

**MOTHER-CHILD RELATING:
AN INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Lisa Joy Brown, 2012147829, hereby declare that the dissertation titled *Mother-child relating: An intergenerational perspective* is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another university or for another qualification.

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PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to explore and describe how mothers' own childhood experience of mother-child relating shapes their mothering of the next generation. While secure attachment is recognized to be an important determinant of psychological wellbeing, South Africa's socio-economic circumstances pose challenges to the forging of such health promoting bonds for many children. Intergenerational transmission of parenting patterns can either enhance or decrease the likelihood of mothers being able to offer attachment security to their children. The question of how mothers experience and possibly even direct or regulate this intergenerational transmission has been less researched, with few studies in the South African context. This is therefore the focus of this study.

Seven participants, all the biological mothers of at least one child in the developmental phase of middle childhood, were purposively selected from a small peri-urban town in the Eastern Cape. Each participant engaged in two semi-structured interviews, and attended two focus groups, over a one-year time span. Six rich cases and the focus groups were identified for analysis. Analysis of the data was according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). An intergenerational and attachment literature lens was used in the final stages of interpretation to conceptualize the findings. Thorough elucidation of the findings yielded six themes of significance across the cases, which were presented in a model. These are intention, reflection, central positioning, enactment, individuality and change. The results indicate that the experiences of the participants were multi-faceted, with both rewarding and challenging dimensions. Participants reported identifying within themselves the intention of improving their mothering, based on their childhood experience of mother-child relating. This was achieved through reflection processes, although the extent and depth of reflection varied. In addition, by making use of the 'central positioning' of themselves between their children and their mothers, participants showed how they gained insight into intergenerational processes, which enabled them to establish aspects requiring change. This awareness was operationalized as enactment in the form of either compensatory or over-compensatory approaches.

The manner in which the mothers sift, organize and make meaning of the phenomena of mothering and being mothered is achieved through the four mutually influencing themes of reflection, intention, enactment and central positioning. Reflection acts as a backdrop against which the other three themes interact and shapes how they inform each other. These themes are then filtered through a layer which consists of the theme of individuality,

incorporating factors specific to the participants' intrapsychic structure and life context. Culture is an important aspect of this contextual experience. The product of the sifting and filtering process is a unique, individualized meaning which in all participants also showed change, the final theme. This change occurred either in themselves or in their approach to and practice of mothering.

The results of this research have theoretical and practical significance. A contribution is made towards addressing the gap in the literature relating to the intergenerational focus of mothering. In particular, this provides insight into how mothers' childhood experience shapes the mother-child relationship in the next generation, in the South African context. The study captures an in-depth, nuanced understanding of these issues and develops a conceptual model. The accessibility of the conceptual model for those with little background in psychology has implications for implementation, as it could be valuable in promoting understanding among mothers of how their own experience informs the way in which they relate to their children. This, with further research, can be generalized to any caregiver involved in the raising of children, which would be particularly important in the South African context.

Key words: Mothering; intergenerational parenting patterns; attachment theory; attachment; phenomenology; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); focus groups

OPSOMMING

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het ten doel gehad om te verken en te beskryf hoe moeders se eie kinderjare-ervarings van moeder-kindverhoudings hulle moederskap van die volgende geslag gevorm het. Terwyl geborge gehegtheid as 'n belangrike bepaler van sielkundige welstand erken word, rig sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede in Suid-Afrika uitdagings tot baie kinders ten opsigte van die smee van sulke bande wat welstand bevorder. Oordrag van ouerskappatrone tussen geslagte kan egter die waarskynlikheid van moeders se vermoë om gehegtheidsekerheid aan hulle kinders te bied, bevorder of verlaag. Min navorsing is gedoen oor die vraag hoe moeders hierdie oordrag tussen geslagte ervaar en moontlik selfs rig of reguleer, met slegs enkele studies in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

Sewe deelnemers, almal die biologiese moeders van ten minste een kind in die ontwikkelingsfase van die middelkinderjare, is doelgerig uit 'n klein peri-stedelike dorp in die Oos-Kaap gekies. Elke deelnemer het oor 'n tydperk van 'n jaar aan twee semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude deelgeneem en twee fokusgroepsessies bygewoon. Ses ryk gevalle en die fokusgroepe is vir ontleding geïdentifiseer. Ontleding van die data is volgens die interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise gedoen. 'n Tussengeslagtelike en gehegtheid-literatuurlens is in die finale stadiums van vertolking gebruik om die bevindings te konseptualiseer. Deeglike opheldering van die bevindings het ses belangrike temas oor die gevalle heen opgelewer, wat in 'n model aangebied is. Hulle is voorneme, nadenke, sentrale posisionering, rolspel, individualiteit en verandering. Die resultate dui daarop dat die ervarings van die deelnemers meervlakkig was, met beide belonende en uitdagende dimensies. Deelnemers het rapporteer dat hulle in hulself die voorneme geïdentifiseer het om hulle moederskap te verbeter, gebaseer op hul ervarings van moeder-kindverhoudings tydens hulle kinderjare. Dit is bereik deur prosesse van nadenke, hoewel die omvang en diepte van nadenke verskil het. Bykomend, deur van die 'sentrale posisionering' van hulself tussen hul kinders en hul moeders gebruik te maak, het deelnemers gewys hoe hulle insig in tussengeslagtelike prosesse verkry het, wat hulle in staat gestel het om aspekte wat verandering vereis het, te bepaal. Hierdie bewustheid is geoperasionaliseer as rolspel in die vorm van óf kompenserende óf oorkompenserende benaderings.

Die manier waarop die moeders die verskynsel van moederskap en die ontvangs van moederskap sif, organiseer en daarvan sin maak, word deur die vier wedersydse temas van nadenke, voorneme, rolspel en sentrale posisionering bereik. Nadenke dien as 'n agtergrond waarteen die ander drie temas optree en vorm gee aan hoe hulle op mekaar

inwerk. Hierdie temas word dan gefiltreer deur 'n laag wat bestaan uit die tema van individualiteit, wat faktore eie aan die deelnemers se intrapsigiese struktuur en lewenskonteks inkorporeer. Kultuur is 'n belangrike aspek van hierdie kontekstuele ervaring. Die produk van die sifting- en filtreerproses is 'n unieke, geïndividualiseerde betekenis wat by al die deelnemers ook verandering, die finale tema, getoon het. Hierdie verandering het óf in hulself óf in hulle benadering tot en uitoefening van moederskap plaasgevind.

Die resultate van hierdie navorsing het teoretiese en praktiese betekenis. 'n Bydrae is gelewer tot vernouing in die gaping in die literatuur wat verband hou met die tussengeslagtelike fokus van moederskap. In besonder bied dit insig in hoe moeders se ervaring in hul kinderjare die moeder-kindverhouding in die volgende geslag in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks vorm. Die studie lê 'n diepgaande, genuanseerde begrip van hierdie kwessies vas en ontwikkel 'n konseptuele model. Die toeganklikheid van die konseptuele model vir diegene met min agtergrond in sielkunde het implikasies vir implementering, aangesien dit waardevol kan wees in die bevordering van begrip onder moeders van hoe hulle eie ervaring die manier waarop hulle met hulle kinders omgaan, rig. Met verdere navorsing kan dit veralgemeen word na enige versorger betrokke by die grootmaak van kinders, wat veral in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks van belang sou wees.

Sleutelwoorde: moederskap; tussengeslagtelike ouerskappatrone; gehegtheidsteorie; gehegtheid; fenomenologie; interpretatiewe fenomenologiese analise; fokusgroepe

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the study under discussion. This is achieved by focusing on the context in which the research was conducted and by giving attention to the general aim and rationale of the research. In so doing, the value of the project is substantiated. Due to the utilization of a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the importance of reflexivity of both researcher and research participants, a strong personal motivation has been presented in addition to the theoretical stance. This positions the work within a personal context and also within the professional context of child psychology. This chapter further aims to succinctly orientate the reader with regard to the research design employed. All aspects are discussed briefly, as detailed descriptions follow in the subsequent chapters.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Child Psychology in South Africa faces a daunting task of meeting the needs of the 18.6 million children who live within her borders (Hall, Meintjes, & Sambu, 2014). In a country confronted by significant inequality, poverty, educational struggles, service delivery crises and health challenges, specialists in this field have an important contribution to make. While there are many ways in which professionals can contribute to the wellbeing of the young population of our land, current research suggests that interventions and research aimed at enhancing the attachment relationships between children and their caregivers has a significant impact on future development (Cooper et al., 2009; Frost, 2012; Tomlinson, Cooper, & Murray, 2005).

Arising from his attempts to understand emotionally disturbed children, John Bowlby, a psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist working in the 1930s in a Child Guidance Clinic in London, came to recognize the significance of a child's tie to their caregivers (Bowlby, 1944, 1958). In particular, he explored how this manifested in the relationship between mother and child. Bowlby (1969) termed this connection an attachment, and further defined this as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (p.194). Since then, a vast body of literature and research has augmented Bowlby's seminal works on how, when and why this bond exists. Attachment theory has been extended to explain not only the infant and child's emotional needs, but also relationship formations that occur throughout the lifespan (Magai, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). While Bowlby himself acknowledged that

infants are not limited to only one significant bond, he did however emphasize the connection of the child to their mother. The focus of attention on motherhood was not new, as since the early 1900s psychological studies have analyzed the effects of mothering on children (Arendell, 2000; George & Solomon, 1999). As mothering and being mothered are fundamental aspects of the human condition, they have also been explored from a variety of perspectives (Black, 2004; George & Solomon, 1999; Redshaw & Martin, 2011). However, of note for this study is that attachment theory provides a unique contribution to understanding mothering, in that it emphasizes the importance of this bond to later development and how such early experiences contribute to the transmission of attachment and parenting patterns for future generations.

Research, both seminal and contemporary, supports attachment as serving a role in facilitating healthy socio-emotional and cognitive development in children (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy, 2008; Fearon, Bakersmans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & Roisman, 2010; Ha, Sharp, Ensink, Fonagy, & Cirino, 2013; Sharp & Fonagy, 2008). As will be discussed in Chapter 2, a primary deficit in attachment has been convincingly shown to form the basis of many psychological difficulties for children (Berlin, Zeanah, & Lieberman, 2008; Ha et al., 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2005), while secure attachment relationships are associated with robustness and developmental competence in several domains (Berlin et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2009; Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Van Petegem, Beyers, Brenning, & Vansteenkiste, 2013).

The idiosyncratic social and economic challenges faced by South African youth therefore make approaches relating to the improvement of attachment relationships highly relevant for this context. Disruptions of attachment that children face can frequently be traced back into the attachment histories of their primary caregivers, and indeed, into generations beyond this. Therefore the manner in which a mother negotiates her own attachment history will have implications for her children's psychological development (Bouvette-Turcot, Bernier, & Meaney, 2013; Grienenberger & Slade, 2002; Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger, 2005). It follows then, that it would be important to understand the intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns, if attachment security is to be enhanced. Certainly, this has received considerable attention in attachment theory research (Atkinson et al., 2005; Bernier & Dozier, 2003; Bernier, Matte-Gagne, Belanger, & Whipple, 2014; Bigelow, MacLean, Proctor, Myatt, Gillis, & Power, 2010; Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & van IJzendoorn, 2006). For this study, the evidence supporting the replication of attachment security across generations is noteworthy (van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Duyvesteyn, 1995) as well as support for intergenerational discontinuity among those with insecure relationships

(Cook & Roggman, 2010; Raby, Steele, Carlson, & Sroufe, 2015). There has, however, been less examination as to how mothers experience this and possibly even direct or regulate the intergenerational transmission of attachment (Bernier et al., 2014; Cook & Roggman, 2010). This study therefore aims to explore how a mother's own childhood experience of mother-child relating shapes her mothering of the next generation.

Recent South African research has indicated considerable attachment difficulties between mothers and infants, particularly in impoverished communities (Tomlinson et al., 2005). The high prevalence of post-natal depression in mothers also has implications for the formation of secure attachment bonds (Pininski, 2015; Tomlinson, Cooper, Stein, Swartz & Molento, 2006). Various South African writers stress the importance of quality caregiving in promoting a society of psychologically healthy children (Berg, 2016; Dugmore, 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2005). While the researcher recognizes that mothers are not the only caregivers involved in facilitating emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of children, their role is certainly pivotal. This study therefore chose to use an attachment theory lens to explore the mother-child relationship, from an intergenerational perspective.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Empowering women to mother effectively is a personal journey for the researcher, and informed her choice of research project. In her role as a clinical psychologist over the past 15 years, working both in the community and in a child/family practice, she has witnessed the significance that the presence or absence of affectional ties has for a child. Children, faced even with extreme social and economic hardship, are able to negotiate this effectively and display resilience when primary attachment relationships offer security (Atwool, 2006). This resonance both from personal experience and then later, through engagement with psychological theory, has evoked for her a personal fascination and excitement about the difference that mothering can make in the life of a child. Having embarked on motherhood herself some 12 years ago, she also became more acutely aware of how a mother is challenged to address the "ghosts" in her own nursery (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975, p.387), to ensure that the inevitable deficits in her own mothering experience are not blindly replicated in the way she cares for her children. Inspired by the writing of Kathryn Black (2004) who explores the experience of women who enter motherhood "without a map" (p.ii), the researcher engaged with attachment theory as a theoretical explanation for the replication of intergenerational patterns of mothering. The theory provides understanding for how the repetition may occur, but also shows that there are current limits to the understanding of how and why the patterns of intergenerational transmission occur. As

discussed in Chapter 2, the arguments for mediating and moderating factors are a focus for current research.

This study then has, at its core, the belief that the mothering of our South African children has been undermined by years of hardship and patterns of neglect. The effective mothering of a child is a beautiful and yet ordinary phenomenon. However, it is powerful in its ordinariness (Winnicott, 1965), because if it is absent, the destruction that can follow for a child is overwhelming. The theoretical underpinning for this personal viewpoint is that of attachment theory. It is from this perspective that the data elicited by the research project will be interpreted. This project hopes to contribute in a variety of ways, believing that in the South African context, a primary deficit in attachment accounts for many of the social, emotional and cognitive difficulties that children face. Research that illuminates aspects of the mother-child relationship and how intergenerational patterns unfold may have positive implications for intervention and theory.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The crucial questions asked in this study can be formulated as follows: How does each mother's experience of being mothered influence her mothering of the next generation? What enables them to use, or alter, mothering practices which they themselves experienced?

1.5 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research project was to explore mother-child relating from an intergenerational perspective. This involved eliciting how the participating mothers experienced being mothered themselves and how this has contributed to their own mothering of the next generation in their relationship with their children. Literature from attachment theory and, in particular, that pertaining to intergenerational dynamics, was integrated into the interpretation and discussion of the findings.

1.6 BRIEF RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW

1.6.1 Qualitative research

A qualitative research design was considered to be most suitable to attempt to answer the research questions. The aim of the study necessitated an in-depth and rich understanding of the experience of mothers and mother-child relating. A qualitative investigation provided a detailed, nuanced account, which could not have been achieved through traditional quantitative methodologies. Qualitative research facilitates the exploration of individual's experience by capturing participants' perspectives through the use of data collecting

methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups (Howitt, 2010). However, qualitative researchers have been criticized for only categorizing and explaining participants' narratives rather than developing novel, challenging and insightful interpretations that could add to theory (Chamberlain, 2000). Therefore, this study attempted to link the findings to relevant psychological literature and develop the interpretations into a coherent model. Qualitative research also recognizes the active role of the research (Etherington, 2007; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010b) and a process of reflexivity was acknowledged and integrated into the writings of the researcher throughout this study. In particular it was important to acknowledge from the outset the researcher's sensitivity towards the influence of her own experience of being mothered and being herself a mother of two children. Specific attention to the researcher's reflexive process is presented in Chapter 4 with the research findings and throughout this research document where applicable.

1.6.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This study was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This was in keeping with the understanding that the essence of psychological exploration is to understand human experience, as IPA emphasizes that the participants are the experts from whom information is gleaned (Smith & Osborn, 2003). For this study, IPA was an appropriate choice as it investigated the psychological experience of mothering and being mothered, and aimed to draw on each participant's unique perspective and meaning-making processes (Howitt, 2010). It also enabled the researcher to engage with the research question on an idiographic level, combining the participants' lived experiences with a subjective and reflective interpretative process (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Data analysis was performed through IPA, following the steps recommended, but not prescribed by Smith and Osborn (2003). These steps required the researcher to (a) familiarize herself with the data by repeated reading of the transcripts; (b) conducting a first-order analysis to identify preliminary themes; (c) connecting themes within an individual case, as second order analysis; (d) interpretation of individual cases; (e) cross-case analysis; (f) and interpretation of cross-case analysis. IPA requires the researcher to work inductively and not deductively, remaining open to new ideas emerging from the participants' accounts. Furthermore, while the use of a theoretical framework, such as that of attachment theory in this study, is acceptable, the analysis should not be led by pre-existing theory (Smith, 2004).

A further advantage of IPA for the purpose of this research, is the transparency of the approach. This appealed to the researcher, as IPA encourages reflexivity throughout the research process to recognize preconceptions and experiences that might influence the study (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010b).

1.7 METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

Data for this study were gathered by conducting 14 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with seven mothers over a timeframe of one year. Both these data collection methods have the potential to generate extensive and rich data from participants (Howitt, 2010; Palmer, Larkin, de Visser, & Fadden, 2010). Until recently, IPA has favoured semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the means of gathering data (Howitt, 2010; Smith, 2004). However, it has since become recognized that focus groups may also be used in conjunction with IPA (Palmer, et al., 2010; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010b) if suitable to the overall aim of the research. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that an IPA sample should consist of only a small number of participants, all of whom have shared the experience which is then explored. All seven participants in this research were the biological mother of at least one child in the developmental phase of middle childhood. This ensured that they had all experienced a similar number of years of mothering, from which to share their insights and thoughts. Analysis of the data was conducted according to IPA, with the results indicating three themes [intention, enactment and central positioning] and two processes [filtering by individuality and enabling through reflection], which contributed to an experience of change and meaning-making for the mothers regarding intergenerational patterns of mothering. The findings were conceptualized in a model and are presented in Chapter 5. Throughout the research, attention was given to ensuring that the ethical treatment of the participants was considered and ensured. This was achieved by attaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and minimizing any negative effects of participation. The details of this are discussed in section 3.6. In this qualitative study, the principles of trustworthiness were imperative to promoting the quality of the research. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings faithfully reflect the personal or lived experience of the phenomenon being explored, which then enhances the credibility of the research (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). For this study, trustworthiness was established by paying attention to dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research findings (Golafshani, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The quality of the research process was also promoted by reflexivity by the researcher. These concepts are elaborated on in section 3.5.

1.8 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Several key concepts utilized in this document have been defined below. Although a variety of conceptualizations can be offered for these terms, the definitions provided are in keeping with how they were primarily used and understood within this study. Further details for these and other important terms will be provided in Chapter 2.

Mothering: the term mothering in this study is not used as a technical term and therefore does not have a formal definition. However, it serves to refer to the act of nurturing an infant or child, and incorporates both the child's physical and emotional wellbeing.

Intergenerational parenting patterns: These patterns refer to core attitudes and behaviours in parenting practices which are either intentionally or unintentionally transmitted from one generation to the next generation (van IJzendoorn, 1992). These patterns psychologically shape how the current generation parent their children (Fonagy & Target, 2005; Wallin, 2007; van IJzendoorn, 1992).

Attachment theory: Attachment theory is a psychological theory originating with the seminal work of John Bowlby (1958). It incorporates a set of concepts that explain the development and significance of an emotional bond between an infant and their primary caregiver, frequently, although not universally, their mother. The theory also explores the way in which this bond affects the child's behavioural and emotional development, "from the cradle to the grave" (Bowlby, 1988, p.62).

Attachment: Bowlby defined attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (1969, p.194) which is understood to connect them across time and space (Ainsworth, 1972; Bowlby, 1969). This strong emotional bond between an infant or child and their primary caregiver is considered to be vital for the child's development, as it provides an emotional security which facilitates survival. Attachment is characterized by proximity-seeking behaviours in the face of perceived threat (Bowlby, 1969).

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is a 20th-century philosophical approach associated with Husserl (1970). However, it also refers to a type of qualitative research where the approach intends to provide a "study of people's conscious experience of their life-world that refers to their everyday life and social world" (Schram, 2003, p. 71). A phenomenological analysis then aims to draw out the essence of a phenomenon, to produce rich themes and descriptions that provide insight into the meaning of the experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): IPA is a qualitative research method of analysis which is committed to exploring the meaning-making processes people employ in relation to their major life experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The focus of this approach is on insight and understanding of experiences (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA has its foundations in phenomenology and explores the way in which individuals

make sense of the particular phenomena which they encounter. It achieves this by focusing on the internal psychological meanings evident in the accounts of research participants (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

1.9 PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY

This research document consists of six chapters and eleven appendices. This chapter briefly outlined the context within which the study was conducted, introduced the rationale for the study, described the aim and presented a brief overview of the research design which was implemented. Chapter 2 introduces and reviews the relevant literature and defines the concepts needed for the study, while simultaneously providing an argument for the value of this particular exploration. Chapter 3 describes in detail the design and methodology employed and is followed by the presentation of the research findings in Chapter 4. These results are discussed and integrated with the literature in Chapter 5. The study concludes with Chapter 6, in which the implications of the findings, the limitations, value of the study and recommendations for future research are discussed.

1.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the research context, rationale and aims of this study were addressed, introducing the reader to the topic of mother-child relating from an intergenerational perspective. The theoretical approach of attachment theory was briefly presented, to contextualize the significance of the study. A brief overview of the research design was provided, to orientate the reader. The next chapter contains a discussion of the literature relevant to the research questions mentioned above.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The place of attachment in facilitating healthy development in children is well supported in the literature (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy, 2008; Fearon et al., 2010; Ha et al., 2013; Sharp & Fonagy, 2008). Although biological and environmental factors clearly play a part in development, the way in which children's early bonds are formed is significant in shaping their social and emotional futures.

A primary deficit in attachment can be argued to be the basis of many of the psychological difficulties with which children present (Berlin et al., 2008; Ha et al., 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2005). Secure attachment relationships are associated with improved long and short term outcomes in several development domains (Berlin et al., 2008; Cooper et al., 2009; Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Van Petegem et al., 2013). These include good socio-emotional adjustment and peer relationships in early and middle childhood and lower mental health problems in adulthood (Cooper et al., 2009, Davies, 2011, Tomlinson et al, 2005). For these reasons attachment is an important determinant of psychological wellbeing (Berlin et al., 2008; Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012). In the South African context of economic and social hardship, issues pertaining to the enhancement of secure attachment in children are thus highly relevant. Often the deficits that children face with regard to attachment can be traced back to deficits in the life histories of their primary caregivers, and indeed, into generations beyond this, resulting in intergenerational patterns of impaired mother-child connections. Intergenerational patterns in parenting can either enhance or decrease the likelihood of mothers being able to offer attachment security to their children (Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Raby et al., 2015; Slade, 2005; Slade, Grienenberger, Bernbach, Levy, & Locker, 2005). How mothers negotiate their own attachment histories has great significance for their child's psychological development and the way in which they are equipped for the world (Black, 2004; Bouvette-Turcot et al., 2013; Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger, 2005; Kretchmar & Jacobvitz, 2002).

