to the importance of taking steps to address this problem. The suggestions of Rantanen et al. (2011), for example, involve a holistic approach, focusing on both individual and organisational coping interventions. 'Family friendly' strategies include flexible schedules, family supportive supervisors and a supportive work-family culture in the organisation, all of which were found to be important by the study participants. Personal coping strategies used by some participants and suggested by Rantanen et al. (2011) include such short-term measures as prioritising home duties or delegating them ('avoidant-focused coping'), and tolerance for the expression of emotions (emotion-focused coping) to allow for some immediate relief in a demanding family situation. As regards further ideas

which employers might use, Wierda-Boer et al. (2009), referring to the role of emotional stability in experiencing stress, suggest that it may be helpful to teach skills that are associated with this trait, such as coping strategies in tense situations, in order to reduce levels of stress in the work and family domains and thus to reduce WFC experiences.

All in all, as Wierda-Boer et al. (2009) point out and as this study would corroborate, due to the link between WFC and the outcomes of lower job satisfaction, reduced organisational commitment and elevated parental distress, the taking of measures to lower parental stress and WFC may have positive consequences for parents, families and employers.



As regards this study's bearing on the two theoretical models explored, namely those of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Amstad et al. (2011), it could be argued that the findings supported both models. Greenhaus and Beutell's time-based work domain pressures such as excessive work time and an inflexible work schedule were indeed found to lead to strain and to exacerbate strain-based variables such as job burnout. Greenhaus and Beutell's time-based family domain pressures, such as having the main responsibility for rearing young children, did indeed lead to strain and exacerbate strain-based variables such as low spousal support. Their hypothesised outcomes of role pressure incompatibility were also supported. These included time, strain and required behaviours related to one role all making it difficult to fulfill the requirements of another role. The over-arching factor of role-salience was also found to be significant. As regards Amstad et al.'s (2011) model, the three distinct categories of consequences of WFC were supported: (1) work related outcomes such as burnout/exhaustion, work (dis)satisfaction and organisational commitment or lack thereof, (2) family related outcomes such as marital (dis)satisfaction, family related performance and

family related strain as well as (3) domain-unspecific outcomes such as psychological strain and life (dis)satisfaction were all supported. In conjunction, the models provide a more complete picture of the nature and consequences of WFC than either would on its own.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

The use of a phenomenological paradigm inherently means that the interpretation of the data is to some degree subjective. Although the researcher made every effort to bracket her own ideas and agendas, some degree of influence is almost inevitable.

The generalisability of this study is reduced because of its localised ambit, its small size and some similarities in socio-economic profile among the participants. For example, all the participants were middle-class professionals and the study does not attempt to explore the situations of working mothers from other groups.

The snowball sampling procedure used for selecting research participants could have meant that participants were somewhat similar in outlook and that some findings were therefore over-emphasised.

The personal investment of the researcher, herself a working mother, may have impacted the study due to her inadvertently giving more emphasis to experiences of participants that in some way matched or supported her own.

The study was not attempting to explore implications of race, ethnicity or culture on WFC in any structured way, and such limited findings in this regard as did emerge were serendipitous.

## **5.5 Recommendations for future research**

Future research which would enrich the understanding of WFC could include focusing on the process of how people make choices to do with the intersection of work and family, such as choosing certain careers for their perceived 'fit' with family life. For example, some distinction was seen between the participants who had greater levels of seniority and who worked in commerce or law as opposed to those in teaching, albeit that two of the teachers held management positions in parallel with their teaching portfolios. The former enjoyed considerably more autonomy and were less stressed (although still experiencing fairly high levels of WFC).

It would also be enlightening for the field to attempt to shed light on the choices or strategies which are actually successful in reducing conflict.



Another direction for further research could include focusing on what very concrete actions individuals take after experiencing high levels of work-family conflict – do they move home, change jobs, get divorced, down-scale or take other definitive courses of action?

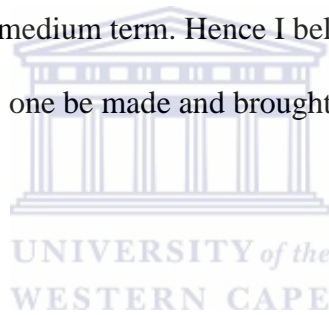
## **5.6 Conclusion**

In attempting to bring to light the situations of full-time working mothers, I found that the themes which emerged have come out more strongly and spoken with an even louder voice and more insistent timbre than I had anticipated.



I had long been of the opinion that, as one participant put it, “women are suffering all round”, and, while wanting to explore these ideas more fully, was concerned that my own personal investment in the questions at stake might unduly impact the research process. I made every effort to let the participants ‘speak for themselves’ and am awed by the resonance of their voices.

I am left with some feelings of disquiet, for the issues at stake affect a great many people most profoundly, but ironically, so stretched are these women by already having to juggle enormous role pressures that they have few resources left over with which to address the exigencies of the situation in which they find themselves in ways that might bring the hope of some redress in the short or even medium term. Hence I believe that it is all the more important that studies such as this one be made and brought with some vigour to the light of day.



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**APPENDIX I**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**



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**LETTER OF CONSENT: Study on Work and Family by S Drummond**

I, the undersigned, fully understand the research aims of this study, my role as a participant and the issues related to confidentiality including my right to withdraw at any time.

I hereby express my willingness to participate in this study. I grant permission to the researcher to record and transcribe the interview, to use the information obtained as part of a research project and to publish the finding as part of the research report and any other related report in future.

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Participant's Signature

-----  
Date

**APPENDIX II**  
**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

- How would *you* define your role of mother and your role of worker and how important is each role to you?
- How do you think *society* defines the roles of worker and of mother?
- What factors related to your employer have an influence on your ability to perform both roles?
- What does your family feel about you working and how does this show itself?
- What strategies do you use to help you to manage both roles together?
- How does juggling both roles makes you feel?