The transmission of attachment patterns is important in understanding how this negotiation unfolds (Ainsworth, 1989; Bernier et al., 2014; Bretherton, 1990; Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & van IJzendoorn, 2006). In attachment research, the dynamics of transmission are considered important and have received much attention (Atkinson et al., 2005; Bernier & Dozier, 2003; Bernier et al., 2014; Bigelow et al., 2010; Velderman et al.,

2006). It is common, within this framework, to refer to transmission between generations as intergenerational transmission. Intergenerational parenting patterns therefore refer to the attitudes and behaviours underlying parenting practices which are, intentionally or unintentionally, transmitted from a previous generation to the next generation (van IJzendoorn, 1992). These patterns psychologically influence the way in which the current generation parent their children (Fonagy & Target, 2005; Wallin, 2007; van IJzendoorn, 1992).

Much writing has emphasized the transmission of parenting styles across generations focusing on the similarities that exist between generations. It is evident that security of attachment tends to be replicated across generations (van IJzendoorn et al., 1995). It is also understood that there is often intergenerational discontinuity among those with insecure relationships (Cook & Roggman, 2010; Raby et al., 2015) and that repair is possible (Black, 2004; Raby et al., 2015). Less examination has occurred as to how mothers experience this, and, possibly, even moderate the intergenerational transmission of attachment (Bernier et al., 2014; Cook & Roggman, 2010). This study therefore aimed to explore how mothers' own childhood experience of mother-child relating shapes their mothering of the next generation.

2.1.1 Motherhood and mothering

Mothering and motherhood are fundamental aspects of the human condition and, consequently, these are important fields of study in psychology (Black, 2004; George & Solomon, 1999; Redshaw & Martin, 2011). Mothering and motherhood are diverse concepts, defined not just by the acts of nurturing an infant or small child, but also by what culture and society deem them to be. In recent years, research into motherhood has expanded as scholars try to understand the elaborate and often contradictory place of motherhood in modern society (Griffin, 2014). Numerous attributes are associated with mothering, ranging from romanticized ideas of mothers as the foundation of society, to mothers being criticized for social policies such as welfare and abortion (Griffin, 2014; Kleinberg, 1999).

Psychological studies in this field date back to the early 1900s, analyzing the effects of mothering on children and the possible links between child rearing practices and child development (Arendell, 2000; George & Solomon, 1999). However, research then shifted to include a broad set of activities relating to mothering as well as types of mothers (Arendell 2000). More recent foci in these fields include feminist perspectives and ideology (Christopher, 2012; Dow, 2016), mothering experiences (Laney, Hall, Anderson, & Willingham, 2015), the social construction of mothering (Griffin, 2014), motivation to mother

or not and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction related to these experiences (Luthar, 2015; Redshaw & Martin, 2011; Steinberg, 2005).

Mothering is an important influence in psychodynamic theories of psychology and for this reason, dynamic approaches have contributed substantially to the study of mothering and motherhood (George & Solomon, 1999). Attachment theory in particular provides a unique contribution to understanding mothering, in that it emphasizes the instinctual, goal-directed nature of caregiving.

In recent South African research, high rates of attachment difficulties between mothers and infants have been shown (Tomlinson et al., 2005), as well as a high prevalence of post-natal depression in mothers (Pininski, 2015; Tomlinson et al., 2006). The significance of the quality of caregiving in promoting a society of healthy, well-adjusted children is recognized by South African researchers in this area (Berg, 2016; Dugmore, 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2005). Although mothers are clearly not the only caregivers involved in establishing the emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing of children, they have historically been recognized as playing a pivotal role. This study therefore chose to focus on the mother-child relationship, exploring it from an intergenerational perspective, through the theoretical lens of attachment theory.

2.1.2 Intergenerational transmission

The question of why parents parent the way they do is of interest to developmentalist researchers and practitioners alike. In the field of child psychology it is highly relevant, as it impacts on the interventions offered to children, their family systems and the community. A longstanding hypothesis is that the form and quality of parenting is intergenerationally transmitted (Belsky, Conger, & Capaldi, 2009). Various theoretical perspectives embrace this understanding, including attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). However, the theories differ in how they conceptualize the mechanisms which they presume account for the process of intergenerational transmission. Regardless of the perspective, there is no shortage of evidence that parenting is transmitted across generations and therefore no dispute that transfer happens (Belsky et al., 2009).

The focus of research on transmission has been both on negative patterns of parenting that are replicated (Capaldi, Pears, Patterson, & Owen, 2003; Kovan, Chung, & Sroufe, 2009; Neppi, Conger, Scaramella, & Ontai, 2009), and also on patterns which can be construed as positive and result in developmentally healthy outcomes for the children of such parents (Chen & Kaplan, 2001; Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Pappola, 1987; Quinton & Rutter, 1984;

Shaffer, Burt, Obradovic, Herbers, & Masten, 2009). But if it is known that not only destructive patterns are transmitted, then several interesting questions are raised, which have implications for further research and practice. As articulated by Belsky, Conger and Capaldi (2009), the question must be asked “what factors and processes account for both continuity and discontinuity with regard to the intergenerational transmission of parenting?” (p.1202). These factors are referred to as mediating and moderating mechanisms (Belsky et al., 2009). They are used to explain “lawful discontinuity” (p.1202) where predicted patterns of intergenerational transmission do *not* occur, as well as when continuities across generations *do* happen. Whereas moderators specify when transmission may or may not happen, mediators speak to how or why such effects occur. While some progress has been made with research on moderating and mediating mechanisms, further study is needed, particularly regarding moderating factors (Belsky et al., 2009). Better understanding of both when and why the parenting experienced in one generation is not replayed in the next has valuable implications for interventions in the field of child and adolescent psychology. A key enquiry then for this research project was to provide comment on ways in which the intergenerational transmission of parenting is *moderated* in the lives of the participants.

Given that the theoretical lens through which this study is to be understood is that of attachment theory, a discussion on key aspects of this theory follows.

2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Attachment theory has its origins in the combined work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bretherton, 1992). In the period in which attachment theory was developing the mother-child relationship was a major emerging focus within other psychological conceptualizations of personality and development. It is therefore important to acknowledge that attachment principles both contributed to other perspectives and were derived from other great thinkers of the time. While not in the scope of this thesis, the foundational work of theorist-giants such as Freud, Winnicott, Klein, Fairbairn, Kohut and Erikson all acknowledge, in varying ways, the importance of the mother-child relationship. For example, Freud (1920, 1923) conceptualized in his psychoanalytic theory that a child’s early relationship with the mother serves as a blueprint for later relationships. Winnicott contributed insight into the parent-infant relationship, maternal preoccupation and the good-enough mother (1945,1956,1960). Melanie Klein’s (1957) concept of ego development as a series of object relationships influenced Fairbairn’s (1949, 1951) restructuring of psychoanalytic theory as an object relations model, emphasizing relationship between the infant and caregiver (Summers, 1994). Kohut’s self psychology model (1959, 1966) focussed on the formation of self objects and infantile narcissism within the dyad between the child

and their parents and posited that this is a constantly evolving process, thus emphasizing again the influence of this relationship in development. Erikson (1968/1994) addressed how an infant who is experiencing the first stage of basic trust versus mistrust is guided through this stage by a mother who is experiencing her own developmental phase. The way in which the mother is able to guide the infant will be partly determined by how she is able to resolve her own crises from previous developmental stages, as well as her resolution of challenges which she experiences in her current stage of life.

Bowlby was therefore no exception in this focus on relationship, although his specific motivation and conceptualization was unique. He did not write in isolation of other psychological theoretical developments, and it is important that while he developed attachment theory, this broader theoretical context should be acknowledged.

Bowlby, a psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist, formulated the basic tenets of the theory by drawing on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology and psychoanalysis. Motivated by his observations that the mother appeared to have a central role in the psychological health of a child, Bowlby became dissatisfied by the explanations offered by the two dominant theories, at that time. Psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory, both secondary-drive theories posited that the infant's relationship with the mother emerges and is established because of her role in feeding the child. The mother's response to satisfy the infant's hunger drive was thought to provide pleasure, which in turn was associated with the mother's presence, establishing a relationship between mother and child (Cassidy, 2008). Encouraged by evidence from animal studies suggesting different possibilities behind such connection, Bowlby drew on the thinking of a variety of fields to formulate his views. His conceptualization challenged and revolutionized thinking in the 1950s and beyond, about the nature of a child's tie to the mother and how the disruption of this tie through separation, deprivation and bereavement influences later development throughout the lifespan (Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy, 2008; Fraley, 2002).

Bowlby's innovative area of study, the 'making and breaking of affectional bonds' established the principle that a close, constant and sensitive relationship with a caregiver is necessary in order for a child to thrive emotionally (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Howe, Brandon, Hinings, & Schofield, 1999). Bowlby's key contribution was in recognizing that a child's attachment to its caregiver is a biologically based evolutionary necessity (Bowlby, 1958; Cassidy, 2008; Wallin, 2007). For him the primary focus of attachment was a motivational system driven by the infant's absolute need to ensure their constant physical proximity to the caregiver to guarantee their survival. This proximity was literally a determinant of "life or death" and not

just to promote emotional security (Wallin, 2007). The child's instinctive attempts to gain physical and psychological proximity to the primary caregiver when faced with danger or emotional distress, constitute attachment behaviour. Most importantly, it is not only the sense of physical security that the child derives from the presence of the caregiver but also an intangible sense of safety which then enables the child to explore their environment with less apprehension (Cassidy, 2008; Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby was also concerned with children's experience of loss of their primary caregiver(s) early in life. He hypothesized that such irreversible separation from a significant attachment figure after the first six months of life would be psychologically harmful, given his belief that the attachment relationship develops sometime during this time period. Bowlby (1969/1982) theorized that a child's attachment behaviour becomes organized toward a caregiver sometime between six and twelve months of age. Bowlby further found that infants adopted between six and nine months of life showed little or no socio-emotional damage (Bowlby, 1982; MacLean, 2003).

Mary Salter Ainsworth, a Canadian developmental psychologist, joined Bowlby's research team in the 1950s as part of a Tavistock Clinic project investigating the effect on personality development of separation from the mother in early childhood (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Her subsequent work with her innovative methodology made it possible to test some of Bowlby's ideas empirically and in consequence expanded the theory itself. Ainsworth made two particularly significant contributions which have been responsible for some of the new directions attachment theory has taken in research focus and practice (Bretherton, 1992). Firstly, she formulated the concept of the attachment figure as a 'secure base' from which an infant can explore the world. Secondly, she conceptualized the issue of 'maternal sensitivity', identifying how a mother's sensitivity to infant signals impacts the development of infant-mother attachment patterns (Bretherton, 1992; Cassidy, 2008).

The research and understanding provided by Ainsworth and Bowlby laid a foundation for the exploration of numerous avenues pertaining to attachment. Studies and writings since then have aimed not only to corroborate the original theoretical assumptions of attachment theory, but also to expand the research and extend the application of attachment theory to other contexts. An overview of current empirical and theoretical developments will be given in section 2.8. Amongst others, these include further work on the measurement of attachment security (Solomon & George, 2008), developments in the biological perspective on attachment (Polan & Hofer, 2008; Simpson & Belsky, 2008) and clinical applications of attachment theory (Berlin et al., 2008; Seedall & Wampler, 2013; Levy, 2013). The transmission gap debate is a current area of research which is particularly relevant to this study and will be extensively explored in section 2.6. The relevance of attachment related

concerns continues to inspire research and application of this important model for understanding human development.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

2.3.1 Definitions

Attachment refers to an enduring, intimate, emotional bond that connects an individual to another person (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969). The propensity to form such deep bonds, which provide emotional support and physical protection, is an evolutionary-based, instinctive predisposition and motivates the infant to pursue contact with, and proximity to, a specific caregiver (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1992). Such responses occur, for example, when an infant or child feels under threat due to actual or perceived events (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008). During the developmental phases of infancy and early childhood particularly, this attachment figure will be the one to whom the child turns in potentially threatening life situations (Main, 1999). However, in attachment theory, Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) gave central position to the place of supportive interpersonal relationships in healthy human development. He argued that the attachment system is active throughout life, “from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1988, p.62) whenever the individual is under threat.

Attachment behaviour refers to behaviour that promotes proximity to an attachment figure (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Cassidy, 2008; Solomon & George, 2008). The attachment behavioural system, discussed in section 2.3.3.1, refers to how attachment behaviours are organized within the individual (Cassidy, 2008; Magai, 2008).

An attachment bond refers to the existence of an affectional tie (Cassidy 2008). What is noteworthy is that this bond is not between two people, but instead identifies a connection that one person has to another person whom they consider to be stronger and wiser than themselves. It therefore follows that someone may be attached to an individual who is not attached to them, as in the case of an infant being attached to their primary caregiver. The caregiving bond, or parental bond, are the terms used in attachment theory to identify the connection forged from a parent, or alternative caregiver, to an infant or child (see section 2.3.3.3) (George & Solomon, 2008; Keller, 2013). As Cassidy (2008) explains, the attachment bond is a particular type of a larger group of bonds which were referred to by Bowlby and Ainsworth as affectional bonds.

Five criteria have been outlined for affectional bonds. Firstly, they are persistent and long-lived. Secondly, they concern a specific person and cannot be substituted with another

individual, and thirdly, the relationship is of emotional significance to the bonded person. The fourth criteria would be that the bonded party wants to maintain proximity or connection with the object of their affection, although the nature and degree of this will vary with developmental age. Physical proximity, for example, is important to an infant, but becomes less so for an adolescent who needs instead to know that someone would be available should they be required, but need not be continuously physically close. A final criterion for affectional bonds would be that the individual experiences distress if separated involuntarily from the person for whom they feel the bond. What makes an attachment bond different from the affectional bonds described above is that in addition to these criteria, for an attachment bond, security and comfort are sought from the relationship with the other individual (Ainsworth, 1989). If this security is achieved, the attachment is considered secure, and if the security needs are consistently not met, the attachment is termed insecure.

It is important to note that the existence of an attachment bond cannot be assumed from whether there is a display of attachment behaviour or not. Even when a child or infant is not directing attachment behaviour to their caregiver, they may still experience an attachment bond (Cassidy, 2008). Activation of attachment behaviour, as discussed in sections 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.3.2, is generally context driven and can be present or absent at any given time. However, the attachment bond exists consistently, regardless of the presence of attachment behaviour.

A further defining issue relating to attachment behaviours and attachment bonds is that of intensity, or the strength of a bond. Cassidy (1999, 2008) confirms that when evaluating one attachment against another, Bowlby used the labels secure or insecure, rather than of strong or weak. Ainsworth favoured the idea of “penetration” to refer to the centrality that a relationship has in the life of an individual (Merz, Schuengel, & Schulze, 2007, p.182). The importance of the relationship would relate to the extent of involvement of the attachment figure in the life of the individual and the number of areas in which they are involved (Cassidy, 1999; Hinde, 1979). The more an attachment relationship is integrated in a variety of areas of a person’s life, the more important the attachment relationship will be. This concept is helpful in understanding how children’s attachment to the parent changes as they develop. The parent, for example, is less central in the life of an adolescent, but this does not imply that the attachment bond has weakened (Merz et al., 2007). An attachment relationship need not become weaker even when it penetrates fewer aspects of the other person’s life, or does so only to a limited extent (Cassidy, 1999; Merz et al., 2007).

Bowlby (1969/1982), despite his focus on the attachment bond, proposed that the parent-child relationship is by no means only that of attachment and caregiving. The attachment bond reflects one aspect of a child's relationship with their mother or caregiver. Just as the mother may be an attachment figure, she may also act as a teacher, playmate and disciplinarian depending on the context. So too, a behaviour may be used by different behavioural systems at various moments, even when it is aimed at the same person (Cassidy, 2008).

2.3.2 Core hypotheses

Van IJzendoorn and Sagi-Schwartz (2008) outline four core hypotheses which underpin attachment theory. The first they term the *universality hypothesis*, which posits that all infants, when the opportunity is provided, will attach to at least one, or more, specific caregivers. The only exception to this would be in the face of marked neurophysiological impairment. As discussed further, in section 2.5.4, cross-cultural research suggests that this is true for a variety of cultural settings. Certainly, this supposition is in keeping with Bowlby's (1969/1982) original belief that attachment was a survival instinct for all human beings. The *normativity hypothesis* suggests that in any given grouping, the majority of children will be classified as securely attached, making this the norm. Research in Western societies reveals that most infants display secure attachments. In cross-cultural studies there is variation in the number of secure infants, but despite this fluctuation, secure attachment seems to remain the norm. The *sensitivity hypothesis* speculates that secure attachment is dependent on particular patterns of childrearing, in particular, sensitive, consistent responsiveness to an infant's signals for safety and soothing. While other factors may also be important (De Wolff & Van IJzendoorn, 1997) several studies have reported a causal link between attachment security and sensitive child-rearing practices (Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Juffer, 2003; Belsky & Fearon, 2008). Finally, the *competence hypothesis* refers to the vast body of research identifying how attachment security links to differences in children's competence in various social and emotional domains. These include enhancing cognitive capacity (Meins, 1997; Thompson, 2008; van IJzendoorn, Dijkstra, & Bus, 1995), the ability to regulate negative affect (Calkins, 2004; Cassidy, 1994; Rispoli, McGoey, Koziol, & Schreiber, 2013), and forging positive teacher and peer relationships (Allen, 2008; Bretherton, 1991).

2.3.3 The nature of the attachment tie

Attachment theory then is focused on the relationships and bonds between people and the term attachment refers to a bond between an individual and an attachment figure (Holmes, 2001). As mentioned earlier, the bond to a parent or caregiver is likely to be asymmetric

because, as the theory proposes, the need for safety and protection (which is vital in infancy and childhood) is the foundation of the bond (Wallin, 2007). Behaviour associated with attachment is mainly a process of proximity-seeking to a specific attachment figure, particularly during stressful situations, thus improving the child's chances of survival (Holmes, 2001; Simpson & Belsky, 2008). Children attach instinctively to their caregivers in order to survive and achieve security. The bond is established as a result of the infant's vulnerability and need, and is essential for ensuring the healthy development of the child. The child's tie is called the attachment and the caregiver's reciprocal equivalent is termed the caregiving bond (Cassidy, 2008).

Attachment theorists believe that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a profound impact that continues throughout life. Bowlby described attachment as a "...lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (1969, p.194). For this reason, attachment theorists understand human infants as having an innate need for a secure relationship with an adult caregiver, without which social and emotional development may be impaired (Atwool, 2006; Bowlby, 1973; Cassidy, 2008). Infants are considered to become "securely" attached to adults who are sensitive and responsive in interacting with the infant. Such caregivers need also to be consistently available to the infant, particularly during the period from about six months to two years of age (Marvin & Brittner, 2008). Towards the end of this period, the child begins to use their attachment figure as a secure base from which to explore (Waters & Cummings, 2000). The infant who knows that their caregiver is dependable, is most likely to feel able to venture out to explore their environment. Certain styles of parental responses lead to the development of patterns of attachment which can be classified as either secure or insecure. These patterns in turn lead to the development of internal working models which guide the child's feelings, thoughts and expectations in relationships (Cassidy, 2008; Dozier & Rutter, 2008).

Ainsworth (1989) identified three patterns of attachment, namely secure, insecure-ambivalent/resistant and insecure-avoidant. A further category, insecure-disorganised attachment, was identified by Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (Ainsworth, 1989; Atwool, 2006). Insecure attachment results when infant's attachment behaviour evokes rejection, inconsistency or threat. To survive, the infant must adjust their behaviour to respond to the caregiver's in a way that optimizes the chances of the infant's needs being met, thus making even obscure infant behaviour adaptively strategic in that relationship (Crowell & Treboux, 1995).

Various systems play a role in attachment behaviour, namely the behavioural system, the exploratory system and the caregiving system. These are discussed below.

2.3.3.1 Behavioural systems

As mentioned above, attachment focuses on the interaction and relationship in infant-caregiver dyads, rather than on the individual characteristics of either (Davies, 2011). The infant's active participation in the relational process is emphasized, as well as the importance of the caregiver's ability to respond sensitively to the infant's anxiety during the phases of complete dependency (Atwool, 2006). Bowlby (1969) depicted the attachment behaviour system as a motivational control system with a primary aim of ensuring safety and feelings of security between infant/child and their caregiver. The attachment behaviours are those such as calling out, crying, searching or clinging, from which we are able to infer that the attachment behaviour system, designed to repair a rupture in connection, has been activated. The system is activated with the hope of gaining proximity and responsiveness from the caregiver in times of danger or stress (Crowell & Treboux, 1995).

Vocalizing and smiling are attachment behaviours, as they engage the caregiver and draw attention to the child, frequently increasing proximity to the other. Crying is also considered attachment behaviour because it is experienced as unpleasant by most caregivers, who then attempt interactions with the child designed to bring the crying to an end (Davies, 2011). The behaviours that create and maintain proximity would be: (a) any signals that draw the caregiver to the child (such as vocalizing or smiling), (b) aversive behaviours that achieve the same purpose (like crying), (c) and motor activity that enables the child to maintain physical proximity by seeking out the caregiver (such as crawling or walking) (Davies, 2011).

The attachment behaviour system may interact with other systems (Stevenson-Hinde, 2007). For example, a child who gets a fright and whose fear behaviour system is activated will be most likely to have their attachment behaviour system activated, and simultaneously deactivate their exploratory behaviour system. Use of the mother as a secure base (see section 2.3.3) allows for the deactivation of the attachment behaviour system and the child can then engage again in exploratory play (Stevenson-Hinde, 2007).

Attachment needs to be understood in the context of a behaviour system, which is activated when the child is under threat or has a need. Behavioural systems differ in their complexity. According to Marvin and Brittner (2008), the simplest is a reflex, which is a stereotyped action activated by a stimulus. A somewhat more complex behaviour, the "fixed action pattern" (Marvin & Brittner, 2008, p.273) is initiated like the reflex, but the threshold for its

activation is dependent on the state of the organism at the time and often too, some feedback from the environmental context. Many of the attachment behaviours identified by Ainsworth (1967) would be in this category, for example grasping, crying and smiling (Marvin & Brittner, 2008). The effect of these behaviours is to bring about a change in the environment, which then either terminates the behaviour or even initiates a new one. Thus, a certain level of *predictability* is present as a result of the behaviour. For example, the hungry baby cries, and predictably, the mother picks them up and places them at her breast. The stimulus of the breast evokes the rooting response, and the cry ceases. Once the nipple is found, rooting ceases and sucking begins. Although this complex sequence may appear purposeful and goal-directed, or as Bowlby (1973) called it, goal-corrected, it is not. Instead it is responsive, rather than intentionally goal-directed. The behaviour has a predictable outcome only if it occurs in an environment that is facilitative (George & Solomon, 2008).

The predictable outcome of attachment behaviour is usually proximity to the mother or primary caregiver. This understanding is important in that it shows how simple forms of behaviour which achieve a desired outcome are not necessarily the result of the behaviour being executed intentionally, even when the behaviour sequence occurs in a predictable way. These simple behaviours only become meaningful when understood in context. This is helpful in understanding some of the innate behaviours of infants and how in context, they facilitate attachment. It is only later in development that the capacity for intentional goal-directed behaviour emerges, and from this we are able to infer the beginnings of what Bowlby (1973) called the Internal Working Models (IWM).

The more complex behaviour is the goal-corrected pattern. These have, like the simpler forms, initiating and terminating conditions, as well as predictable outcomes, but the outcome is brought about in a more sophisticated way (Marvin & Brittner, 2008). Here the child chooses from a range of behaviours, in order to achieve a particular goal. For this to happen, the child must have already developed a complex, internal representation of various parts of themselves, their behaviour and the responses of the environment and others. These would be the internal working models (IWMs) mentioned above and discussed comprehensively in section 2.3.6. When a goal-corrected sequence of behaviour is initiated, for example, the toddler moving towards their mother, the child is clearly able to orient themselves and find alternative behaviours, based on feedback, to adjust behaviour to achieve that set goal. The structure of a child's developing IWM can be inferred by observing how their behaviour is organized over several situations (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Marvin & Brittner, 2008). From a developmental perspective, the emergence of IWMs would

happen in conjunction with specific neurological developments and enhancement of cognitive capacity.

2.3.3.2 Exploratory system

The balance between attachment and exploration is clear. In the face of threat, the exploratory system will shut down, and the attachment system will be activated to enhance proximity and evade the threat. Once attachment needs have been met, and the dangerous situation avoided or resolved, the child is able once again to explore (Cassidy, 2008). The exploratory system serves an evolutionary function, in that without it there would be no motivation to find food, devise tools, build or gather needed information about the environment. However, without the balance of the inhibiting attachment system, unrestricted exploration may prove fatal.

According to theory, the infant uses the attachment figure as a secure base (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008) to explore from and return to should their attachment system be activated by a threat. The manner in which an infant utilizes their mother as a “secure base” was initially described by Ainsworth (1963). The child’s assessment of the availability of their mother to assist them should they require it, determines the degree to which they can move away and discover their world. Children who trust that they have, in their attachment figure, a secure foundation to return to, will be more likely to explore (Ainsworth, 1967; Cassidy, 2008; Marvin & Brittner, 2008). This “attachment-exploration” balance (Cassidy, 2008) ensures both safety and examination of the world around them. If a child needs to give too much attention to the availability of an unresponsive or unreliable caregiver, then the security to explore is reduced, the exploratory behavioural system is deactivated and the attachment system remains in ascendance (Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 2008). As attachment theory argues that IWMs are expanded through interaction with the world and others (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008), it follows then that lack of exploration will restrict such change, leaving a child less secure about their needs being addressed, but also with less capacity and reduced confidence in their ability to manage novel or challenging situations.

2.3.3.3 The caregiving system

Bowlby paid some attention to how the behaviour of a caregiver is organized by suggesting that a *caregiving behavioural system* operates in a reciprocal manner to the child’s attachment system. Further attention has been paid to this by George and Solomon (1989; 1996; 2008) who contend that understanding how the caregiving system operates is fundamental to improving attachment relationships and therefore has implications for

intervention. Cassidy (2008) suggests that the caregiving system describes those parenting behaviours which aim to promote proximity and comfort for the child, when the parent considers that the child is facing either real or possible danger. The adaptive function of the caregiving system then is about protection of the young and subsequent survival of the species. The system is therefore activated by internal or external cues that the parent views to be threatening to the child. For this to occur, the caregiver must be able to evaluate whether and how to behave. Clearly, their ability to do so will have implications for the child's attachment need fulfilment. One source of information for this appraisal is the caregiver's assessment and 'reading' of the child's attachment signals, while a further source is their ability to accurately perceive threats (Cassidy, 2008; George & Solomon, 2008).

There are many factors which may influence the development of the caregiving system, such as the parent/caregiver's own childhood experience, maturation and especially hormonal balances in adolescence and those associated with pregnancy and birth in mothers (George & Solomon, 2008). The infant's physical appearance, gestures, smiles and temperament have also been shown to be highly influential in evoking caregiving behaviours. However, the mother's perception of her infant and the relationship that they share seems to outweigh any other aspect of the infant's response, including temperament, in evoking a caregiving response. Clearly, the mother's perception is constituted from an amalgamation of other factors, including memories and feelings she has from her own experiences in childhood. Thus the reciprocity of interplay between systems is evident, and demonstrates the complexity of mother-child relating. For this study, the use of an exploratory approach acknowledges the need to investigate at depth the intricacies of the experience of mothering.

George and Solomon (2008) contend that if caregiving is a behavioural system in its own right then it should be guided by a representational model, which regulates the parent's thinking and behaviour. In attachment theory, such mental representations are understood as IWMs (see section 2.3.6). So the parent's caregiving representation would be constructed from experiences both past and current, with their child, as well as their own memories of childhood attachments and also their current thinking about the parent-child relationship. Representation was regarded by Bowlby (1973) as pivotal for retaining biological system balance, while representational flexibility would be an attribute of any truly goal-corrected partnership. Such flexibly integrated states of mind speak to how someone integrates thoughts and emotions about relationships, or conversely, excludes considering relationship-related thinking and feelings from reflection.

Reflective functioning (RF), discussed later in section 2.6.3.3, is a form of psychoanalytic inter-subjectivity, which has come to feature in attachment research and psychotherapy (George & Solomon, 2008; Wallin, 2007). RF is the capacity to reflect on one's own mind and the minds of others, in the context of an attachment relationship (Ha et al., 2013). Specifically then in this study, RF would refer to participant mothers' ability to consider their own mental states and those of their child, understanding their child to be a separate entity from themselves (Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger, 2005; Sharp & Fonagy, 2008). In the field of attachment theory there are different representational approaches to caregiving. Of significance to this study is the concept of RF or mentalizing (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004), which is an approach that has been suggested to respond to what van IJzendoorn and colleagues referred to as the transmission gap (De Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997; van IJzendoorn, 1995). This transmission gap was evident in research which has shown that a mother's state of mind regarding her own childhood attachment experiences does not predict maternal sensitivity and child security as strongly as was hypothesized. Research on whether parents' representations of their children would provide a compelling explanation towards understanding the "gap", found that integrated "mentalizing" qualities of caregiving representations were significant mediators between mothers' representations of their history and current, sensitive interactions with their children (George & Solomon, 2008). For George and Solomon (2008) then, attending to the caregiving system, as well as the attachment system of the child, offers valuable insights into parent-child relationships that would otherwise be overlooked. In particular, they suggest that such a focus adds to our understanding of maternal caregiving and attachment, allowing for insight into how caregiving behaviour develops throughout the lifespan. They state that little is known about the caregiving system in parents of children in middle childhood and beyond, indicating a need for further research in this area. Participants in this study were mothers with at least one child in middle childhood. Findings then may contribute to a deepening of understanding of the experience of caregiving during this phase of motherhood.

2.3.4 Multiple attachments

Bowlby (1969/1982) wrote on the issue of multiple attachments in infancy, identifying that the majority of infants will form more than one attachment during their first year of life, and direct attachment behaviour to these individuals. This proposition was supported by Ainsworth's empirical observations (Ainsworth, 1979; Cassidy, 2008). In most cultures, attachment figures will include biological parents, older siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, but need not be biologically related. However, although multiple attachments are the norm, the potential number of attachment figures for an infant is not unlimited. Cross-cultural research

supports this (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Despite most infants having multiple attachment figures, they do tend to show a preference for certain individuals, demonstrating the presence of attachment hierarchies. In these hierarchies, not all attachment figures are treated equivalently, neither are they interchangeable. The adult's emotional investment in the child, the quality of care they provide, how much time the infant spends with the caregiver, and the consistency of care provision, as well as social cues are all thought to determine the structure of an infant's attachment hierarchy (Cassidy, 2008). The term monotropy was used by Bowlby (1969/1982) to label this powerful propensity in infants to favour one main attachment figure for security and comfort needs. From an evolutionary perspective, monotropy can be argued to be the most efficient method for the child to gain immediate aid if threatened, as they would have an automatic response to seek out their principal attachment figure. This would ensure survival and reproductive fitness. Cassidy (2008) proposes a process of "reciprocal hierarchical bonding" (p.15) in which the child matches their attachment hierarchy to the hierarchy of the caregiving in their immediate environment. The suggestion is that a child's principal attachment figure is also selected from those with the strongest caregiving bond to the child as such a person will be most invested in their survival, and therefore maximally responsive.

Over the lifespan, there are changes in the course of multiple attachments. While two or three usually unfold during the infant's first year, changes in the child's environment in middle childhood frequently bring opportunities for new attachments as the child begins to connect with more people outside of the family. In adolescence and early adulthood, a further shift is seen as attachments develop to sexual partners. While the norm is for attachments to parents to continue into adult life, the new attachments, particularly to romantic partners, then become more central (Allen, 2008; Cassidy, 2008; Zeifman & Hazan, 2008).

An area for further research is in how these multiple attachments influence children's functioning. It is possible, according to Cassidy (2008), that different attachments exert influence on different areas of the child's life. It may also be that one secure attachment permeates other areas and serves as a protective factor to enhance the child's capacity generally. The findings available in this area suggest that if a child is securely attached to one individual and insecurely attached to another, the child functions most competently when the secure relationship is with their mother, although security in two relationships is optimal (Cassidy, 2008; Sagi-Schwartz & Aviezer, 2005). The enhancement of children's functioning through multiple secure connections is also supported in cross-cultural data (Cassidy 2008; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).

Although Bowlby (1958) began his explorations based on the disruption of mother-child bonds during hospitalisations, he did not negate the role of fathers in the life of the child. However, this was not the focus of his attention. He considered the father to be a trusted play companion and a secondary attachment figure, rather than a principal one (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theorists and researchers since then have paid more attention to the role of fathers and the nature of the tie between them and their infants (Bretherton, 2010; Dumont & Paquette, 2013; Freeman, Newland, & Coyl, 2010; Grossmann, Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Zimmerman, 2002). Empirical research on child-father attachment has, according to Bretherton (2010), progressed through several phases with each phase raising a different set of questions. At first, researchers compared fathers to mothers as likely attachment figures. However, more current studies emphasize the idea that mothers and fathers hold different roles as attachment figures and that their influences on child developmental outcomes may be distinctive but complementary (Freeman et al., 2010; Grossmann et al., 2002). Fathers seem to serve a salient role in supporting the exploratory aspects of the child's attachment development, as well as providing psychological security during shared explorations and play (Grossmann et al., 2002; Grossmann, Grossmann, Kindler, & Zimmerman, 2008).

2.3.5 Styles of attachment

The crucial factor for attachment theory which guides the child's formation of an attachment relationship is their actual experience with caregivers. The quality of care is what determines how the relationship is organized, as this informs the child's confidence as to the degree of availability of the caregiver, resulting in secure or insecure quality of attachment.

Ainsworth's ground-breaking research in 1954, in Uganda, provided a means of classifying types of attachment relationships between mothers and their infants (Atwool, 2006; Cassidy, 2008). In her observations, she noticed that the most important behavioural differences between children when they were separated from their mothers, was evident not while they were apart, but rather in their reunion behaviour following separations. Initially, she identified three different types of attachment, namely secure, insecure and absent. This was later expanded in her Baltimore study in the United States where she clarified her attachment categories into secure and insecure, with a subdivision of the insecure classification into insecure-ambivalent and insecure-avoidant. It was the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) developed for the purpose of Ainsworth's attachment research that provided the means to accessing patterns of infant-mother relating for classification. The SSP has since become the gold standard laboratory technique in the attachment research field. The procedure is

comprised of eight episodes, designed to subject infants to increasing amounts of stress so that the way in which they organize their attachment behaviours with their parents can be observed. Sources of stress utilized in the SSP include placing the infant in an unfamiliar environment, the entrance into this environment of an unfamiliar adult, and brief separations from the mother (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Infants classified as secure in the SSP are deemed to be able to use their mother, or primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore the unfamiliar environment. The entry of a stranger, and separation from their mother, curtails their exploration for a time, and possibly results in proximity-seeking behaviour and protest. However, such infants appeared to perceive their caregiver as reliable and available, and they are able to be comforted by them during reunion (Atwool, 2006). The mothers of such infants were observed to be consistently sensitive and responsive to the infant's attachment needs. Approximately 65% of infants respond in a manner that meets the criteria for a secure classification (Type B) in the SSP. This includes infants studied in a number of different countries (van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988), although there is considerable variation in this percentage both within and between countries. What is reflected by this is that the majority of infants' behaviour conforms to attachment theory's predictions of how babies should behave in relation to their primary caregiver if a positive, sound attachment has been established.

One grouping of infants categorized as insecure in the SSP, seem incapable or reluctant to use their caregivers as a secure base. While they may be distressed by their caregiver's absence, when reunited they behave ambivalently, seeking contact and interaction but simultaneously angrily rejecting their caregiver's attempts to respond. Such infants are categorized as insecure-resistant or ambivalent (Type C). Research suggests that approximately 15% of infants meet these criteria (van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988).

A second group, also considered insecure in the SSP, show little concern by their caregiver's absence. On reunion, they actively avoid interaction and ignore their caregiver's attempts at connection. These infants constitute about 20% and are thought to display attachment of the insecure-avoidant type (Type A) (van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988).

The work of Mary Main and colleagues (Main & Solomon, 1990) contributed a fourth group of infants, classified as disorganised (Type D), as their behaviour on reunion appears disoriented and disorganised (Main & Solomon, 1990). Such infants display contradictory behaviour patterns, which occur simultaneously. Their movements are incomplete or undirected, and they appear confused or uneasy about approaching their caregivers.

Research shows a strong link between maltreatment by caregivers and a disorganised style of attachment behaviour in infants (Deklyen & Greenberg, 2008; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2008).

In later research, Main again observed that there was a connection between the mother's own attachment history and the attachment status or classification of her infant (Atwool, 2006). Exploring adult attachment styles and relationships between infant classifications of security and patterns of continuity into adulthood produced the Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI) delineating adult attachment styles, which are linked with infant attachment classifications. The AAI identified four patterns of adult attachment. These are secure/autonomous, preoccupied, dismissing and unresolved/disorganised (Atwool, 2006), which correspond to those identified in children, namely secure, ambivalent, avoidant and disorganised. Adult outcomes are not predetermined by their childhood categorization, although the correlation between the two is high (Hesse, 2008). Thus attachment theory's significance for lifespan development was enhanced as the impact of these early patterns was shown to be evident in later adult functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008; Senior, 2009). Bowlby (1988) argued that IWMs are particularly activated by parenthood, increasing the chances of transmission of attachment patterns across generations.

Attunement of the caregiver to the infant's needs enables the infant to establish a secure attachment, which later provides them with a secure base from which to explore the world (Ainsworth, 1979). This sense of security enables the child to focus on developmental tasks and to feel competent (Cassidy, 2008; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Ainsworth identified three patterns of attachment, namely secure, insecure-ambivalent/resistant and insecure-avoidant. A further category, insecure-disorganised attachment, was identified by Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (Ainsworth, 1989; Atwool, 2006). Insecure attachment results when an infant's attachment behaviour evokes rejection, inconsistency or threat. Secure attachment relationships are associated with improved long and short term outcomes in several development domains. These include good socio-emotional adjustment and peer relationships in early and middle childhood and lower mental health problems in adulthood (Cooper et al., 2009). Such security of attachment continues into adulthood, informing parenting practices and romantic relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Behrens, Main, & Hesse, 2007; Hamilton, 2000; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). Recent research shows how even harsh environmental factors like poverty, HIV/AIDS and political upheaval can be better negotiated if the child has a sound relational foundation with a caregiver. This is particularly pertinent in South Africa with our Apartheid legacy of family separations and disintegration, grandparents rearing children, and AIDS/HIV leaving children

without primary caregivers and imposing potential attachment deficits (Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Senior, 2009). Conversely, insecure attachment, of the disorganised type, has been linked to aggressive and hostile behaviour in pre-schoolers (Newman & Newman, 2006). Relationship difficulties with peers and romantic partners in adolescence and adulthood, have also been linked to fears of loss and abandonment, stemming from insecure childhood attachments (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Ruptures in attachment can be the result of various factors which reduce or impair sensitivity in the caregiver (Newman & Newman, 2006). Cultural expectations, infant characteristics, such as disabilities, prematurity, illness or temperament can all impact on the ability of the caregiver to respond to the child (Davies, 2011; Paris, 2000). The caregiver's own life history, vulnerabilities and experience of attachment will also inform their responsiveness. Post-natal depression, for example, has a profoundly negative impact on the forging of bonds between mother and child (Tomlinson et al., 2005). As Crowell and Treboux (1995) discuss, in the absence of appropriate caregiving responses, the infant, and later the child, finds ways to adjust their behaviour to maximize response from the caregiver so that the child's attachment needs are met to some extent. While such behaviour may be strategically adaptive in the context of an impaired parent-child connection, the consequences for the child's development can be significantly negative.

2.3.6 Internal Working Models (IWM)

2.3.6.1 Conceptualizing

Bowlby's concept of internal working models (IWM) adapted from the cognitive psychologist Craik, provides the link as to how early attachment experiences continue to influence individuals throughout their lifespan (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). The notions underlying IWMs are not unique to attachment theory and are found elsewhere in the psychological literature in various forms. As early as 1896 Freud wrote of the concept of the repetition compulsion (1920) speaking to an understanding of the presence of unconscious internalizations of past experience of the self-other dyad which then inform behaviour. More recently Tomkins' addressed the idea of scripts in script theory (1978) and cognitive-behavioural-therapy utilised the idea of automatic negative thoughts (Beck, 1976). These, and other theories, all support the idea that human beings internalize past expectations of self-other, and subsequently view the world and new experiences through the lens of these past relational experiences, such as early mother-child interactions. In discussing Bowlby's IWMs it is therefore important to acknowledge that his is not the only theory addressing this phenomena, but rather one of several perspectives within a conceptual context of how people make sense of their current experience with reference to their past.

Bowlby (1969) proposed that IWMs govern individuals' expectations of close relationships. IWMs form the basis for the understanding and organization of affective experience (Bretherton, 1990; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985), helping the individual to make sense of new experiences, and shaping their subjective reality (Howe, et al., 1999). Constructed from the infant's experiences of early interactions, these are models concerning the availability of caregivers, as well as a conceptualization, in light of this, of the self as worthy or unworthy of care. As such, the IWMs become an internalized representation of the interactional world and of the self, and provide a fundamental context for all subsequent transactions with the environment and social relationships in particular (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Sroufe, 1985). IWMs allow the infant, child and adult to predict the likely behaviour of others in a given situation, as well as their own likely response, through the history of their relationships (Bowlby, 1973). As they develop as the result of interactions, the IWMs of the self and other are complementary (Bowlby, 1973). An infant who experiences their attachment figure as responsive and available, for example, is likely to have a sense of themselves as worthy of love and attention, while the converse is that an unresponsive caregiver may evoke an internalized representation of the infant's self as unworthy of love. Clearly, the more accurate IWMs are, the more useful they will be in predicting behaviour. However, should information held in IWMs of attachment be too painful to represent accurately, a process of defensive exclusion may be employed (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Bowlby, 1980). Here, any information that may be harmful to psychological wellbeing is excluded from the conscious awareness of the individual. Like all defensive structures, this provides a short-term adaptive function, but has the ultimate effect of reducing the predictive validity of the IWMs and also impedes them being effectively updated. Defensive exclusion may give rise to segregated representations of an attachment figure, allowing the individual to only access the representation of the attachment figure which casts them in a positive light (Belsky, 2002a; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

Bowlby (1980) proposed that IWMs were initially quite flexible, adapting in response to changes in the nature of care experienced by the child. However, he suggested that IWMs become increasingly less flexible from the age of five years. Alteration of IWMs in childhood is hypothesized to be possible in response to changes in direct experience. Once the capacity for formal operational thinking has developed, IWMs may be altered through the metacognitive ability to think about and reflect on thought processes (Allen, 2008; Allen & Miga, 2010; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). It is generally recognized that IWMs have a strong propensity for stability (Atwood, 2006; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Bowlby, 1973) but the degree to which change is possible is a debate discussed in section 2.3.6.3. As mentioned, the degree of continuity between formative, current and future attachment-

related experiences is ensured by the establishment of IWMs. It is in this manner that IWMs are considered to influence the intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby used the foundation of Freud's contention that the infant-mother relationship is the blueprint for all later relationships, to propose that infants' IWMs of their relationships with primary attachment figures shape all future relationships for the individual, including those with their own children (Bowlby, 1969; Waters & Waters, 2006). This contention is significant for the present study, which explores how mothers' own experience of being mothered influences their relating to their children. While the nature of transmission of attachment styles from mother to child has been an area of extensive debate and research (see section 2.6.1), it is believed that children are exposed to their parents' IWMs of attachment in both verbal and non-verbal ways. The former may include the manner in which a parent communicates with their child, while the latter would involve how the parent responds or fails to respond to their infant or child. In relating to their parents, or attachment figure, a child experiences the caregiver's IWM of attachment, and learns to relate to them in a way that complements the parent's representations. This is necessary for survival, as this adaptation ensures that the child will receive some care, even if, in some cases, the degree of care is less than optimal (Crowell & Treboux, 1995; Summers, 1999).

This would be especially evident under conditions of attachment-related stress. Attachment literature addresses two secondary, or insecure, attachment strategies (Main, 1990; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009; Weinfield et al., 2008) namely de-activation and hyper-activation. Should a child experience their parent as rejecting of their attachment needs, the child will learn to reduce their attachment-related stress, inhibiting their display of attachment related behaviours. The purpose of this dampening of their own experience is to avoid further rejection from the parent, and protect the attachment tie (Binkley, 2011; Summers, 1999). The child, however, will still need some care in situations which are experienced as threatening, and therefore develops another strategy to achieve proximity without provoking rejection from their parent. The parent's rejecting responses have thus encouraged a pattern of dismissal of attachment-related feelings within the child. De-activating strategies tend to emerge as responses to unavailable, rejecting attachment figures who demonstrate punishment or disapproval of the infant's expression of attachment needs. The infant and child learn to suppress their dependency needs and become self-reliant (Weinfield et al., 2008). Their attachment system is therefore de-activated without their obtaining a sense of safety or security. Long-term consequences of such strategies may be a tendency to avoid close relationships, disconnection with their own dependency needs and emotions, and an avoidance of situations which may evoke a sense of threat and activate the attachment system (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009; Weinfield et al., 2008).

Similarly, a child may learn to be hypervigilant and over-activate their attachment system, in an attempt to evoke response from an attachment figure who is inconsistently responsive to their attachment needs. The child may prolong and intensify their expression of attachment needs in the hope of provoking their parent into responding with appropriate care. Here, the parent's inconsistent, unpredictable care encourages a pattern of preoccupation with attachment-related issues for the child, who needs to constantly monitor the attachment figure to ensure adequate responsiveness (Binkley, 2011; Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Weinfield et al., 2008). Hyper-activating strategies stem from interactions with attachment figures who are unpredictably responsive (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). As a result of the intermittent reinforcement of the infant's attempts for responsive caregiving, their attachment system is constantly activated. The consequence of this is that the child develops a distorted appraisal of the unavailability of the attachment figure and also of likelihood of danger, leading to increasingly intense demands for care and attention.

Thus, while a systematic relationship between parental IWMs and infant-parent attachment is therefore understood, the complexity of how this transmission occurs has been a source of intense research in the field of attachment, and has yet to be resolved (see section 2.6.1).

2.3.6.2 Assumptions regarding IWMs

It is assumed that IWMs are primarily unconscious, operating outside of the individuals' awareness (Bowlby, 1980; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000; Pretorius, 2010) making them difficult to measure (Belsky, 2005). In recent years, the attempt to hone the nature and structure of IWMs has seen the concept of secure base scripts emerging in the literature. Waters and Waters (2006) explain that an individual's history of having a "secure base", as coined by Ainsworth (1963) is represented in memory as a secure base script. If consistent secure base support has been available then the script will reflect this. Conversely, inconsistent, incomplete, or ineffective support will be reflected in the script of an individual with this life experience. These relational scripts (Connor, 2006) set the stage for later functioning in terms of both affect regulation and future relationships.

IWMs are considered to be dynamic and complex structures existing for the purpose of anticipating, interpreting and predicting current experience to guide the individual's behaviour (Bretherton, 1990; Fivush, 2006). At the time when infants gain an understanding of object permanence, it is hypothesized that behavioural patterns are translated into IWMs (Bretherton, 1990). IWMs are also thought to be arranged in a hierarchical fashion from general to specific (Bretherton, 1990; Fivush, 2006; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000).

Four major assumptions about IWMs are identified by Fivush (2006). Firstly, as discussed above, she emphasized that IWMs emerge from early sensorimotor experiences and are based on actual experience of caregiving behaviour. She clarified that infants form generalized expectations about future events based on their initial experience with an event. Accordingly, IWMs are formed in a “top-down” hierarchical manner, so very young children would have less detailed or complicated hierarchical models than older children (Binkley, 2011; Bowlby, 1980; Fivush, 2006). Pietromonaco and Barrett (2000) have emphasized a general-to-specific process of IWMs, with IWMs becoming content and context-specific over time. This would suggest that the earliest representations at the top of the hierarchy contain the “default values for what usually happens” (Fivush, 2006, p. 286). However, those at the lower levels would involve the optional, conditional or alternative representations (Fivush, 2006).

A second assumption outlined by Fivush (2006) is that IWMs provide representations of self and others, which are generalized across situations and relationships as the infant gets older. This process of generalization contributes to the IWMs becoming increasingly stable over time. Thirdly, as IWMs become more and more specific with the child’s development, but remain based on a generalized or core “default” value, the foundational core model becomes less available for change, and subsequently more resistant to alteration (Bowlby, 1980). As discussed in section 2.3.6.3, there is debate as to the ability of IWMs to change over time. However, what is agreed is that an individual would require significant exposure to events that differ from their “default” expectations in order for changes to their generalized IWMs to occur.

Fivush’s (2006) fourth and final assumption is that IWMs are considered to be transmitted across generations. Language is identified as pivotal in the likelihood of IWMs being transmitted from primary attachment figures to infants across generations. The transmission of IWMs from mothers to infants is hypothesized to be one potential pathway for the transmission of attachment styles across generations (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000). However, the mechanism for this transmission still poses a mystery for the field. Understanding IWMs and their role in forging patterns of relationship is of essential relevance to this study, which aims to provide a deeper understanding into the intergenerational experience of mother-child relating.

2.3.6.3 Models of change in attachment representations

An important debate in attachment literature is the degree to which attachment strategies and styles are constant over time or subject to change (Berlin, Cassidy, & Appleyard, 2008;

Binkley, 2011; Fraley, 2002). Some authors argue that although IWMs may be updated, the models developed during infancy remain unchanged and impact interpersonal interactions throughout the individual's lifespan. Other writers (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008) suggest, however, that IWMs are revised in response to ongoing experience. In his writing about the debate, Fraley (2002) termed these two positions the prototype perspective and the revisionist perspective.

2.3.6.3.1 Prototype model

The prototype model allows for the updating of some early attachment representations, but in contrast to the revisionists, proponents of this position emphasize the entrenched nature of the IWMs formed in early infancy. Early IWMs are therefore considered to continue to play a significant part in current and later relationships, acting as a "default" to which the individual reverts. The prototype model would argue that the likelihood that early attachment styles will correspond with adult attachment styles is therefore greatly enhanced (Fraley, 2002). It has been suggested that the prototype model tends to be supported by studies that have used samples that have experienced comparatively consistent, sensitive caregiving (Waters et al., 2000; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1997). Freud's (1923) psychoanalytic theory conceptualization that a child's early relationship with their mother serves as a prototype for later relationships, is reflected in the prototype model. As discussed previously, writers have postulated a hierarchical, top-down model for attachment representations (Binkley, 2011; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fivush, 2006; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000) in which children appear to seek experiences and obtain reactions from others which fit with their overall expectations of what generally occurs. This propensity to seek environments consistent with the individual's prototypes, suggests that the stability of early IWMs would be enhanced (Binkley, 2011). In addition, because core IWMs are proposed to develop during the sensorimotor period, they may be less likely to change because of the difficulty of accessing sensorimotor experiences later in life (Fivush, 2006; Schore, 2000; Zeanah & Zeanah, 1989).

2.3.6.3.2 Revisionist model

In this perspective, researchers accept that the attachment relationship starts to develop in the first year of life and continues developing for the first five or six years of life. However, they also uphold that it continues to be sensitive, although increasingly less so, to environmental changes (Bowlby, 1973; van IJzendoorn, 1995). According to Fraley (2002) then, the revisionist hypothesis holds that early attachment representations (IWMs) are continuously updated and revised over time and experience, and therefore need not correspond with adult attachment representations. Early IWMs are conceptualized to be

flexible and may be updated when life experience differs from existing expectations. This is in keeping with Bowlby's (1973) understanding that change in the caregiving context would be a significant factor in the adjustment of a child's IWM. The revisionist model then does not necessarily expect stability between infant and adult attachment patterns (Fraley, 2002) as the caregiving environment is always exposed to change due to external factors, such as major life transitions and unexpected events.

Also identified by Fraley (2002) and supported in Bretherton and Munholland's (2008) thorough description of IWMs is that, in addition to environmental factors, individual factors are likely to play a part in the possible updating of early IWMs. Even where the environment may support alteration in early IWMs, it may be that individual factors, such as temperament, may favour stability and continuity of early IWMs. Attachment writers with a "revisionist" stance emphasize that early IWMs may be less susceptible to change because individuals have a tendency to find individuals and environments which fit with their expectations, and furthermore, frequently elicit behaviours from these relationships which match their IWMs (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). While acknowledging that change may be resisted or difficult, the perspective suggests that if someone is exposed to an environment or significant experience (positive or negative) for a sustained period, which contrast to their early IWMs, these models may be updated to reflect the more recent experience (Fraley, 2002).

Bowlby believed that the individual's internal world was reflective of their relational experiences in the external world (Connor, 2006; von Sydow, 2002). It is likely then that Bowlby would have supported a revisionist model of IWMs, emphasizing as he did the importance of early IWMs of attachment but not discounting the possibility of change. In his view, IWMs have the tendency to persist relatively unaltered throughout life, but can be adjusted to accommodate a shifting social reality (Bowlby, 1973). The supposition that IWMs can be changed through new relationship experiences (Bowlby, 1982) is captured in his emphasis that they are dynamic, *working* models rather than stagnant models. It is this openness to change that is acknowledged in the contemporary application of attachment theory to psychotherapy (Wallin, 2007), understanding that stability of IWMs does not imply rigidity, and that healing is possible. Further support for the revisionist hypothesis can be found in the research findings showing a lack of complete correspondence between infant and adult attachment style (Main, 1999; Roisman, Padrón, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002; van IJzendoorn, 1995). Findings show that some adults, classified as insecurely attached in infancy, can, through experiences forged in supportive partnerships, obtain an *earned*

secure attachment style (Black, 2004; Hesse, 2008; Wallin, 2007). Such research strengthens the revisionist hypothesis.

The distinction between the revisionist and prototype hypotheses is somewhat confusing, as advocates of both sides attempt to use schema confirmation theory as supportive of their hypothesis (Fraley, 2002). However, the emphasis of the significance of early IWMs on later behaviour appears to be the major difference between the models. The prototype model, while allowing for the updating of some early IWMs, stipulates that an infant's earliest IWMs cannot be changed, and continue to play a pivotal role in influencing behaviour throughout the lifespan. The revisionist model, in contrast, recognizes that early IWMs are important in shaping later behaviour, but views these early IWMs as open to being updated and changed. Both these perspectives have relevance for the current study, as the experience of the participating mothers reflects their internal representations of their attachment relationships, as well as the extent to which these representations have been adjusted or maintained over time.

2.3.7 Applications of attachment theory to psychotherapy

In recent years, the significance of attachment theory's contribution to understanding the psychotherapeutic relationship and process has been revisited and recognized (Slade, 2008). The application of attachment theory to inform psychotherapy research and practice, such as psychoanalysis (Fonagy, 2010) is a growing field with a currently, predominantly adult focus. However, interventions for supporting early child-parent relationships have also received attention, with a variety of prevention and intervention programmes targeting parents' IWMs and parenting behaviours. These include Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), the UCLA Family Development Project, "Minding the Baby", Attachment and Bio-behavioural Catch-Up, Circle of Security and the Leiden Programs (Berlin et al., 2008).

According to Slade (1999, 2004, 2008), while attachment theory and research have the potential to enhance a therapist's understanding of their patients, they do not dictate how treatment takes place. Instead, understanding the dynamics of attachment and mentalization should inform clinical thinking, interventions and conceptualization of the therapeutic relationship. It therefore should operate in conjunction with other forms of clinical understanding, assisting in making meaning of the patient's experience.

In an effective therapeutic relationship conditions synonymous with the very function of attachment are provided (Pistole & Watkins, 1995). The therapist's capacity for emotional

availability, consistency and containment create an emotional environment like that between a child and their attachment figure, which fosters the development of secure attachment.

Bowlby (1988), although not dictating how therapy should be conducted, did formulate several key tasks for psychotherapy. He identified the need to establish a secure base, by providing patients with a strong internal sense of trust, care and support. This then allows them to explore the contents of their mind in safety, even when this may be difficult or painful (Levy, 2013). Secondly, therapy should explore attachment experiences, encouraging reflection on past and present relationships. This would include the patient's expectations, emotions and actions in these contexts. Thirdly, the therapeutic relationship itself would also warrant exploration to help the patient examine how this may reflect and relate to relationships or experiences outside of therapy. Past experiences should also be linked to present ones, to encourage awareness of connections between the two. And finally, these processes would contribute to the revision of IWMs, which would allow the patient to feel, think and behave in different, more constructive, ways (Levy, 2013; Slade, 2008; Wallin, 2007). Even for an individual grappling with a history of unsupportive or hostile parenting, such a therapeutic focus has the potential to assist them towards a position of "earned security" (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 2008; Wallin, 2007). Although the influence of a psychotherapist is usually for a relatively restricted period of time, ending with the termination of therapy, the objective is for the representational model of the relationship to endure for the client indefinitely (D'Elia, 2001).

2.4 DEVELOPMENTAL OVERVIEW

2.4.1 Infancy

2.4.1.1 Neurobiology

The interplay between environment and brain development has recently seen an upsurge of research interest from neuroscientists. The discovery in the mid-1990s by Rizzolatti, of what was termed "mirror neurons" has provided evidence of a neurological substrate for empathy, affect attunement, mentalizing and intersubjectivity (Wallin, 2007). Although little research has been ethically possible on infants and children, findings showing that newborns are able to imitate tongue protrusions and mouth opening movements suggest that, even from this age, humans have some basic mirror neuron system (Meltzoff & Brooks, 2007). This would then be the neurological substrate for the understanding of intention in others, which is further facilitated through the attachment relationship as discussed below (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). As Davies (2011) explains, the infant's brain is moulded by their environment as caregiver responses shape the developing brain. The infant's complete physical dependence on the mother or primary caregiver for survival dictates that this

caregiver spends significant amounts of time with the baby, effectively becoming the infant's "environment".

Primary caregivers create the environment in which young brains develop (Davies, 2011; Cozolino, 2006). Schore (2001, p.6) presents the caregiver as the "external psychobiological regulator" of the infant's nervous system which, over the first two years of life, efficiently structures itself. At birth the neonate is able to recognize the mother through smell and touch (Belsky & Fearon, 2008). This is enhanced and becomes an attachment as skin-to-skin contact and mutual gazing are engaged in. The mother's touch, soothing and feeding of her infant creates a collection of specific sensory stimuli which are thought to be responsible for specific neural activations in the areas of the infant's brain which will later be responsible for bonding and socio-emotional bonding (Perry, 2002). The premise of so called "kangaroo care" is based on research indicating that infants, especially those born prematurely, show better regulation of arousal, more organized sleep-wake cycles, longer periods of sleep, lower heart rates following stress and general overall calmness when experiencing skin-to-skin contact with parents (Davies, 2011).

Another interactional stimulus for early brain development is face-to-face engagement. The complex facial muscles of a human being provide a wide range of movements which communicate various emotional states (Davies, 2011). By looking at someone's facial features the infant learns to intuit feelings and track changes in emotional states. In all primate brains there are neuronal groups which are specialized to respond to faces and facial expressions. In this way, vision and the perception of eye-contact and face changes shapes our perception of emotion and meaning (Siegel, 2001). From between three and five weeks of age human infants begin to respond clearly to face-to-face contact (Davies, 2011) and specific face-to-face neural circuits have been shown by neuroimaging studies to develop by two to three months (Tzourio-Mazoyer, de Schonen, Crivello, Reutter, Aujard, & Mazoyer, 2002). Even very young infants concentrate especially on the eyes in the faces of their caregivers. Over the next few months, this focus on the face and eyes intensifies and is understood to be one of the key bases for the formation of attachment (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). The brain grows most rapidly during the first year of life during which time the attachment relationship is the most influential relationship for the infant. It is therefore not surprising that this relationship has a powerful influence on the brain systems which develop. A secure attachment is instrumental in providing an optimal environment for brain development through face-to-face interaction, emotional attunement and playful interchange (Davies, 2011). Schore (2001) also highlights how the attachment relationship shapes and matures structural connections in the cortical and sub-cortical limbic areas, parts of the brain

involved in mediating socio-affective functions. The mediating nature of a secure attachment serves as a protective function, enhancing and supporting the gradual development of neural integration. Thus self-regulation becomes possible, through the initially mutual regulation offered by the caregiver (Davies, 2011; Siegel, 2001).

2.4.1.2 Temperament

For many years, attachment and temperament represented two opposing viewpoints, with adherents of each wedded to the supremacy of their position for understanding human development. Followers of temperament theory considered attachment to reflect only temperamental inhibition in the SSP (Kagan, 1996), while attachment theorists held that temperament was obsolete, because of its exclusive focus on innate or constitutional individual differences (Sroufe, 1985). The role of temperament in attachment is controversial in that it is recognized that temperament is not stable and can shift. Furthermore, temperament is mediated by synchronicity with the mother or primary caregiver regardless of whether the infant is considered to have a difficult, or easy temperament (Belsky & Fearon, 2008). Essentially then, there are two standpoints in the debate about the role of temperament in attachment. The first is that temperament has no direct influence on attachment *quality*, as attachment is by definition constructed relationally. Even a sensitive or irritable infant, if offered consistent, responsive care, can become securely attached (Sroufe, 1985). The opposing view posits that an infant's temperament and vulnerability to distress will be directly related to the attachment outcome, by virtue of the impact that the infant's temperament has on the mother-infant interaction (Belsky & Fearon, 2008). This perspective sees temperament as the principal determinant of behaviour seen in the Strange Situation assessment.

However, more current research has convincingly shown that caregiving environments which promote secure attachment influence the neurophysiological substrates of temperamental inhibition and contribute to the infant's regulation of emotional reactivity (Hane & Fox, 2006; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). Thus, temperament and attachment have gradually become understood as considerably intertwined and the borders between the two concepts have become more permeable (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). For example, research showed how experimentally induced changes in maternal sensitivity had more impact on the attachment security of infants deemed highly reactive than on other infants (Klein Velderman, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & van IJzendoorn, 2006). This suggests that the temperamental characteristics not only make such infants vulnerable to adversity, but more optimistically, seem to make them highly receptive to contextual support.

Attachment then may be a moderator for the influence of earlier temperament on later emotional reactivity to unfamiliar people or situations. It follows then, that the relationship between attachment, temperament and parenting is both complicated and multidirectional in nature (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). In recent writing, van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg (2012) suggest the Differential Susceptibility Paradigm, which offers a way of exploring and understanding this interplay.

The neurobiological perspective and role of temperament emphasize the importance of attachment during infancy. In the next section focus is given to attachment in the phases of middle childhood and beyond.

2.4.2 Middle childhood

Recently, research has begun to address the concept and measurement of attachment in middle childhood, a relatively neglected area of study. Middle childhood is an important period of development, and attachment during this time is influenced by the broader developmental context (Kern, 2008). During this phase, the child's social world expands and they begin to spend more time away from parents, who then exercise less control and influence over the interactions they have with the environment. Peers in particular begin to have a greater influence. An important aspect of parenting during this time is the need to change the nature of supervision provided from that of parental control to a shared, co-regulation process (Maccoby, 1984). Middle childhood brings changes in cognitive development such as improved memory, metacognition and mental flexibility. Such changes also necessitate changes to parent-child attachments. Kerns (2008) suggests that one change may be in the regulation of the attachment behavioural system. Emotional availability of caregivers replaces the need for physical proximity, with the child better able to manage longer separations and increased distance from attachment figures. There are also fewer situations which activate attachment behaviours, as the child becomes more self-reliant. This relates to Bowlby's (1973) conceptualization of the goal-corrected partnership, established before the age of three years, where the child begins to develop relationships with caregivers that are more complex and is able to recognize the goals and plans of the adult to whom they are attached. Up to this point, the child has focused on having their own needs met, and the attachment bond is a rather inequitable relationship. Gradually, these partnerships mature, with increased opportunities for reciprocal interactions. It has been suggested that this shift in attachment may materialize later than Bowlby indicated, appearing in middle childhood, rather than earlier (Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posada, & Richters, 1991). Children in this phase may also be able to acquire more complex strategies that include other ways to achieve the set goal and be able to assess and alter plans as required (Marvin & Brittner, 2008; Mayseless, 2005; Kern, 2008). Middle childhood is also

likely to see changes in IWMs occurring as a result of the new emerging cognitive abilities mentioned above. These IWMs may become detailed and organised, but there is debate about whether they can as yet alter a general model of attachment relationships, referred to as one's state of mind with respect to attachment (Kern, 2008; Main et al., 1985). Certainly, as far as assessing attachment is concerned, childhood representations are still assessed in relation to significant caregivers, reflecting the still limited abstraction ability of the typical middle childhood child.

It would seem that parents remain important attachment figures for children in this phase, and are still sought, over peer relationships, for support. However, at times, and particularly in the absence of parents, children may direct attachment behaviours towards their peers, perhaps preparing them for the transition that occurs as they enter adolescence (Mayseless, 2005). A further difference in this age group is the use of secondary attachment figures to augment primary attachment relationships to parents. The child exhibits greater diversification of attachment, which may include grandparents or siblings (Kern, 2008).

This study chose to focus on mothers who currently have at least one child in the developmental phase of middle childhood, because of the understanding that the attachment relationship is still likely to be central to their mothering role, and therefore potentially more readily available to access for exploration of their experience.

2.4.3 Adolescence

Adolescence is a transitional period for all facets of the maturing person and this includes the attachment system (Allen, 2008). The psychosocial development that takes place in adolescence produces significant changes in the meaning and expression of attachment processes (Ruhl, Dolan, & Buhrmester, 2015). As adolescents attain formal operations and cognitive capacity, they become able to reflect on abstracted, generalized representations of attachment relationships; what Main referred to as moving to the level of representation (Main et al., 1985). The cognitive and emotional advances of adolescence allow the individual to reflect upon and modify their states of mind regarding attachment. The teenager is better able to compare relationships with different attachment figures and in so doing, can “de-idealize” parents (Allen, 2008; Steinberg, 2005). Clearly, this has implications for change in internal working models of attachment, as the adolescent becomes able to operate metacognitively on this reflection and use it to reconstruct their own state of mind regarding to attachment.

Research in this field has explored how continuities and discontinuities in attachment classifications are reflected into the adolescent years (Allen & Miga, 2010; Hamilton, 2000). Approaches to the measurement of attachment representations in adolescents have received much attention, in particular, the use of the Adult Attachment Inventory [AAI] (Allen, 2008; Allen & Miga, 2010), which has been used to assess the adolescent state of mind regarding attachment. An interesting link is that autonomous/secure adolescents seem to have better emotional regulatory capacity. The development of this may have been facilitated by their own secure attachment relationships in childhood, but may also have been informed by other factors, such as life experiences. The AAI then has important implications as a predictor of caregiving skills as it reflects the social emotional regulation capacities of the individual. This may then have important relevance to a young person's ability to provide sensitive, attuned and reflective caregiving to their own child (Allen & Miga, 2010). Clearly, in light of the focus of this study, such capacities and the way in which they evolved would be important.

Adolescence is a time in life during which the individual seems to make conscious and deliberate attempts not to rely on attachment figures, even when their attachment needs are activated. Instead, there is a desire to attempt to regulate emotion independently using alternative coping methods such as peer relationships or internal cognitive strategies (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986). So while the attachment system starts to have a less prominent role in the life of the adolescent, the challenge of emotional regulation takes its place. However, the efficacy with which the youngster is able to negotiate these unfolding emotional challenges may be a natural outgrowth of their prior attachment experience (Allen et al., 2003; Allen & Miga, 2010; Ruhl, Dolan, & Buhrmester, 2015). The implications of how childhood and adolescent attachment concerns are negotiated will be discussed in the section which follows.

2.4.4 Attachment patterns and adult relating

A key concern in attachment research is how security and attachment patterns change and develop over time (Stevenson-Hinde, 2007). This is highly relevant to forming a developmental perspective within this theoretical framework. In childhood it is likely that changes to the IWM are only made by direct experience (Atwool, 2006). A change in attachment style of a child would indicate that there had been a change in caregiver-child interactions of some form, either for the better or worse, which may be the result of external circumstances impacting on the dyad (Crowell & Treboux, 1995; Stevenson-Hinde, 2007).

As Wallin (2007) explains, the most functional models of attachment are truly “working” because they have a flexible quality that makes them open to modification due to new experience. This allows for Black’s (2004) concept of the “earned secure” person, who may not have received optimal caregiving but has become a securely attached adult by virtue of choices and relationships held later in their development. For Bowlby (1973), change could happen through the influence of new emotional relationships combined with the attainment of formal operational thought, which would provide the metacognitive capacity required to reflect on and reinterpret both prior and current experiences (Cassidy, 2008; Wallin, 2007). He did note that IWMs often resist revision, and so this process can be complex as a result of the IWMs often functioning outside of conscious awareness and also due to self-protective defences (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Wallin, 2007). Although Bowlby proposed the concept of IWMs as providing the blueprints for later relationships throughout life, he did not suggest that there was a critical period for this in infancy, which would then determine relationships for the lifespan (Crowell & Treboux, 1995). Instead he identified the strong trend for continuity in parent-child interactions, which then feeds back into the attachment behaviour system and reinforces IWMs. So then, not only do parent-child relationships impact on the individual personality characteristics a child develops (and are themselves influenced by them too), these relationships also affect patterns of family organization and have a role to play in the intergenerational transmission of family patterns (Hamilton, 2000).

From the perspective of lifespan development, the conceptualization of IWMs is highly significant, as it provides a way to understand attachment as a bond that ties people across time, remaining evident in adulthood and in parenting practices (Crowell & Treboux, 1995). The ability to mentally represent concepts is the key to understanding the differences in expressions of attachment in children and adults. Adults clearly have greater cognitive capacity to conduct relationships. The influence of mental representations on the attachment behaviour systems, and how this changes from childhood to adulthood, is the link to understanding the lifespan influence of attachment. It is not that attachment ceases to be important, but rather that it manifests in different ways. This links to Crowell and Treboux’s (1995) discussion of Ainsworth’s findings about the form and function of the attachment behaviour system in adult life. They note the similarities in proximity-seeking behaviour with the attachment figure, for example a romantic partner, and the likelihood of seeking them out as a secure base if the person is stressed. However, what makes secure adult attachments different to childhood attachments is the reciprocal nature of the relationship. Also, adult relationships may involve, regardless of the health of the attachment bond, a variety of roles, such as sexual partner, friend and provider of a sense of success or competence (Crowell & Treboux, 1995). It was Mary Main’s research into adult attachment patterns using the Adult

Attachment Interview (AAI) which identified four patterns of adult attachment. These are secure/autonomous, preoccupied, dismissing and unresolved/disorganised (Atwool, 2006) these correspond to those identified in children, namely secure, ambivalent, avoidant and disorganised. Adult outcomes are not predetermined by their childhood categorization, although the correlation between the two is high. Thus attachment theory's significance for lifespan development was enhanced as the impact of these early patterns was shown to be evident in later adult functioning (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008; Senior, 2009). This is in correspondence with Bowlby's (1988) argument that IWMs are particularly activated by parenthood, increasing the chances of transmission of attachment patterns across generations. In exploring for this study the experience of mothering from an intergenerational perspective, such understanding is important.

2.5 SPECIFIC ISSUES

For the purpose of this study, several issues pertinent to attachment and the concerns and life experiences of the participants require elaboration. These are explored in this section.

2.5.1 Adoption

Foster care and adoption may present disruptions to children's innate tendency to develop attachment relationships to caregivers. However, due to the relative flexibility of the human caregiving system, this challenge need not result in irreparable harm. Depending on both pre and post-placement conditions, and the child's resilience, the outcome may be positive. Nevertheless, as Dozier and Rutter (2008) explain, adoption and foster care are challenging situations for both the child and surrogate parents, and some adoptions fail. A comprehensive discussion on attachment implications in adoption is beyond the scope of this review, but it is important to note that much research has been conducted in this area. Findings differentiate between children adopted in early infancy and those adopted later in life, with more optimistic outcomes evident for the former, particularly when adoption takes place before six months of age (Dozier & Rutter, 2008). Adoptees face a slightly higher risk for insecure and disorganized attachment than their non-adopted peers (Dozier & Rutter, 2008; van den Dries, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009; van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006). Children older than one year at the time of adoption are more likely to be classified as insecurely attached, than peers who were adopted before the age of one (van den Dries et al., 2009). Parents of adopted children face the task of building a reciprocal relationship of trust and security with a child who has been separated from their primary caregiver. Complicating factors include children who are older, those who have experienced a period of institutional care, or suffered abuse or neglect (Coakley & Berrick, 2008).

The human attachment system can adapt to a variety of caregiving circumstances and subsequently, despite early adversities, research indicates that most adopted children are able to successfully form attachment relationships to new caregivers (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Braff, & Singer, 1984; Dozier & Rutter, 2008; Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, & Waters, 1985). Nurturing, consistent substitute care can result not only in the formation of attachment relationships, but in security of attachment. This finding is supported both theoretically and empirically. Bowlby (1969, pp. xi-xii) indicated that children could attach to a “permanent mother substitute” and other writers (Singer et al., 1985) found that, in comparison to non-adoptive mother-infant pairs, most adoptive mothers and their infants develop secure attachment relationships. Roberson (2006) hypothesized that adoptive parents become the *psychological parents* to children in their care, and do not need a biological bond to serve this role.

Bowlby (1958) initially promoted the idea of a sensitive period for forming attachment, stating that if this had not occurred by 2½ years of age it was “almost useless” (p. 14). However, he later extended this to slightly beyond the fifth year of life while still emphasizing that forging an attachment relationship would become more difficult the older the child became (Bowlby, 1973; MacLean, 2003). More recent research (Hoffman, Marvin, Cooper, & Powell, 2006; MacLean, 2003; van den Dries et al., 2009) challenges the notion of a defined sensitive period for attachment, emphasizing the role of factors such as maternal sensitivity and attachment-enhancing interventions as agents of change in attachment styles.

2.5.2 Role reversal

Role reversal can be conceptualized as a child attachment strategy which disrupts the attachment bond by inverting the relational dynamics between parent and child (Fivaz-Dèpeursinge, Frascarolo, Lopes, Dimitrova & Favez, 2007; Zeanah & Klitzke, 1991). In such a relationship the parent looks to their child to meet their emotional needs for support, parenting, intimacy, or companionship, and the child undertakes to attempt to respond to this solicitation for care (Cassidy, 2008; Fivaz-Dèpeursinge et al., 2007; Macfie, Fitzpatrick, Rivas, & Cox, 2008; Macfie, Mcelwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005). Bowlby (1969/1982) firmly asserted that when the roles of parent and child are reversed, with the parent attempting to seek security from the child, it is “almost always not only a sign of pathology in the parent but also a cause of it in the child” (p.377). This has been supported in more recent literature and research (Fivaz-Dèpeursinge et al., 2007; Katz, Petracca, & Rabinowitz, 2009). Writers on parenting support this concern, citing how enmeshed over-protectiveness and role-reversal can be linked to psychopathology for children and may run on into adulthood (Macfie et al.,

2005). The mechanism of how this occurs is important however, as role reversal is not pathological in and of itself (Hooper, 2007; Jurkovic, Morrel, & Casey, 2001; Mayseless, Bartholomew, Henderson, & Trinke, 2004). It becomes problematic when such relating by the parent demands chronic, age-inappropriate contributions from a child, resulting in the child's own developmental needs not being met (Mayseless et al., 2004). In addition, further detrimental outcomes are likely if the child's attempts to respond to the parental need are either not acknowledged or are devalued (Chase, 1999; Jurkovic, 1997, 2014). Excessive role reversal in childhood has been shown to lead to difficulties in developing independence, which then increases the likelihood of enmeshment and preoccupation with relationships. Furthermore, extreme role reversal is expected to promote an inclination to interact with others through disproportionate caregiving at the expense of satisfying one's own emotional needs (Bowlby, 1978; Chase, 1999; Mayseless et al., 2004), as caregiving and attachment become inevitably associated (West & Keller, 1991). Termed *compulsive care-giving* by Bowlby (1978), this pattern of adult attachment behaviour sees individuals emphasizing the importance of providing care in relationships rather than receiving it (Lapsley, Varshney, & Aalsma, 2000).

"Thus, from early childhood, the person who develops in this way has found that the only affectional bond available is one in which he must always be the caregiver and that the only care he can ever receive is the care he gives himself" (Bowlby, 1978, p. 14).

The risk of dysfunctional relationships later in life is high for such individuals as they lose their ability to express needs or ask for attention, while still retaining a deeply, unsatisfied neediness and sense of emotional deprivation (West & Keller, 1991). Life events such as illness, death or separation from an attachment figures are likely to be extremely stressful for such individuals, and difficulties in intimate partnerships and relationships with their own children, including repetition of role reversal patterns, can also be anticipated (Lapsley et al., 2000).

2.5.3 Culture

Ainsworth's research in Uganda (1967) raised important issues for cross-cultural research in the field of attachment, namely the universality of the mother-infant attachment bond and the authenticity and prevalence of the three attachment classifications (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Ainsworth also explored the contextual dimensions of the development of attachment, acknowledging the role of specific approaches to caregiving (Ainsworth, 1963, 1967). It is therefore not a new concern to acknowledge the cultural dimensions of attachment. However, as much of the research since the Ugandan studies has been

conducted in Western cultures, it is understandable that questions have been raised about how generalizable the attachment concepts are.

Since Ainsworth's investigations then, the universality of attachment has undergone debate in the literature, but seems to have stood the test of time (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). It is therefore accepted that despite cultural caregiving differences, all children seek to attach to one or more caregiving figures. However, the cultural specificity of the distribution of attachment behaviours has also been explored by researchers. A further question is the cultural specificity of the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) as an indicator of attachment. LeVine and Miller (1990) proposed that cultural differences in infant care practices account for differences that have been observed in response to the SSP, rather than this being evidence of a lack of universality of attachment response categories.

In the investigation of attachment in Japan, a study by Durrett, Otaki and Richards (1984) in Tokyo showed attachment patterns consistent with the global distribution. However, a separate study reported by Takahashi (1986), produced results showing an over-representation of the ambivalent-resistant category. Takahashi (1990) questioned whether the strange situation showed cross-cultural validity because it appeared not to predict competence after infancy. In addition, Doi (1989) identified the Japanese concept of *amae* as playing a similar role in Japanese family relationships, but conflicting with attachment in that it implies dependency. As such, this concept was seen as a more appropriate alternative to attachment in the Japanese culture. Based on these studies, Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, and Morelli (2000) questioned the validity of attachment research in cross-cultural settings, contesting Bowlby's (1980) model for being ethnocentric. However, a number of empirical follow-up studies in Japan showed attachment patterns consistent with global norms (Behrens et al., 2007; Kazui, Endo, Tanaka, Sakagami, & Suganuma, 2000; Vereijken, 1996). Vereijken (1996) also concluded that *amae* and attachment were distinguishable independent dimensions and thus neither should supercede the other.

Research in Africa has shown support for the core hypotheses of attachment theory. Among the Gusii people of Kenya (Kermorian & Leiberman, 1986) for example, findings provided support for culturally specific attachment behaviours, used by infants to express emotion on separation and reunion. The Gusii babies, accustomed to receiving a handshake by their mothers and caregivers, anticipated this response, in the same way as infants from Western samples expected a hug from their mothers on reunion. Furthermore, despite the presence of more than one mother figure, the Gusii infants did become uniquely attached to a protective caregiver.

In the South African impoverished informal settlement of Khayelitsha, research was conducted using the SSP, as well as tools for the measurement of sensitive responsiveness between mother and infant (Tomlinson et al., 2005). The outcome revealed numbers of secure infants in keeping with norms of Western samples, despite cultural differences and the adverse socio-economic conditions in which these infants were being raised. This provides support for the universality of attachment categorizations cross-culturally. Furthermore, the high incidence of postpartum depression among the mothers was shown to impact on attachment insecurity and disorganization, with maternal sensitivity at two months and 18 months predicting attachment security, independent of the presence of depression. This supports the sensitivity hypothesis of attachment theory cross-culturally (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). The strong empirical evidence for the universality of the secure base phenomenon has been highlighted by various attachment researchers (Posada & Jacobs, 2001; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 2001; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Van IJzendoorn and his colleagues (van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988; Sagi, van IJzendoorn, & Koren-Karie, 1991) meta-analyzed several cross-cultural studies including work from Africa, involving the Ganda, Dogon and Gusii people, China, Japan, Israel, Western Europe, and the United States. All these studies made use of the SSP. Their findings confirmed that in any culture, attachment security is characteristic of the majority of infants (Pierrehumbert et al., 2009). Even in Takahashi's (1986) sample, the proportion of infants categorized as secure does not differ from that found in the meta-analyses.

Keller (2013) discussed socialization patterns which deviate from those of Western middle-class perspectives, such as the practice of multiple caregiving arrangements. While this is a concern frequently cited by critics of attachment theory's sensitivity to culture, attachment theory recognizes the likelihood of multiple caregivers and attachment bonds in a child's life, although it is also acknowledged that a hierarchy exists (Cassidy, 2008). Alternative caregivers are understood to complement attachment relationships by augmenting care offered in primary attachment bonds, for example through the provision of physical needs or play. This has been validated in cross-cultural research (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008).

Although from research it appears that a secure pattern of attachment is the norm (approximately two thirds of the subjects), there are differences between the samples in how the insecure subcategories are divided into avoidant, resistant and disorganized (Pierrehumbert et al., 2009). LeVine and Miller's (1990) suggestion mentioned above, makes a plausible case for why this may be so. It is also noteworthy that in van IJzendoorn and

Kroonenberg's (1988) meta-analysis, intracultural variations appeared to be quite considerable, as opposed to intercultural differences. As Pierrehumbert and colleagues (2009) delineate, differences due to socio-economic status inside a specific country were greater than the differences between countries. It can be concluded then that even if attachment behaviours in the SSP are sensitive to context, such as socio-economic status, the secure categorization seems to be notably cross-culturally consistent.

Keller (2013) proposed that attachment theory needs to be reconceptualized in a culturally sensitive framework. She identified key areas for caution in applying attachment related concepts and research to all cultures. These have also been explored by other critics of attachment theory's cross-cultural applicability (Rothbaum et al., 2000). Different attachment strategies could be seen as different responses to varying contexts and adaptational challenges (Belsky, 1999) rather than assuming that there is one healthy strategy (secure) and then deviations from this (insecure). However, while such caution about value judgements is important and certainly aids understanding as it questions why a child attaches in a certain way, rather than judging the child or mother, it has been shown that children rated as secure on the SSP tend to adjust better in later life, albeit perhaps within certain cultural contexts (Jaffari-Bimmel, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Mooijaart, 2006; Weinfield et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Keller (2013) recommends that great caution should be taken with defining independence as a prerequisite for healthy human development. For her, if this is held to be one of the ideological foundations of attachment theory, implicit in the concept of security, then there are consequences for defining health, parenting quality and goals of childrearing when working cross-culturally.

Also, in considering culture, Keller (2013) suggests that attention should be paid to what is understood as the goal of attachment. If the focus is purely survival, then a classification of secure attachment is not necessarily better than insecure responses for maximizing this. Instead, it would be the behaviour that guarantees survival, dependent on the context that is valued. It is also important not to make cross-cultural judgements about maternal sensitivity. For example, the assumption that a mother must allow the expression of will and independence as these are desirable is not accurate for some non-Western cultures. Interference and extreme directing may be frowned upon in Western parenting, but in certain cultures, directing and controlling children's behaviour is considered the ideal parenting approach (Keller 2013). What is normative in one culture may then even be considered pathological in another. However, if we are looking to relational capacity, cognitive and emotional development, then research seems to indicate that securely attached children and adults are better equipped – although clearly, once again, such findings are representative of

certain contexts (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Keller (2013) argues that the organization of the caretaking system has implications for how attachment is defined.

With regard to adult representations of attachment, meta-analysis of 33 studies employing the Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI) determined that the dispersal of the AAI classifications was, with minor exceptions, constant across countries (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Similar to the SSP research, intracultural differences appeared more important than intercultural differences. The division of AAI categories in samples with very low socio-economic status differed significantly from normative nonclinical samples, and the dismissing category was over-represented (Pierrehumbert et al., 2009).

Cross-cultural research has not refuted the importance of attachment as a universal phenomenon, nor has it countered what is understood about the normativity of attachment classifications (Agishtein, & Brumbaugh, 2013; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). There is less evidence for the competence and sensitivity hypotheses, and therefore additional studies are required with this emphasis. In any research it is important to understand that there are variations in how attachment bonds will be formed, which may be culturally specific (Keller, 2013). There remains a need for further, culturally sensitive and diverse research to assess the core propositions of attachment theory in non-Western contexts.

2.5.4 Infertility

Negotiating infertility is recognized to bring with it intense psychological stress (Van den Broeck, D' Hooghe, Enzlin, & Demyttenaere, 2010). While it would make sense that a mother's struggle with infertility may influence how she relates to an infant conceived through fertility treatment, research on this issue in the field of attachment theory is sparse. What has been explored is how Adult Attachment Inventory (AAI) classification can be linked with how a woman copes with infertility (Mikulincer, Horesh, Levy-Shiff, Manovich, & Shalev, 1998). Furthermore, the AAI classification of their partners was also shown to be significant. Either partner, if classified as autonomous-secure, reported less distress, more wellbeing and better adjustment than anxious-ambivalent or ambivalent individuals (Mikulincer et al., 1998). In another study, it has been found that women struggling with infertility of unknown biological cause tend to have an avoidant attachment style (Justo, Maia, Ferreira-Diniz, Santos, & Moreira, 1997). A recent study explored how the stress of infertility could activate attachment patterns in either member of the couple (Donarellia, Kivlighan, Allegrac, Lo Coco, 2016) and previous research indicated that secure attachment is a moderator for psychological wellbeing and an important resource in times of stress (Mikulincer & Shaver,

2008). Although not informed by attachment theory, Golombok and colleagues' (1996) investigation indicated that mothers of children conceived by fertility treatment expressed more warmth towards their child, were more emotionally involved with their children, interacted more and reported less parenting-related stress than mothers who had conceived without assistance.

2.5.5 Religion and spirituality

Attachment theory has been used as a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the psychology of religion and spirituality (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Hall, 2007). The basic premise applied from the theory is that the deity qualifies as an attachment figure (Hall, 2007; McDonald, Beck, Allison & Norworthy, 2005). Kirkpatrick (1998) cited evidence for the existence of characteristic attachment behaviours in relationship with God, such as viewing God as close in proximity through prayer and the belief that God is omnipresent. These are aligned with attachment behaviours seen in the infant such as seeking and maintaining proximity, using the caregiver as a secure base from which to explore or as a safe haven, and experiencing anxiety when separated from the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1985).

Further premises stemming from research in applying attachment theory to religion and spirituality have been compiled by Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2013). The first premise considers how generalizations of attachment-related mental representations may be conveyed in the religious and spiritual context. This has been widely discussed in the literature and two outcomes have been put forward concerning the relationship between attachment to God and working models of attachment, namely the compensation and the correspondence hypotheses (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2005). The compensation hypothesis states that it is possible for the relationship to God to compensate for an inadequate caregiver, adult romantic bonds or both. The correspondence hypothesis says that an individual's attachment style will be consistent across types of relationships, such as caregivers, romantic partners and God. It seems clear from writers in this field that evidence exists for both compensation and correspondence outcomes (Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Hiebler-Ragger, Falhansl-Scheinecker, Birnhuber, Fink, & Unterrainer, 2016; McDonald et al., 2005).

A second premise from research in attachment and religion suggests that the quality of caregiving experiences and security of attachment will affect how receptive the individual will be to their parent's religious standards (Granqvist et al., 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013). Thirdly, research findings argue that religion can serve the role of surrogate

attachment figure, thereby helping to regulate distress and provide a sense of “felt security” despite life experiences of insensitive caregiving or insecure attachments (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Hall, 2007; McDonald et al., 2005). Lastly, research has also shown that individual attachments to God may affect psychosocial adjustment (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2013).

2.6 CONTINUITY/STABILITY AND DISCONTINUITY

2.6.1 Intergenerational transmission

Fraiberg, a child psychoanalyst, published with her colleagues a poignant paper entitled “Ghosts in the nursery: A psychoanalytic approach to the problem of impaired infant-mother relationships” (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1980). Referring to how a mother creates a relationship with her child out of the psychological residue of her own relational history, this paper described how “in every nursery there are ghosts...they are visitors of the unremembered past of the parents; uninvited guests at the christening” (p.164). The acknowledgement of the influence of the past on current behaviour is evident in considerable psychological research and attachment theory has contributed significantly in this regard.

Intergenerational transmission of attachment refers to the process through which parents’ mental representations of their previous attachment experiences impact their parenting behaviour and subsequently the quality of attachment their children form towards them (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Fonagy, Steele & Steele, 1991; Hesse, 2008, Main et al., 1985). In studies where the focus was on Western culture, a powerful association (75% concordance rate) was demonstrated between security of the parents’ mental depictions of attachment and the security of the parent-child attachment (van IJzendoorn, 1995; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). That transfer of attachment occurs has been robustly validated by research (Bernier et al., 2014; Bretherton, 1990; Fonagy & Target, 2005; Verhage et al., 2016) but how this process takes place remains something of a mystery.

In his paper on adult attachment representations, parental responsiveness and infant attachment, van IJzendoorn (1995) challenged researchers to try to account for what he termed the “transmission gap” (p.400). This “gap” refers to what is and is not, as yet, explained about the determinants of attachment security in infants (Belsky, 2002b). Van IJzendoorn’s (1995) challenge was for further study into the mechanisms through which parental attachment representations affect children’s attachment relationships. In particular, the transmission gap is a reference to the fact that, contrary to expectations, measured maternal sensitivity does not fully account for the link between a mother’s own state of mind concerning attachment and her infant’s attachment classification (Belsky & Fearon, 2008;

George & Solomon, 2008; Slade et al., 2005) and that therefore, alternative explanation is required.

Current research continues to explore the mechanisms through which parents' IWMs affect child-parent attachment and relating (Behrens, Haltigan, & Bahm, 2016; Berlin et al., 2008; Bernier et al., 2014). The suggestion that parents' IWMs and parenting behaviours are a primary influence on the quality of parent-child attachment, is important to this research study, which offers a qualitative, in-depth exploration into mother-child relating. Various recent findings have offered explanations which may in part help to close the transmission gap. These include those which highlight the role of maternal sensitivity, reflective functioning, mentalizing and a multi-dimensional approach. The section which follows explores the debate on the transmission gap by discussing these in more detail.

According to Bernier and colleagues (2014), the evidence for the intergenerational transmission of attachment is one of the most robust outcomes of attachment research to date. Findings have consistently indicated that the security of infants' attachment relationships with their caregivers can be predicted by considering the caregivers' "state of mind with respect to attachment" (Bernier et al., 2014, p. 1852). This is assessed by the caregiver's organization of their narrative during the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) when speaking of their childhood relationships with their own parents (Main et al., 1985). Research with diverse population groups has produced consistent results. This includes samples across varying socio-economic statuses (Bus & Van IJzendoorn, 1992), mothers who were experiencing clinical depression (McMahon, Barnett, Kowalenko, & Tennant, 2006), teenage mothers (Tarabulsky et al., 2005) and a variety of different cultures (Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Rudolph, & Grossmann, 1988; Hautamäki, Hautamäki, Neuvonen, & Maliniemi-Piispanen, 2010; Sagi et al., 1997). While most studies have employed the Strange Situation Procedure to assess child attachment even studies using alternate measures, produced similar results (Beliveau & Moss, 2009; Miljkovitch, Pierrehumbert, Bretherton, & Halfon, 2004).

The first meta-analytic study of the association between maternal and child attachment (van IJzendoorn, 1995) confirmed its robustness. Verhage and colleagues' (2016) recent presentation of preliminary meta-analytic findings again confirms the results, although they suggest that effect sizes may be significantly less than initially thought. Nevertheless, they remain substantial. Therefore, despite the suggestion that the size of the association between maternal and child attachment may have been overestimated in earlier studies, the consistency of the association is accepted as robust. However, despite such conclusive and

extensive research into the intergenerational transmission of attachment, the reasons for the association between maternal state of mind relating to attachment and infants' attachment security status have been challenging to formulate.

Research making use of genetically informed designs has suggested that genetic factors cannot explain the transmission of mother–child attachment patterns (Bokhorst, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Fearon, van IJzendoorn, Fonagy, & Schuengel, 2003; Fearon, van IJzendoorn, Fonagy, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Schuengel, & Bokhorst, 2006; Roisman & Fraley, 2008). For Bernier et al. (2014) this then implies that the process of transmission must be environmentally informed, resulting in the caregivers' attachment state of mind affecting the quality of their child's attachment relationship with them.

The purpose of this research project then, was not to explore if intergenerational transmission occurs. This has already been thoroughly established. Rather, for this exploration, it was hoped that light would be shed on the question of *how* such continuity or change has evolved for the women with whom the project engaged. Specifically, it was decided to do this through the lens of attachment theory. Ultimately, it is hoped that this exploration may lend something of worth to the understanding of the mechanisms involved in this process of transmission. The nature of this project, being an IPA study, takes a different approach to most attachment theory research, which measures child and adult attachment patterns and investigates quantitative relationships between responses. This study did not attempt to quantify and assess the security of either the participants or their children, but rather aimed to have the participants reflect on their own experience of mothering and being mothered. It is noteworthy that in the process of data collection for this project, developing insight into the intergenerational transmission of parenting for the participating mothers proved to be highly beneficial to them.

2.6.2 Maternal sensitivity

Various studies in the field of attachment research have tried to identify how transmission of attachment security happens and a variety of explanations have been offered. An initial consideration was that a mother's ability to respond to her infant's emotional needs sensitively and appropriately, referred to as maternal sensitivity, would provide the link between her adult attachment state of mind and infant security of attachment (Main et al., 1985). Mary Main and her colleagues, building on the ground-breaking writings and research of Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1979), began to ask questions about the links between parental attachment experiences and their children's attachment organization (Slade, Sadler, & Mayes, 2005). This research saw the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)

as a means through which adult attachment representations could be captured and assessed. The hypotheses for this research were that parents' life events would inform their capacity to respond sensitively to their infants and that this would impact and predict the quality of their infant's attachment.

Maternal sensitivity was considered for many years to be a key element in this transmission process (Slade et al., 2005). A responsive mother, who attended to her child's need for comfort and proximity, was thought herself to be secure in relation to attachment. And her "quality" maternal responsiveness was considered to produce attachment security in her own children (Slade et al., 2005). Initially, it was suggested that a mother's behaviour conveyed her state of mind to her child (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Main et al., 1985) because a mother with a coherent representation of her own cognitive and emotional processes, would be best equipped to intuit and respond to the comfort, proximity and safety needs of her child.

However, research has not been able to show that maternal sensitivity and responsiveness is the link between infant and adult attachment (van IJzendoorn, 1995). Van IJzendoorn (1995), in trying to corroborate this model, found that only 23% of the association between the mother's attachment state of mind and the security of her infant could be accounted for by maternal sensitivity. It was then that he labelled the remaining variance "the transmission gap" and queried what in fact the mechanism of transmission was. Certainly, maternal sensitivity, as currently measured, does not appear to offer a satisfactory or adequate explanation of the intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns.

What emerged from Main, Kaplan and Cassidy's (1985) research, instead of the predicted link between maternal sensitivity and infant attachment, provided another direction for the search for the transmission gap solution. It was noted that the degree to which the parents had integrated and made meaning of their own early childhood experiences emerged as being the determinant of their infant's attachment security (Main et al., 1985; Slade et al., 2005). Parents who told coherent, believable, integrated and undistorted accounts of their relationships in early life, had children who were more secure at one year of age. This was regardless of the nature of the parents' childhood experiences. Main viewed these parents as possessing "secure" internal working models (IWM) of attachment, as they were capable of accessing and integrating a diverse range of emotions and thoughts relating to attachment, without distorting them. These findings have been replicated many times in the years that followed (Slade et al., 2005). Such replication confirms that a mother's capacity to regulate and organize her own thoughts and emotions about her relationships with her own primary caregivers is strongly connected to and influences her capacity to regulate, organize

and sensitively respond to her own child's needs for safety, comfort, proximity and care. (Carlson & Sroufe, 1995; Main, 1995, 2000; van IJzendoorn, 1995). The description provided by Main of the link between the quality and organization of adult attachment stories and the status of infant attachment, was the foundational evidence for what has become known as the "intergenerational transmission of attachment" (Slade et al., 2005, p. 285). However, the manner in which this attachment-informed state of mind is conveyed from a mother to her child remains a question which has continued to occupy researchers.

A goal of this research is to develop further insight into this issue. A number of mechanisms have been proposed as important for this process, but as yet, there is no consensus about whether any is dominant or the precise manner in which they may interact to influence infant attachment. These mechanisms include: parents' reflective understanding of their own early attachment relationships, which may facilitate their relating to their children (Allen, 2011); the mother's capacity to understand her own mental states and to hold her child's mental states in mind (Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade, 2005); the capacity of the mother to keep in mind, hold and regulate the child's emotional experience (Fonagy et al. 1995). All these mechanisms relate to the understanding of state of mind and will be discussed further in the next section.

2.6.3 Mentalizing, reflective functioning and Theory of Mind (ToM).

The construct of mentalization emerged from Fonagy and his colleagues' (Fonagy, Steele, Moran, Steele, & Higgitt, 1991) attempts to operationalize and enlarge Main's idea of metacognitive monitoring, recognizing the presence of some capacity which informs "states of mind in relation to attachment" (Slade, 2008). They were trying to understand what might be the core capacity held by secure individuals, and absent in those not deemed secure. Theory of Mind (ToM) is the conceptual framework for mentalizing, denoting an interconnected body of beliefs and desires, attributed to explain the behaviour of an individual (Fonagy et al., 2004). Reflective functioning, mind-mindedness or mentalization, are terms often used interchangeably to refer to the ability to attend to the mental states of the self and others within the context of attachment relationships (Fonagy, et al., 2004; Slade et al., 2005). It involves both the perception and interpretation of human behaviour as linked with intentional mental states such as desires, emotions, beliefs, needs, goals and reasons (Allen, Fonagy, & Bateman, 2008). Inherent in high level mentalizing or reflective functioning is the ability to regulate and envision both negative and disruptive mental states (Slade, 2008). In addition, when this capacity is well developed the individual is also able to appreciate the intrapersonal, interpersonal, causal and dynamic dimensions of mental states (Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade, 1999, 2008). The relevance of this for attachment theorists is that RF or mentalizing is considered to be a mechanism by which the mother-child

relationship exercises its influence on the attachment security of the child (Sharp & Fonagy, 2008).

2.6.3.1 Mentalizing and attachment history

RF or mentalizing is considered to play a pivotal role in the manner in which attachment security is transmitted from parent to child, making an understanding of this concept highly significant for this research study. Accurate and appropriate parental mentalizing of the child promotes secure attachment. This in turn positively stimulates the development of sound mentalizing capacity in the child, which facilitates the mentalizing child's capacity to form a secure attachment to the parent. Allen (2011) explains that parents' mentalizing in relation to their own early attachment relationships is advantageous to facilitating those parents' mentalizing of their children. Their children are likely to rely on them for emotional security when this is in place, as these securely attached children will anticipate that their parents will *hold their mind in mind*. Subsequently, well mentalized, securely attached children acquire the skill to become better mentalizers, as seen in their more empathic interactions with other children (Allen, 2011). Conversely, trauma in attachment relationships is considered to originate from a failure of parents' mentalizing in relation to their own attachment history, which impedes them providing this for their children (Allen, 2011; Wallin, 2007). This undesirable intergenerational cascade results in insecure attachment and impaired development for the next generation. Allen (2011) asserts that mentalizing is the process for the establishment and maintenance of secure attachment and emotional regulation. However, attachment security is acknowledged by attachment theorists to be not only the result of parental behaviour. A range of child characteristics, most notably temperament, can influence or disrupt the parent's capacity to engage in accurate and appropriate mentalizing (Fonagy et al., 2004; Sharp & Fonagy, 2008). The manner in which secure attachment is advanced via accurate and fitting parental mentalizing is therefore expected to be bidirectional. Main (1991) suggests that the early experiences of children with their caregivers are significant for their ensuing metacognitive knowledge and the evaluating of attachment experiences. Indeed, she proposes that these experiences with attachment figures may not only modify the contents of the child's mind, but also adjust their ability to organize these contents.

2.6.3.2 Maternal reflective functioning

As discussed previously, attachment theory traditionally emphasized the role of maternal sensitivity in the intergenerational transmission of attachment (Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger 2005). While the mechanisms underlying this transmission remain elusive, research has

shown that in fact mentalizing, or reflective functioning, plays a crucial role (Sharp & Fonagy, 2008; Slade et al., 2005).

In an effort to find this elusive piece of the intergenerational transmission of attachment puzzle, Slade, Sadler and Mayes (2005) and Kelly, Slade and Grienenberger (2005) hypothesized that maternal reflective functioning may be pivotal in intergenerational transmission of attachment. The term maternal reflective functioning refers to the mother's capacity to hold her baby and their mental states in mind (Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade, 2005). The mother's capacity to understand her own mental states, as well as the nature and function of her child's, is what enables her to provide an experience of physical and emotional security and comfort for her child. For Main (1991), security and insecurity of attachment were defined primarily in cognitive terms, conceptualizing the organization and integrity of an individual's representational models. Metacognitive monitoring was for her a hallmark of secure attachment in adults. By this, Main referred to the adult's ability to monitor their own complex and sometimes conflictual thoughts, emotions and discourse relating to attachment history, without using defensive processes (Slade et al., 2005). The coherence or incoherence of these narratives would then reflect secure or insecure attachment respectively. The mechanism underlying this process involves the construction of the internal working models. Memories, thoughts and emotions which cannot be integrated into a singular, coherent internal working model result in these incompatible experiences being split off. What follows is the creation of multiple, fragmented internal working models. These multiple IWMs are exhibited in the contradictory, incoherent or disjointed accounts of attachment provided by adults assessed to be disorganized or insecure in their attachments (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

These findings then raise the question of whether the variance in infant attachment classification that has previously been accounted for by adult attachment classification, can be better explained with reference to maternal reflective functioning. It may be that a mother's ability to think about her child in a reflective way is an aspect of the mechanism through which IWMs of attachment are passed intergenerationally. The ability to understand that people have mental states has been linked to the ability to develop a representation of self, an aspect of the IWM concept (Bretherton, 2005; Fonagy & Target, 1997). It is this reflective function that Fonagy and Target (1997) suggest acts as the foundation for future social understanding, due to generalizations from the early attachment relationships.

In Elizabeth Meins and her colleagues' study of 71 mothers (Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001), as well as measuring for maternal sensitivity, the researchers used both the

SSP and recordings from mother-child interactions from as early as six months to analyze and establish the proportions of mothers' utterances and behaviours that made definite reference to their child's mental states. This research indicated that the mothers of infants who were classified as securely attached made use of considerably more such references. Although the maternal sensitivity codings also predicted attachment security, the latter measures were stronger, indicating that parents' communication styles may be a critical part of the transmission of attachment.

Meins and colleagues used the term mind-minded to describe parents who tend to "treat their infants as individuals with minds, rather than merely entities with needs that must be met" (Meins et al., 2001, p. 332). Such parents are thought to use more psychological constructs in their talks with their infants and toddlers. This viewpoint therefore sees exposure to mental-state language and secure attachment as interconnected.

More recent research (Meins, Fernyhough, de Rosnay, Arnott, Leekam, & Turner, 2012) has distinguished between maternal sensitivity and mind-mindedness noting that appropriate mind-related comments and maternal sensitivity appear to assess separate aspects of infant-mother interaction. The concept of attunement is relevant to sound mind-mindedness, as the mother must accurately interpret the infant's likely internal state, if she is to respond effectively in this way. For Meins and her colleagues, "Focusing on mind-related discourse thus provides crucial information on the mother's psychological orientation toward her child" (Meins et al., 2012, pp.139). In this study of the exploration of mothers' experience of mothering and being mothered, cognisance was awarded to these concepts as potential dynamics of the intergenerational relating narrated by participants.

2.6.3.3 Reflective functioning and affect regulation

Fonagy et al. (1995) suggested that reflective functioning may be in part an aspect of the elusive transmission gap mechanism. Kelly and colleagues (2005) explored the relations between caregiving behaviour and maternal reflective functioning, expanding on both their separate and combined roles in the transmission of attachment across generations. So too, Slade et al. (2005) explored this further, showing that mothers who rated secure according to their attachment stories were more likely to have securely attached children. This was shown even when adult attachment was assessed before the baby was born (Fonagy et al., 1991). This research was used to reframe the ideas of metacognitive monitoring and attachment security, incorporating psychoanalytic understanding of affect regulation and inter-subjectivity, and the cognitive theorists' conceptualization of intentionality. Fonagy and colleagues argued that cognitive processing and representational models were inadequate

to explain intergenerational transmission of attachment (Fonagy et al., 1995). Instead they saw a need for the emphasis to be on interpersonal and intersubjective mechanisms, which they viewed as inherent in an individual's thinking about their own or others' internal mental and explicitly emotive experiences.

Attachment relationships are by nature constructed around the regulation of intense, frequently negative emotions. It therefore follows that any conceptualization of the internal processes essential to attachment security and intergenerational transmission must consider the capacity to think about emotions and how they relate to behaviours. The "reflective function" (RF) is the term given to these mechanisms for processing intersubjective and interpersonal experience (Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade et al., 2005). The RF then speaks to the adult's capacity to understand their own, or another person's, behaviour with reference to underlying mental states. For Fonagy et al. (1995) this RF enables a mother to hold her child's internal emotional experience in mind, because she is able to "hold" in her own mind, complex mental states. Such ability allows the mother to understand her child's behaviour, feelings and intentions. It is a process by which the mother gives meaning to the child's affective experience and having processed it, she "returns" it to the child in a more regulated form. This creates the foundation for the child to develop a sense of security, authenticity and safety. From this argument then, it follows that the RF may be the core capacity from which parents provide a secure base for their own children. This is achieved by the ability to access emotions and memories of their own early attachment experiences in a flexible and coherent manner. Clearly, even the most reflective of mothers are not this way all the time. What the measurement of RF depicts is a model of regulation and modulation of experiences, which under stress may need to be adjusted, but consistently serves to regulate and organize effectively. This is reminiscent of the writing of Winnicott (1965) and Stern (1985), as well as other theorists and clinicians, who eluded to the importance of the mother being able to "give voice" to her child's inner experience and in so doing, validating and making those experiences more palatable for the child. This process promotes child security by developing coherent internal working models, and establishing emotional balance and flexibility within the child.

2.6.4 A multidimensional approach

Bernier et al. (2014) propose two aspects for addressing the need for clarity of mechanisms of transmission. The first is a statistical issue which considers the approach to testing for mediation. The second, and relevant to this study, is the suggestion that it is important to widen the view of maternal caregiving behaviour.

The unexplained common variance between adult and infant attachment was argued by van IJzendoorn (1995) possibly to result from the measures of maternal behaviour employed not fully capturing all the relevant features of parent–child interactions which promote secure attachment. This led to De Wolff and van IJzendoorn (1997) conducting a meta-analytic review to examine the relevance of different parental behaviours in the unfolding of infant attachment. Several maternal behaviours, conceptually distinct from maternal sensitivity were found, such as synchrony and stimulation which produced comparable effect sizes in predicting infant attachment security. As a result, the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to the study of attachment-related maternal behaviours was emphasized (De Wolff and van IJzendoorn, 1997) as opposed to promoting only the contribution of maternal sensitivity.

Attachment theory lends itself to a multidimensional approach to explaining these phenomena. The theory proposes two separate but linked behavioural systems, namely the attachment system and the exploratory system (Bowlby, 1982) discussed in sections 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.3.2. The way in which infants balance and organize these two systems is an indication of their attachment security (Ainsworth, 1989). The balance of these is what is determined in the Strange Situation Procedure, and the term “secure-base behaviour” reflects how the infant moves between proximity-seeking and exploration behaviour (Ainsworth et al., 1978). As mentioned in section 2.3.3.2, the infant makes use of the attachment figure as a secure base from which to explore (Ainsworth et al., 1978). What facilitates this exploration however, is the parent’s sensitivity to their child’s distress. If the child is able to trust that the attachment figure will react and soothe should this be required, they are better able to explore with confidence, returning to the secure base as needed for comfort if a threat arises. Children who have learnt from past experience that their caregivers are willing and available to attend to their attachment needs, are more able to freely explore. However, in addition to the meeting of security needs, parental behaviours which specifically promote the child’s confidence in the context of exploration are also likely to contribute to attachment security outcomes (Bernier et al., 2014; Cassidy, 2008). Maternal behaviours which aim to provide the exploring child with both appropriate support and gentle challenge are equally important in the development of secure attachment as maternal sensitivity to comfort needs (Grossmann, Grossmann, Kindler, & Zimmermann, 2008).

Bernier et al. (2014) suggested that exploring parental behaviours directly and specifically aimed at supporting the child’s exploratory activity may open up new knowledge relating to the search for the caregiving foundations of attachment security.

Autonomy support, a term from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) speaks to those parenting behaviours with the goal of supporting children's autonomy, exploration and volition (Bernier et al., 2014). Such behaviours would contribute to the exploratory side of attachment security development. Research has found that maternal sensitivity and autonomy support behaviours each provided an explanation for a unique part of the variance in child attachment security (Whipple, Bernier, & Mageau, 2011). As Bernier et al. (2014) emphasize, despite the robust findings for the intergenerational transmission of attachment, the explanation for this reliable association has been very difficult to establish. They proposed that conceptual and statistical issues may have been responsible for limiting the identification of particular parenting behaviours explaining attachment transmission between generations. They therefore conducted research to investigate the ability of maternal behaviours from each side of the exploration–proximity balance “to jointly explain mother–child attachment transmission” (p. 1861). Simultaneously, they aimed to follow the best practices for mediation testing. Their research suggested that when combined, maternal sensitivity and maternal autonomy support behaviours completely accounted for the relationship between maternal and child attachment. Furthermore, they considered that each explained a unique aspect of this relationship, which was not accounted for by the other. Lastly, they noted that the mediated pathways were equivalent.

There is evidence that maternal attachment state of mind may be linked to both maternal sensitivity and also to individual differences in a range of parenting behaviours (Adam, Gunnar, & Tanaka, 2004; Eiden, Teti, & Corns, 1995; Ward & Carlson, 1995). However, Bernier et al. (2014) propose that previous research on intergenerational transmission appears to have relied on a single aspect of maternal behaviour to explain mother–child attachment links. The study under discussion suggests that considering both sides of the exploration–proximity balance may be important for assessing child attachment security as well as for understanding the origins in parenting behaviours.

2.7 CRITICISMS OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

Every theory has its advocates and its critics and attachment theory is no exception. Despite the abundance of research in this field, criticism remains both for the methods employed in studies (Berghaus, 2011) and for the applicability of these concepts beyond infancy (Berghaus, 2011; Goodwin, 2003; Slater, 2007). However, that having been said, some of the critiques result from misconceptions of the original focus of the theory, and others hold validity for how current research has veered from the seminal ideas of Bowlby and Ainsworth.

Berghaus (2011), speaking from the perspective that inferred models of mental processes are unscientific, stipulates that current methods of investigation in attachment research may be flawed as they have moved increasingly away from a “natural science approach” (p.7). He cites Kagan’s (1996) critique of many psychological theories, questioning how experiences of infants can be held to create enduring emotional or cognitive patterns which influence later life.

Slater (2007), writing from the perspective of educational psychology, agrees with the utility of IWMs but acknowledges that there is still much to be learnt about their exact nature and, in particular, which resilience factors allow some individuals to overcome early hardships.

Attachment theory has also received criticism for only attending to the bond between mothers and children, neglecting the role of fathers and alternative caregivers. The emphasis on the role of the mother, although demonstrating an incomplete understanding of attachment theory, has been a source of concern and, at times, heated debate (Slater, 2007). Attachment theory is frequently read as promoting the importance of the mother–child relationship over all other childhood experiences. This is then cited as denying the role of fathers and substitute caregivers, but it has also raised concern about imposing the motherhood mandate on women, the term given to confining women with children to the mothering role (Goodwin, 2003) and so imposing significant pressure on women, and promoting guilt and blame for those who do not embrace this role. However, although Bowlby (1958) certainly began his explorations based on concern about mother-child bonds and how they were disrupted during hospitalizations, he did not negate the role of other attachment figures in the life of the child. This has been discussed in section 2.3.4. As Slater (2007) states, it is unfortunate to use attachment theory as a means with which to blame mothers for any deficiency in their children, rather than utilizing the theory as a way of supporting effective mothering.

A further potential shortcoming identified in this field is that the biological foundation of attachment remains grounded in animal studies (Fonagy, 2010; Slater, 2007). Quiery (1998) criticizes Bowlby’s use of animal research to inform understanding of human mother–infant bonding, because of discrepancies between bonding and attachment as an emotional process rather than as an imprinting event. In addition, it has been suggested that attachment theory has failed to credit children for their ability to be active agents in their own social environments (Goodwin, 2003; Quiery, 1998).

Another area in which attachment theory has come under fire is that of cultural sensitivity. As discussed in section 2.5.4, the need to extend this research into other non-Western cultures is acknowledged by many authors, and although the universality of attachment seems to prove robust in the findings, the way in which culture influences the manifestations of attachment behaviours is not adequately understood (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). This is an area for further research.

Despite recent significant expansion of research into adult attachment, concerns have been voiced that attachment theory is fundamentally a child-centred theory which may not then be adaptable to adult relationships (Goodwin, 2003). As attachment theory has been extended to areas of human life beyond that initially formulated by Bowlby and Ainsworth, there has been a tendency to over-use these principles to explain all aspects of human experience. Like many theories in psychology, attachment theory does not provide a way of understanding *all* human behaviour (Slater, 2007). As Cassidy (2008) cautions in the foreword to the most recent Handbook of Attachment Theory, it is important not to stretch the concepts of attachment beyond where it can feasibly serve to explain or clarify the human condition. Many of the more current trends in research in this field are seeking to address this concern, by researching how attachment theory notions manifest in the human lifespan, as Bowlby (1988) asserted they did. In section 2.8 which follows, current trends in the field are explored, highlighting the recognition by researchers where insufficient information is known and further study is required.

2.8 CURRENT TRENDS

As mentioned in section 2.2, recent studies and writings in the field of attachment have not only established support of the original theoretical assumptions of the theory, but expanded understanding and extended the application of attachment theory to other contexts. Recent empirical and theoretical developments include approaches to the measurement of attachment security (Solomon & George, 2008), exploring the coherence and continuity of attachment patterns through expanding knowledge of internal working models (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008), and insight into how attachment unfolds in other developmental periods, such as middle childhood (Kerns, 2008), adolescence (Allen, 2008), adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008) and in the aging population (Magai, 2008). In addition, the transmission gap debate has been extensively discussed in section 2.6 above.

Emerging biological perspectives on attachment have situated attachment theory with other midrange theories in evolutionary psychology and biology (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). They argue that Ainsworth's major attachment patterns may represent different strategies that

evolved for reproductive fitness determined by particular environmental demands (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). There is new emphasis in research on psychobiological development, through studies on the effects of social experiences on gene expression in systematic experimental studies of attachment-related physiological and behavioural processes in rats (Polan & Hofer, 2008). Exploring gene-environment interactions and outcomes is providing insight into the biobehavioural origins of attachment (Polan & Hofer, 2008). Studies continue to investigate the interplay of infant temperament, understood to be informed by specific genes and gene polymorphisms, and parenting skills in both primates (Suomi, 2008) and humans (Vaughn, Bost, & van IJzendoorn, 2008; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012). Such research has implications for intergenerational transmission of attachment orientations, among others. Psychophysiological assessment techniques which augment and explain behavioural indicators of attachment processes have been developed to extend understanding of the biology of human attachment (Fox & Hane, 2008). Coan (2008; 2010) has investigated neuroscientific approaches to attachment, creating a framework which can include attachment theory and social neuroscience concepts (Coan, 2008), offering valuable areas for continued study.

Disruptions to attachment and how this links to an understanding of psychopathology, and particularly the position of disorganized attachment in dysfunction, has received much emphasis recently (DeKlyen & Greenberg, 2008; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Attachment has also been vigorously explored with regard to clinical implications of the theory, with various interventions for infants and young children seeing positive results (Berlin et al., 2008), as well as individual psychotherapy for adults (Levy & Blatt, 1999; Slade, 2008; Wallin, 2007) and a resurgence of interest in relating psychoanalytic approaches with attachment theory (Fonagy et al., 2004; Fonagy, Gergely, & Target, 2008).

The role of fathers in attachment has been reviewed and further research continues (Bretherton, 2010; Ellis-Davies, 2013) as does acknowledgement and exploration of the role of multiple caregivers in attachment (Cassidy, 2008; Howes & Spieker, 2008). Studies of how attachment manifests for children in non-traditional families are also evident in the literature (Ellis-Davies, 2013). Attachment's place in overcoming adversity has been investigated (Atwood, 2006; Ellis-Davies, 2013; Tomlinson et al., 2005) particularly with emphasis on interventions to promote healthy development of children.

Finally, there are calls for continued exploration of the relevance of attachment theory cross-culturally (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008) as well as its links to religion (Granqvist &

Kirkpatrick, 2013; Hall, 2007) and its implication for public policy relating to child care (Rutter, 2008).

2.9 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

As issues of infant mental health and attachment have become topics of vital focus globally in recent decades, so too has interest grown among South African scholars (Berg, 2003). Contributions to the field have been through studies on a range of topics. Chetwin (2012) investigated attachment for a group of black South African children during Apartheid, and offered comment on how their experience might be linked to their current adult attachment styles. Quinn and Gordon (2011) in a thematic content analysis of interview transcripts explored the perceptions of rural South African mothers of the effects of Cerebral Palsy on early attachment. Their findings suggested the presence of attachment difficulties for these children and highlighted the need for support for mothers and children in these dyads. A study in a township in Polokwane, South Africa, investigated the links between attachment patterns and internalizing and externalizing problem behaviours (Mashegoane & Ramoloto, 2016). The experience and aftermath of chronic bullying in schools was studied to provide insight into the relationship between bullying, self-esteem development and attachment styles (Darney, 2009) and a single case study examined attachment in the therapeutic process (Crafford, 2006).

Most notable contributions however, come from studies embracing the enormous challenge of exploring attachment dynamics within socially and economically deprived contexts and where cultural nuances are important. Research by Cooper, Landman, Tomlinson, Molteno, Swartz and Murray (2002) explored the impact of a mother-infant intervention implemented in an indigent peri-urban South African context. An earlier study by Tomlinson, Cooper and Murray (2005) investigated more specifically the mother-infant relationship and infant attachment in this settlement, as discussed in section 2.5.4. Through these and further studies it has been shown that in socio-economically deprived communities, an infant's attachment to their primary caregiver has significant relevance to the child's developmental outcomes (Cooper et al., 2009; Petersen, Swartz, Bhana, & Flisher, 2010). In addition, results revealed that despite conditions of extreme adversity in a Khayelitsha settlement where the research was conducted, the rate of infants classified as securely attached (62%) was within similar ranges for secure attachment found in van IJzendoorn and Kroonenburg's (1988) meta-analysis (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Furthermore, the link between postpartum depression and insecure attachment was also reinforced by this research (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

Apart from the difficulties that poverty brings, South African research exploring mother-child relationships acknowledges that there are differences in culture that need to be understood and engaged with. Attempts are being made to ensure that interventions are delivered which are relevant and appropriate, demonstrating respectful acknowledgement of cultural diversity (Berg, 2003; Cwele, 2012; Frost, Esterhuizen, Bain, & Rosenbaum, 2012). Astrid Berg (2016) challenged South African researchers and professionals to implement the plea expressed by Daniel Stern in 2008, at the World Association for Infant Mental Health's (WAIMH) 11th International Conference in Yokohama, to implement the knowledge already held about the needs of infants and mothers, and to focus on research and interventions which contribute to finding ways to enhance attachment. Developed countries have successfully created interventions to enhance mother-infant relationships and infant attachment (Cooper, Tomlinson, Swartz, Woolgar, Murray, & Molento, 1999). South African research is calling for developing countries to adapt such interventions to suit their specific context (Berg, 2016; Pininski, 2015).

Some exciting work in this regard emerges from the South African parent-infant/child psychotherapy field, where a range of practice extends from community, public and private levels (Bain, 2014; Bromley, 2012; Dugmore, 2012). The aim of parent-infant psychotherapy is to increase parents' sensitivity to the communications of their infants and encourage normal attachment behaviours in infants (Bain, Rosenbaum, Frost, & Esterhuizen, 2012). This then combines with psychoanalytic understanding of mentalizing, an attachment focus on mothering. The importance, therefore, of the development and assessment of parent-infant interventions focused on improving the quality of maternal care available to infants, is clear. The Ububele Baby Mat Project, implemented at the Alexandra Health Care Clinic in Johannesburg, is one such intervention, from which a significant amount of research is currently emerging (Aspoas & Arnod, 2014; Bromley, 2012; Dugmore, 2012; Frost, 2012; Frost et al., 2012). The focus of these studies includes a profound awareness of issues of deprivation, cultural variations and the potential imposition of western knowledge in mother-child relationships (Cwele, 2012).

South African research specifically focused on describing intergenerational patterns of mother-child relating and transmission, appears to be scarce. While some research has explored mothers' experiences in a variety of contexts, as explained in section 2.1.1 and above, the intergenerational focus has not been addressed. An understanding that intergenerational issues may be at play is implicit in parent-infant psychotherapy, but has not been extensively studied in South Africa. Exploring attachment and caregiving relationships in the South African context is of particular value because adversity persists for a substantial

proportion of South African people, both as a result of the legacy of Apartheid and due to current social and economic conditions. The need to operationalize what has already been established internationally about the significance of attachment, in a society desperate to restore historically constructed imbalance, is clear (Berg, 2001, 2016; Pininski, 2015).

This study, exploring in a deep, nuanced way the mothering experiences of women, aims to shed light on some of the mechanisms which contribute to the intergenerational patterns of mothering, using attachment theory to understand the lived experience of the participants. Situated in the South African context, such findings have relevance for theoretical understanding, but also for involvement in enhancing mothering practices which promote healthy attachment.

2.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of aspects of attachment theory relevant to this study. In addition, as an introduction, a discussion of motherhood as it is positioned and understood for this research, was provided. Of particular importance was the understanding of the role of attachment in the transmission of security of attachment and in the repetition of parenting patterns for future generations. The argument was made that attachment theory provides robust evidence for the transmission of such patterns. It is therefore an appropriate theoretical lens for this study, which explores the mother-child relationship from an intergenerational perspective. Furthermore, the need for such research, especially in the South African context was indicated by the many as yet unanswered questions about transmission of attachment and how mothers mediate or moderate their own attachment history. The findings were therefore interpreted in terms of this theoretical approach. The next chapter presents the research design and methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design and methodological orientation of the present study. It provides a detailed account of the processes that were followed and situates them within the theoretical context of the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This is achieved by beginning with a brief explanation of the purpose of the research, followed by an outline of the hermeneutic phenomenological worldview in which it is situated. IPA, the chosen research design, is then described in detail. This discussion is augmented by describing the study's approach to participant sampling and recruitment, the semi-structured interview and focus group techniques that were utilized to provide data, and finally the steps for IPA that were followed in order to analyze the interview texts (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The chapter concludes by addressing the ethical procedures employed to ensure quality in the research and appropriate treatment of the participants.

3.2 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience of mother-child relating in the context of intergenerational parenting. It aimed to capture an in-depth perspective of the personal experience of mothering as related to mothers' own experience of being mothered. This involved the exploration of three domains. Firstly, ascertaining how mothering is currently experienced and practised by the participating mothers; secondly, capturing the nature of the participants' own experience of being mothered, and finally exploring how this may relate to participants' experience and practice of mothering. This exploration of how women experience and make sense of their mothering of their own children, in the context of their own experience of being mothered, should contribute to a more complete and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of mother-child relating in the context of intergenerational patterns. In the South African context there are numerous challenges to the forging of effective early nurturing attachments. For example, children are frequently separated from primary caregivers, making research into the dynamics which may enrich such bonds highly relevant. Greater understanding of intergenerational and mothering patterns will be valuable for therapeutic interventions as a support or extension of existing theory on attachment. Findings may inform ways of working with mothers and children to enhance and promote secure attachments, as well as guiding resilience enhancing community programmes and parent training, for the promotion of mental health in children.

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

3.3.1 The nature of qualitative research

Qualitative research employs a naturalistic approach and is primarily interested in the exploration, description and understanding of human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). There are many definitions and descriptions offered for qualitative research and the research focus, the nature of the phenomena being explored, and the terminology employed are all part of this variation. However, despite these different attempts to define qualitative research, the common and most important feature is that this approach is centred on understanding how people experience and interpret their worlds. The results of such explorations are communicated through rich, thick, in-depth descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research assumes a broadly constructivist, or interpretivist, approach to the social world. This distinguishes it from quantitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). These key methodological and epistemological differences with quantitative research should, however, not be the defining criteria of qualitative approaches. Rather, the value of qualitative approaches as scientific methods of investigation should be evaluated against their ability to provide meaningful and useful answers to the questions initiating the research. Therefore, the nature of qualitative research is best understood by its philosophical underpinnings and the insight these allow into different research questions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) is explored below.

Despite being hailed as a “new” approach or paradigm of research, qualitative research is as old as the social sciences itself (Howitt, 2010; Tesch, 1990). It can be dated back to 1883 with Dilthey’s statement that the human being is different to the subject matter of the natural sciences, which is measurable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research evolved from a variety of theories and practices including hermeneutics, phenomenology, sociology, semiotics, anthropology and psychology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Although certain of these practices have existed for considerable time, others arose in reaction to traditional positivistic practices (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). In the 20th century, positivistic methods have dominated the field of research but small communities of researchers continued with qualitative studies in all areas of the social sciences (Howitt, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

Within the last decade there has been a shift in popularity in psychological research from a dominant use of quantitative methods of inquiry, to increasing use of methods of qualitative inquiry (Willig, 2012). Qualitative approaches do not focus on predefined categories or hypothesis testing, but instead focus on trying to understand the lived experience of participants. For this reason, they are especially useful in psychological research. Human

experience is complex, and qualitative methods allow room for the possibility of unexpected findings, rather than predicting expected outcomes, as is often the case for quantitative research (Yardley, 2000). As qualitative research is exploratory, paying close attention to unique variation, interpersonal issues, context, culture and meaning, it can offer a depth of understanding which may augment findings gained from quantitative inquiry and is therefore well suited for use in psychology (Howitt, 2010; Willig, 2012). Essentially, the value of any scientific method is evaluated by its ability to supply useful and meaningful answers to the questions that initially motivated the research (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach is best suited to provide insight into the lived experience of mother-child relationships, as it intends to explore the meaning and individual variation that the participants express.

A research paradigm may be seen as a philosophical entity and within this entity are methodologies which adhere to the paradigm's principles. In the qualitative research paradigm, there are four common methodological frameworks employed, which include phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and discourse analysis (Nicholls, 2009). In this study, a phenomenological approach was chosen (see section 3.3.2) as the exploratory nature of the focus of the study was complemented by the exploratory nature of phenomenology. It was particularly relevant to the interpretive nature of this type of study which aimed to present a detailed picture of the participants' experience of mothering and being mothered. A phenomenological methodology informed the project's research question, research design, findings and conclusions. The choice of this approach will be explained and supported below, to clarify the manner in which it complements the focus of the study.

3.3.2 Methodological orientation: Phenomenology

Phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography are long established ways of knowing, or epistemologies in western intellectual life (McLeod, 2001, 2003). IPA, the research design for this study, is informed by these three philosophical principles which are briefly discussed below.

As Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) indicate, the knowledge produced by research is never impartial. Rather, it is always embedded in the epistemological and ontological assumptions determined by the orientation of the methodology. It is these philosophical assumptions that direct how the research questions will be conceptualized and determine the subsequent methods of data collection and analysis (McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Willig, 2008, 2012). The integrity of a study is enhanced when its worldview is unambiguously acknowledged and clarified, and when it is ensured that its methodological precepts and

guiding principles are appropriately implemented (Berg, B.L., 2001; McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Willig, 2008). This position makes it imperative that the underlying philosophical tenets of this study are explained. The philosophical orientation or worldview underpins, but is distinct from, the research method used to collect data and analyze the material. In this study the phenomenological worldview informs, but is separate from, the method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that was employed (see section 3.4.3.1).

3.3.2.1 Philosophical underpinnings: Transcendental phenomenology

Phenomenology emerged in the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It is interested in events as they appear to the individual's consciousness during their interaction with their environment (Willig, 2001; Willig, 2008), rather than in formalized abstractions of the world in itself. Phenomenology adheres to the ontological assumption that a fully accurate, objective knowledge of reality is not achievable, as it is always mediated by the subjective meanings we ascribe to what we perceive (Wertz, 2011). For this reason, we cannot separate an object that we perceive from our experience in perceiving the object. The reality of the object is thus constituted, to a lesser or greater extent, by the manner in which it is manifested in our consciousness. Subsequently, phenomenology focuses not on generating truth claims about the world, but rather, provides a focus on the meanings of people's experiences and perceptions (Farber, 1943; Husserl, 1962; Willig, 2001). This focus was considered appropriate for the present research project, which aimed to explore how women experience both being mothers and having been mothered. In addition, as indicated in Chapter 2, the importance of identifying mechanisms through which mothers repeat or change intergenerational patterns of attachment remains an area for elaboration and research. In order to identify such mechanisms, the phenomena of mothering and being mothered need to be more fully explored and understood. Phenomenology's emphasis on the content of individuals' consciousness was chosen to enable the researcher to focus on women's unique, lived experiences of mothering and being mothered, as well as how they have subjectively made meaning, or understood these experiences.

A fundamental philosophical concept in phenomenology is intentionality, which refers to the orientation of the mind to the external world, or the representational capacity of the mind (Koch, 1995). Our experience is intimately related to our consciousness and, according to Husserl, being conscious means being conscious of something, such as an object or event (Reiners, 2012). Intentionality is thus the relationship we take towards an object of our awareness, and may be either our perception of a real object, or our memory or imagination of the object (Smith et. al. 2009).

In the context of this study for example, women, having been through their own experience of childhood, form mental representations of what constitutes mothering. Mothering would not exist as “mothering” without it having been conceptualized as such by people as a result of their subjective understandings and experience. As we are speaking of a highly individualized experience, “mothering” is not perceived in exactly the same way by each person, despite the fact that it is experienced by all participants. This is in keeping with a phenomenological stance, which would argue that because of different past encounters, beliefs, attitudes, mental processes and settings, people will often experience, or mentally represent a ‘shared’ phenomenon in different ways (Willig, 2008, 2012). Only through creating an understanding of these different representations can the phenomenon of “mothering” be more fully understood.

The nature and orientation of qualitative enquiry (see section 3.3) and the epistemological assertion that knowledge can only be accessed through subjective experience stand in opposition to research methods that rely primarily on objective observation to measure, support or describe the object of study (Giorgi, 1997; Wertz, 2011). For Husserl (1913/1962; 1900/1970) humans are fundamentally different from material nature because of their capacity for consciousness. This difference is further seen in their capacity to intentionally represent the events they observe and experience. He further posits that reality is uncovered through individual, direct experience, requiring of social research an approach that overcomes ‘objectivism’ (Wertz, 2011). Phenomenology then, as one of many qualitative research methodologies, rejects the positivist assumption that knowledge can only be accessed through objective, detached study. It is however less extreme than the social constructionist belief that all truth is constructed by the individual and that there is no fundamental reality to be known (Holt, 2011). While phenomenology supports the existence of a stable reality, it argues that we can only attain an approximation of this, gaining increasing accuracy as more individuals’ subjective understandings of reality are accessed (Willig, 2008).

To extend our subjective understanding of reality, we need to move beyond the preconceptions that we unthinkingly use to make sense of the world. This is the aim of phenomenological enquiry (Polkinghorne, 1983) and to do this, we focus on our perception of the world, which is the intentionality of a phenomenon. This involves ‘bracketing’, or removing from consideration, assumptions or conceptions not essential to the experience (Ashworth, 2003). In so doing, we reduce the influence of prior knowledge and beliefs on our experience of the phenomena and so generate a new consciousness, or intentionality of the phenomena (LeVasseur, 2003). This process of bracketing our natural orientation in order to

“experience a state of pre-reflective consciousness” (Willig, 2008, p.53) of the phenomena, may be termed ‘phenomenological reduction’ and is fundamental in transcendental phenomenology. In this way, we may describe the essential qualities of the phenomena (Shinebourne, 2011). By investigating varied perceptions of a particular phenomenon, we may obtain a description of the essential shared experience of the phenomenon and thus take a middle position between positivism and social constructionism.

3.3.2.2 Philosophical underpinnings: Hermeneutic phenomenology

Although grounded in phenomenology, IPA rejects the possibility of bracketing one’s preconceptions when interpreting one’s experience of a phenomenon. Instead of following the transcendental approach developed by Husserl and Giorgi (Giorgi, 1985; Husserl, 1970; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011), IPA follows the interpretive approach developed by Husserl’s student, Heidegger (1927/1962). Heidegger acknowledged that our prior life history resulted in the pre-reflective structuring of our experience and thus that it was not possible to access the essential qualities of phenomena that had not been influenced by our preconceptions (Shalin, 2010). He sought to overcome the negative effect of our preconceptions by drawing on the hermeneutic tradition for the interpretation of religious texts. In hermeneutics, it is acknowledged that the context of writing and the context of reading are very different, and that it is not possible for readers to transcend their context and so interpret the text from the position of the other. Hermeneutics accepts the relationship between interpretation and our lived position in the world (Smith et. al. 2009) and the implication of this that meaning is not explicit in texts. The hermeneutic approach was further developed by Heidegger’s student, Gadamer, who saw this as a means for becoming aware of the preconceptions of our tradition that inform our interpretation of a text and allowing us to consciously apply our knowledge of the context of the text (McManus Holroyd, 2007; Shalin, 2010). This allows us to clarify our interpretation of the text and progress toward a rational consensus of phenomena presented in a text. In this way, hermeneutics focuses on developing inter-subjectivity in order to clarify the interpretive meaning (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

The hermeneutic cycle (Schmidt, 2006) is an iterative process that cycles between description and context, and between consideration of interpreter and participant. This is done in order to develop an insightful interpretation that is appropriately aligned in each of these areas and so may be termed free from inner contradictions (Willig, 2008; Kvale, 1996). It is due to this alignment, that the interpretation may be termed ‘intersubjective’ (Unger, 2005) and this process of interpretation may be seen as one of ‘co-constitution’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962). IPA thus recognizes that meaning-making is an intersubjective process

involving researcher and participant, rather than a descriptive process in which the account of the participants may be interpreted without influence of the researcher (Pringle et al. 2011). Moreover, the balance between textual elements and the context of the whole results in an interpretation of the meaning and influence of the participant's social reality – their “being-in-the-world” (Pringle et al., 2011). It is this “being-in-the-world” that IPA seeks to uncover, through the process of the hermeneutic cycle.

Phenomenology was seen by many philosophers as important for psychological research, because of the discipline's emphasis on individual consciousness and subjective experience (Gendlin, 1962; Gurwitsch, 1964; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, 1942/1963; Satre, 1939/1948; Schutz, 1932/1967). However, the impossibility of separating description from interpretation in psychology is also generally accepted (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Willig, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology, as implemented in IPA and in this research, is a phenomenological approach that takes into account the difficulties of bracketing and allows for the producing of more appropriately aligned, intersubjective interpretations (Unger, 2005).

3.3.2.3 Philosophical underpinnings: Idiography

With its detailed focus on particular experiences, phenomenology may be seen as an idiographic approach to research. This may be contrasted to nomothetic approaches that seek to identify and formulate general regularities and laws (Smith et al., 2009). The idiographic focus involves detailed and in-depth investigation of the particulars of a person's subjective experience, with a specific focus in IPA studies, on the manner in which the person invests this experience with meaning (Langdrige, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The resulting richness contributes detailed insight into the manner in which the individual's meaningful experience emerges from and influences, their interaction in the phenomenon of interest (Shinebourne, 2011). For this study then, the data was not analyzed with a fixed, predetermined theory, although an intergenerational and attachment theory lens were used in later stages of analysis to elaborate on the findings (see sections 5.2-5.8). In this way, idiographic approaches contribute detailed insight into the processes of interaction that combine and aggregate to constitute the more general regularities identified in nomothetic studies.

Of particular importance in IPA studies is the significance that people attribute to particular experiences (Smith et al., 2009). It is expected that people will reflect extensively on the meaning of experiences that they judge to be significant. Such extensive subjective reflection is particularly evident in IPA, due to its focus on a person's own reflection on experiences they select for sharing as meaningful and significant.

3.3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in psychology

The IPA research design was developed by Smith (1997), as “an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in... accounts through a process of interpretative engagements with the texts and transcripts” (p.189). IPA is interested in gaining knowledge of how participants make sense of their world, and the meaning they ascribe to particular phenomena (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA assumes that individuals are naturally inclined to attempt to make sense of their experiences, and such studies strive to explore these processes (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, IPA is interested in perceptions of the world rather than trying to make truth claims about the nature of the world (Willig, 2001). IPA studies are designed to obtain an in-depth understanding of how individuals experience certain phenomena and how they make meaning of these experiences in the context of their lives (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher seeks to elicit in-depth accounts of the subjective experience of participants that relates to the particular phenomenon being studied (Willig, 2008), such as in this study of the experience of mothering and being mothered from an intergenerational perspective. This is done predominantly through in-depth interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Palmer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009) although more recently, focus group interviews have also been used (Palmer et al., 2010; Tomkins & Eatough, 2010a).

Data analysis in IPA is fundamentally a hermeneutic, interpretive analysis of the text formed by the interview transcripts (Smith, 1997). This analysis follows the hermeneutic cycle, balancing the particulars of the text with the context of the participants’ ‘life worlds’, and also the meaning-making of the participant with the meaning-making of the researcher (Schmidt, 2006). An interpretation is judged as appropriate if it is aligned with text and context to yield a convincing meaning for the participant as understood (and understandable) by the researcher, and if it has no internal contradictions. An important consideration in analysis is that two different interpretive stances need to be employed in the hermeneutic cycle: a sympathetic stance and a questioning stance (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Taking the sympathetic stance, the researcher works to accept and support the participant’s report of the significance and meaning of the experience. But this needs to be balanced by the questioning stance, in which the researcher acknowledges that the participant’s report may be a response to tacit, or unacknowledged factors and thus may view the report more critically, taking into account its possible psychological and/or social function for the participant. This study draws on the literature relating to attachment theory and intergenerational patterns to inform this critical stance.

IPA also provides a systematic analytical procedure, or “a set of guidelines for conducting research” (Smith, 2004, p. 40). Although a number of different formalizations of the process

have been proposed (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran, & Beail, 1997; 1998; Jarman, Smith, & Walsh, 1997; Osborn & Smith, 1998; Smith, 1991; Smith & Osborn, 2008), these guidelines do provide some methodological warrants for the trustworthiness of the results of IPA studies. The steps followed in the analytical process of this study are itemized in Table 3 and discussed in detail in section 3.4.3.

3.3.4 The reflexive role of the researcher

In qualitative research the researcher is not separate from the research process, but instead the researcher acts as an active and involved instrument bringing with them a particular perspective to the research. The phenomenological approach considers that any discovery to be made is a function of the relationship between the researcher and the subject (Merriam, 2009; Smith, 2004). The researcher then is included as part of the world that they describe.

Due to this highly involved position taken by qualitative researchers, the process of reflexivity is essential. Reflexivity involves the process of continuous reflection on the research procedures and the personal experience of the researcher (Shaw, 2010). The emphasis of this reflexive process is on acknowledging the pivotal position of the researcher in the construction of the knowledge. It therefore requires an ability to reflect and consider the underlying dynamics between researcher and data. Etherington (2007) urged that researchers themselves must become aware of, and reveal, their own subjective lens through which they filter the literature, data and interpretations, knowing that it is impossible to disregard their own experiences which serve as the foundation of their interpretations. Reflexivity is an invaluable tool to promote understanding of the experience under study, as it reveals the influence of the researcher's role and demonstrates the researcher's willingness to acknowledge how they affect all stages of the research process.

Reflexivity in this study was respected through the researcher's sensitivity towards the influence of her own experience as a daughter and mother of two children. Through reflexivity the researcher became aware of her mental patterns formed from personal experiences, clinical practice and focused literature studies. To facilitate truthful reflexivity, the researcher continuously asked herself reflective questions such as: Are the voices clearly inked to the participants' original texts? How and in what way am I being challenged in my interpretations? Would I be willing to show my analysis to anyone? What aspects of this participant's story resonate with my own story and how am I addressing this similarity or difference? Koch (1999) highlighted that such self-scrutiny has the benefit of increasing the overall trustworthiness of a study.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The previous section formulated the underlying philosophy of the IPA research approach taken by this study and indicated the suitability of this approach for psychological studies concerned with understanding in detail the meaning and significance that people attributed to their experience. As the fundamental concern of this study is on mothers' experiences of mothering and being mothered and the manner in which participants related these experiences in ways that were meaningful and significant to them, IPA was considered to be an approach particularly suitable for developing insight into this concern.

This section will provide details of the particulars of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research designs and indicate how these design features were implemented in a manner suitable for this specific research project. The section has introduced IPA research design and will now discuss the sampling and data collection methods.

3.4.1 Sampling

3.4.1.1 Participant sampling in IPA

IPA adopts sampling methods influenced by idiographic principles discussed above (see section 3.3.2.3) to focus on the particular and produce a detailed, meticulous case by case analysis of individual transcripts, capturing the lifeworld of every participant (Smith & Osborn 2008; Smith et al., 2009.). A limited number of cases are focused on until a sense of completion has been achieved in describing the sample (Smith, 2004). With this in mind, IPA requires small homogenous samples which can produce rich contextualized data about a particular shared experience (Smith et al., 2009). This study therefore selected seven women for participation. Smith and Osborn (2008) caution that although there is no recommended sample size, various factors will influence the advisability of smaller or larger samples. These include the experience of the researcher with IPA, the detailed "richness" of the individual transcripts, practical restrictions of the study such as access to participants, and finally the researcher's degree of commitment to the case study level of analysis and reporting.

In this study, the selection of research participants was consistent with the principles of IPA, which requires that participants are chosen because of the insight that they offer into the phenomenon under investigation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2008). In addition, the recruitment process aimed to produce a sample that satisfied the criteria for homogeneity, which is related to IPA's inductive principles (Smith et al, 2009). The multi-layered contexts of participants, such as their historical, social, cultural, and economic circumstances, are recognized by IPA to potentially influence the way that they make meaning of their experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Homogeneity in sampling produces a better defined

group of people for whom the research question will be meaningful. As IPA does not try to make claims that are applicable across groups, this approach to sampling is fitting, as it allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about one particular group of people (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA is best suited for small sample sizes as this allows for a detailed, in-depth engagement with every case. Furthermore, a limited number of cases also facilitates valuable comparisons of similarities and differences across the individual transcripts. Smith and Osborn (2008) indicate that larger samples may generate excessive amounts of data, making detailed analysis very difficult.

3.4.1.2 Purposive sampling technique and criteria for participant selection

The purpose of a study must inform the way in which sampling takes place and which participants are selected (Turner, 2010). For this study the purpose was to look very specifically at women's experiences of mothering and being mothered. Given that it was an IPA study, it was also important to attain a degree of homogeneity in the sample (Smith & Osborn, 2008), which requires that participants were sought who satisfied the inclusion criteria and thus were expected to share similarities in experience. For these reasons, purposive sampling (Cresswell & Clark, 2007) was selected as the sampling technique.

The goal of purposive sampling is to obtain a sample of participants who meet pre-established conditions (Cozby, 2009; Palys, 2008) and therefore are suitable participants (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2005). Purposive sampling, then, is a technique that is used to select participants for a study "because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 125). IPA generally makes use of purposive sampling to identify appropriate participants (Smith, 2004). For this study the researcher therefore purposively sought participants who would contribute meaningful insight into the topic of study. The sample was taken from within a small Eastern Cape town. This geographical limit was chosen in order to sample a homogeneous group of participants who would be able to offer rich accounts of their personal experiences of mothering and being mothered. The inclusion criteria outlined below were used to select seven mothers for the study:

1. They were the biological mother of at least one child in the developmental phase of middle childhood (6 – 11 years), thus ensuring that they have at least six years of mothering from which to share experience and that their experience was current and "fresh" to reflect upon.
2. They did not, at the time of the research, present with clinical signs and symptoms of any psychological condition as stipulated by the DSM-5.

3. They were not making use of any psychiatric medication and were not in psychotherapy, during the time in which they participated in the study.
4. It was necessary that all participants, if not mother-tongue English speakers, be able to speak English in the interviews. This was due to the researcher's limitation of only being able to conduct interviews in her own language. Working with a translator and or translating transcribed interviews may have reduced the essence of the participants' experience and ultimately, compromised the understanding gained and the depth of analysis that would be possible.

The above-outlined selection criteria resulted in a relatively homogeneous sample of women who are mothers of at least one biological child, between the age of 6 and 11 years. All these women were able to speak fluent English, although it was not necessarily their mother-tongue. In addition, none had a current diagnosis as outlined in the DSM-5 or were currently undergoing psychotherapy. Sample homogeneity was further ensured by recruiting the women from the same community of a small town, primarily through approaching schools. This ensured some similarity in socio-economic circumstances. Differences based on factors such as age, marital status, race, religion, and sexual orientation were not criterion for exclusion, and were considered to add to the richness of the individual accounts.

3.4.1.3 Methods of participant recruitment

No formal advertisements were used to recruit participants who matched the above-outlined criteria. Instead, the researcher informally raised awareness of the study through general conversations in order to access willing participants. Organizations within the community of the chosen Eastern Cape town who work with children and families (for example: government and private junior schools, La Leche League, doctors and psychologists with family practices) were approached for access to mothers who may have been eligible for the study. Prior to the researcher contacting a prospective participant, personnel in the organizations who suggested research participants were requested to contact the prospective candidate and request their permission for the researcher to make contact. Once a mother had expressed willingness to discuss her possible involvement in the study she was then contacted individually by the researcher. In addition to the stated inclusion criteria, proficiency in English, as well as being able to actively engage with the researcher about their experiences concerning mothering was taken into account. The process of individual recruitment involved the provision of relevant information regarding the study and the role of participants. Participants were informed of the requirements for their participation in the research project, and requested to give consideration to participating. They were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that confidentiality would be maintained.

If women expressed an interest in the study, their details were recorded and they were later e-mailed a letter which gave more information about the study. The demographic details noted included their name, age, number of children and their ages, the participants' highest level of education, marital status (and how long they'd been in the relationship) and whether they spoke English. Only one woman, suggested by a school, declined participation in the study when she was approached and informed about what it would entail. All other women were eager to participate. Overall, nine women indicated that they were interested in the study and all met the inclusion criteria. Once the sample was finalized, participants were invited for an initial individual interview. At this time, they each signed the informed consent form, having read the letter pertaining to the project. They also agreed to have their interviews recorded with a digital recording instrument (see Appendix A). However, two participants, following the initial interview, were considered unsuitable for further participation. The first, as her linguistic ability was very limited and she struggled to express herself in English. The second participant was also screened out as her experience of mothering was overshadowed by an additional childhood trauma, and it was not possible to facilitate her exploration of mothering in the face of her clearly unresolved emotional pain. On setting up the interviews, all participants were informed that they may be asked for a second interview and inclusion in the focus group, but that this would be conditional on the needs of the project. The two who did not continue with the study were therefore supportively thanked and provided with an explanation that no further interviews would be required. Referral for therapy was recommended to the second participant discussed. The remaining seven women were all interviewed twice and participated in the focus group.

Table 1: A summary of participants' demographic information

| Pseudonym | Age | Race | Level of education | Number of children | Age of children | Marital status & duration |
|-----------|-----|----------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Janet | 36 | White | PhD | 2 | 7 (M) & 5 (F) | Married 11 yrs |
| Nokuzola | 32 | Black | Bachelors | 3 | 10 (F), 8 (M), 4 (F) | Traditional marriage 4 yrs |
| Ava | 43 | Coloured | Bachelors | 1 | 11 (F) | Married 13 yrs |
| Debbie | 44 | White | Matric | 2 [twins] | 6 (F) & 6 (F) | Married 15 yrs |
| Helen | 44 | White | Matric | 2 | 11 (F) & 8 (M) | Married 12 yrs |
| Thandi | 39 | Black | Matric | 2 | 10 (M) & 8 (M) | Divorced |
| Lara | 39 | White | Honours | 2 | 7 (M) & 4 (F) | Married 10 yrs |

Seven women participated in the study, although ultimately, the data from only six of the seven individual interviews was analyzed. The reasons for this decision are discussed in section 3.4.3.1.2. The women's ages ranged from 32 to 44, and they represented a variety of race groups, marital status and numbers of children.

3.4.2 Data collection method and procedure

As discussed, the aim of IPA studies is to access the unique conscious experiences of participants. Furthermore, such studies attempt to understand and articulate how participants make meaning of the particular phenomenon under investigation (Willig, 2008). This research, in keeping with many IPA studies, utilized semi-structured interviews to elicit information (Palmer et al., 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2008). However, in addition, two focus groups were also employed. A summary table of the data collection is provided below and elaborated on in the discussion which follows:

Table 2: *Data collected from participants*

| Participant | Interview 1 | Focus Group 1 (January 2015) | Interview 2 | Focus Group 2 (July 2015) |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| Janet | July 2014 | ✓ | May 2015 | ✓ |
| Nokuzola | October 2014 | ✓ | July 2015 | ✗ |
| Ava | August 2014 | ✓ | April 2015 | ✓ |
| Debbie | July 2014 | ✓ | May 2015 | ✓ |
| Helen | July 2014 | ✓ | May 2015 | ✓ |
| Thandi | July 2014 | ✗ | May 2015 | ✓ |
| Lara | August 2014 | ✓ | March 2015 | ✓ |

3.4.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews utilize a very flexible interview schedule which does not dictate the process but instead acts as a guide for the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The purpose of the interview is to provide participants with an opportunity to give detailed narratives of their subjective experiences, and a flexible structure facilitates this. As Smith and Osborn (2008) explain, the participants are considered to be “experiential experts” who shape the conversation, in response to broad ideas of interest and a general schedule of topics introduced by the researcher. The researcher only intervenes to keep the discussion on topic or to probe carefully when an item of interest is mentioned (Willig, 2008, 2012).

Prior to interviewing the participants in this study, the semi-structured interview schedule was used with a volunteer to pilot the project conceptually and ensure that an appropriate research focus and psychological register was attained. This data was not included in the analysis. The pilot interview enabled the researcher to hone her skills and familiarity with the process, before embarking on encounters with the participants. It also emphasized the potentially emotive nature of the topic, which reinforced the importance of the ethical considerations for this study (see section 3.6) and in particular the need to minimize any negative consequence of participation. The establishing of good rapport with participants

during the initial interview, to prepare them for the focus group experience and encourage their sharing of information, was therefore prioritized. The availability of a colleague for counselling following participation if required was also identified as crucial for establishing that participants were not compromised by the research process. Lastly, the pilot interview consolidated the researcher's decision to use this method of data collection as the advantages suited the nature of the data which was being sought. As Smith (2006) identifies, there are particular advantages to using the semi-structured interview. Not only does the flexible structure facilitate the building of trust and rapport, but it also allows exploration of any new areas of interest that may arise during the interview. This subsequently ensures that more detailed information is solicited from the participants. This was pivotal to the outcome of this study, as participants deepened their sharing of their experience as the interview process unfolded. By the second interview, even those who had been more reserved initially, were considerably more forthcoming.

Before commencing with the interviews, rapport was established by ensuring that all the participants were comfortable with what to expect of the research and a general orientation was provided. Throughout the study, the researcher remained aware of the need to maintain rapport and build trust. As a trained clinical psychologist, the researcher found that the interpersonal skills for expressing and exhibiting respect and genuine, sensitive interest in the participants' experiences were comfortable to implement. Semi-structured interviews have the disadvantage of affording less control to the researcher, which could result in data that is more difficult to interpret (Smith, 2004). In this study recording of the interviews and notes made by the researcher at the conclusion of each encounter ensured a careful process of data collection.

The researcher attempted to maintain a focus on understanding the experience as it was being related by the participants throughout the individual interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for all interviews (see Appendix J). The individual interviews each lasted about 75 minutes on average. All audio data was immediately transcribed and in the process 17.5 hours of recorded data was collected, which required approximately 105 hours of transcription. In total, this process yielded almost 170 pages of interview transcripts. After the identification of six cases for analysis, and including the focus group data, the researcher was left with approximately 150 pages of interview transcripts. The interviews were conducted in the office of the researcher, at the premises of her private practice. This venue was easily accessible for participants, but they were also offered an alternative venue or the option of being interviewed at their homes. Making use of the researcher's office

ensured that there were no disruptions and that confidentiality was easily maintained during the interview process.

3.4.2.2. Focus groups

A focus group is a discussion-based interview that produces qualitative data for the researcher (Millward, 2006). They are comprised of participants with similar experiences, concerns, or cultural backgrounds (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Focus groups aim to gain clarity about participants' understanding and perspectives on various issues. They are valuable when the interaction among participants is likely to yield the best information and when participants are similar and co-operative with each other (Cresswell, 1998, 2013). While focus groups may be used as the main method of data collection in studies, they are most frequently used as an adjunct to other methods, being deliberately chosen to complement, prepare for or extend other forms of data gathering (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001). Focus groups have several advantages for data collection. Firstly, the process is both cost and time effective. Secondly, the experience is usually enjoyable for the participants, and lastly, the interactions among group members enhance the quality of the data (Patton, 2002).

In this enquiry the initial focus group, conducted after each participant had been interviewed individually, was valuable in establishing key areas of mothering for the individual participants, but revealed little "new" data. However, the second focus group, held after the second round of individual interviews, provided much richer material.

The seven mothers were asked about their current experience of mothering and their own experience of having been mothered. Using a semi-structured focus group schedule, based on themes emerging from all individual interviews, the group were invited to reflect and add to topics already raised by themselves and others. The group also explored how the mothers made sense of their experience. In particular, during the second focus group, participants were invited to discuss their perceptions and understanding of any links between their own experience of being mothered, and their current experience of providing mothering to their own children.

As for semi-structured interviews, the ability to establish rapport and build trust with the participants is important when conducting focus groups. The structure of this study's data collection process was designed to maximize this. The decision to hold individual interviews before the first focus group was made in order that each participant would have already formed rapport with the researcher. This increased their willingness to engage in the group

process. It also ensured that the researcher, having met with all participants, could anticipate some of the possible group dynamics and plan for how these could best be managed. The focus groups were held in a room at the premises of the researcher's private practice. Before commencing with the focus group session, rapport was established by providing members with name tags, allowing the group members to introduce themselves to each other and by the researcher explaining the nature of the research and the process that would be followed during the focus group interviews. Throughout the group sessions, the researcher remained aware of the group dynamics and attempted to provide opportunities for all members to speak and share. In addition, rapport and trust was maintained by the researcher showing a respectful, genuine and sensitive interest in the participants' experiences. The researcher paid attention to the inclusion of less assertive group members to ensure that they had an opportunity to share their opinions. At times, it was important to limit the contribution of more dominant members by tactfully bringing their stories to a conclusion and then deliberately asking a question of another member. The researcher also regularly made links between a participant's account and comments previously mentioned by someone else, to draw the rest of the group back into the conversation. Extensive experience as a group facilitator in her role as a clinical psychologist enabled the researcher to contain and guide the group process, while remaining cognizant that her role was not that of a therapist but a researcher.

A semi-structured interview schedule was employed for both focus groups. To minimize the disadvantages of this, as identified by Smith and Osborn (2008), namely less control for the researcher during the interview, which could result in data that is more difficult to interpret, the focus group interviews were audio recorded and observation notes taken throughout the session to ensure a careful process of data collection.

As for the individual interviews, the researcher attempted to maintain a focus on understanding the experience as it was being related by the participants during the two focus groups. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for both the focus group sessions (see Appendix K). The first focus group was 90 minutes long and the second lasted 60 minutes. All audio data was immediately transcribed and yielded 2.5 hours of recorded data which required approximately 20 hours of transcription, as the complexity of capturing was greater than for the individual interview recordings. The focus groups together created approximately 30 pages of transcripts.

3.4.2.3. IPA and focus groups

IPA has become increasingly popular as a research method, particularly in psychology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006) because of the clear theoretical underpinnings and detailed,

practical set of procedural guidelines that it provides (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010a). Although IPA studies have traditionally made use of individual interviews as a data collection method, interest has been emerging in applying the approach to other types of data and data collection methods (Palmer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2009). Brocki and Wearden (2006) argue that the flexible nature of IPA, with regards to both its purpose and application, allows for its analytic techniques being increasingly combined with other ways of accessing data. While relatively few studies have utilized group interviews or focus group discussions (Reid et al. 2005), there is a growing acceptance that IPA can, with consideration to group dynamics and process, be applied to focus group data. Indeed, Tomkins and Eatough (2010a) describe the use of IPA with focus group data, as a proposition which is “ripe for detailed theoretical and empirical exploration” (p. 244).

However, recognizing the challenges of combining IPA with focus group data is important (Palmer et al., 2010). The utilization of focus groups may be less obviously suited to IPA research in that they provide a more complex interactional environment, requiring this to be incorporated in the analytic process. The attraction of working in this manner, however, is that focus groups offer the opportunity for hearing multiple voices at one time, maximizing the amount of data collected and minimizing the number of collection events (Palmer et al., 2010). Furthermore, the group dynamics may add to the information gathered, stimulating discussion and promoting ideas for participants. For this study, the use of focus groups contributed to the maintenance of beneficence for participants as the group experience was very positive for them.

To use IPA successfully with focus groups, Smith (2004) notes that an awareness of the potential challenges involved in applying experiential analyses to more complex social activities is required. Within the context of the focus group, experiential reflections are likely to be embedded within a relatively complex set of social and contextual relationships, which may make it challenging to infer and develop individual, *phenomenological* accounts. It was therefore essential for the researcher in this study to maintain an awareness that the participants' accounts of their experiences were shaped not only by the researcher's questions and reactions, but also by the manner and degree of sharing among the other participants in the focus group. In addition, awareness was held of any pre-existing relationships, as the town from which the sample was drawn is a small community, and some participants had met in other contexts. Using Palmer et al. (2010) as a guide, other factors taken into consideration when analyzing the focus group data were the sensitivity or privacy of the subject matter, how participants opened up or closed down in response to other participants' contributions, and the general unfolding dynamic of the interaction itself.

Smith (2004) advocates approaching the analysis twice to ensure that the above mentioned concerns are taken into account in an IPA analysis of focus group data. He explains that the first approach would be to look for group patterns and dynamics and, subsequently, the researcher would return to the data to look for idiographic accounts. These recommendations were adopted for the current study and comment was provided about notable group dynamics in the discussion of the focus group data (see section 4.8.2).

Morgan (1997) indicated that most discussions of analysis issues for focus group research indicate that the group, and not the individual, must be the essential unit of analysis. This fits with Smith's (2004) suggestion that when analyzing IPA focus group transcripts the researcher first "reads" for group level patterns and dynamics, and only then for individual accounts. In this study, the researcher worked through the steps of the protocol discussed in section 3.4.3, and for the focus group data she initially read to attempt to develop a meaningful analysis of the patterns and dynamics of the group response, noting how pauses and interruptions stimulated or inhibited each volunteer's participation.

For the purposes of this study, the steps described in section 3.4.3 provided the overall framework that guided the explication process. However, with specific reference to working with the focus group data, as discussed above, an additional aspect was incorporated. This involved the researcher giving consideration to the purpose of statements made by the participants in the group, how they made their experiences meaningful to one another, areas of consensus and conflict, as well as group dynamics and process. All of these factors played an important role in organizing emerging patterns of meaning and understanding within the focus group data (Rostill-Brookes, Larkin, Toms, & Churchman, 2010).

3.4.3 Data analysis

3.4.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

For this study an IPA methodological approach was followed (Smith & Osborn, 2003). While this approach provided a clear procedure to follow, Smith and Osborn (2003) stress that these are not prescriptive guidelines but rather they are flexible and should be adapted to best suit the particular topic under investigation. The process of conducting IPA for this study is summarized in Table 3 and discussed below.

Table 3: *Summary of IPA steps applied in this study*

| IPA step | Description of the step |
|--|---|
| Transcription | Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim. |
| Step 1: First-order analysis | Patterns of meaning were generated through cumulative coding within cases. |
| Step 2: Connections of themes within a case: second-order analysis | Themes were clustered to form subordinate and superordinate themes which were presented as an individual case study (see sections 4.2-4.8). |
| Step 3: Interpretation of individual cases | Description and interpretation processes were used to provide meaning and deeper understanding of each case (see sections 5.2-5.8). These were then related and integrated with attachment theory, with an additional intergenerational lens. |
| Step 4: Cross-case analysis | Identification and description of common events of experiences in being mothered, mothering and intergenerational relating. |
| Step 5: Interpretation of cross-case analysis | A general meaning structure was created from the common events described in Step 4. A full narrative description of the meaning-making processes across cases was provided (see section 5.9). |

3.4.3.1.1 Transcription stage

Willig (2008) sees the process of transcription as a fundamental first step in the process of analysis. Although Smith and Osborn (2008) do not officially identify it as a step in the IPA analysis process, the value of the process of transcription is clear. In this study transcribing the recorded interviews enabled the researcher to become familiar with the data and this immersion in the material facilitated the initial interpretation and analytic decisions (Willig, 2008). Interviews from all seven participants and the focus groups were transcribed.

3.4.3.1.2 Step 1: Looking for themes in the individual cases

In the first step of analysis there are two stages, namely summarizing and thematizing, which aim to capture participants' experiences by using coding to generate patterns of meaning within an account (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For this study, the process started by working with one case at a time. The interview recordings were listened to several times and each transcript was read repeatedly, to obtain a general sense of what each participant was saying. Preliminary notes were made in the right-hand margin of each transcript and summaries were made of any points of interest or significance. These summaries included paraphrases of what the participant had said, as well as any connections or associations occurring for the researcher during the reading. The richest data from themes was supported with direct quotes from the transcript. Quotes were chosen based on how well they captured an experience or an idea, or how strongly they depicted the participants' emotions

(Sandelowski, 1995). Also included were preliminary interpretations and notes on differences, similarities, contradictions or particular emphasis, such as laughter or tears, in the participants' way of articulating their story. Having completed this process, the transcripts were revisited from the beginning to look for emerging themes. Through repeated re-reading and re-checking of the text, themes were grouped together and new themes emerged. This identification of themes introduced a slightly higher level of interpretive abstraction into the analysis, and made use of more psychological terminology to label themes. All themes identified were linked to direct verbatim quotes from the participants. This step then aimed to make use of the initial summaries to generate themes that captured the essential meaning of each transcript. IPA requires that the researcher makes sense of the data by engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. In this study, the process of identifying themes and analyzing the text was carried out separately for each transcript. The focus group was treated as an individual case. A list of themes and corresponding line and page reference numbers was provided for each participant.

At this point in the research process, the decision was made to omit one participant's individual interview data from further analysis. The volume of data gathered from all participants was more than expected for an IPA project of this magnitude. For this reason, it was considered important to reduce the data for analysis, to ensure that justice was done to the accounts under investigation. After serious consideration, the interview data for one participant, Lara, was identified as suitable for omission because her input in the focus group strongly mirrored the content of her individual accounts. It was therefore considered that omitting her individual narrative would not compromise or negate the richness of what she offered the study, as this was captured in her group contributions. This served to make the volume of data more manageable for thorough analysis. The study therefore proceeded with six individual cases and the focus group as the seventh case. The results from the omitted case are subsequently not reported on in Chapter 4.

3.4.3.1.3 Step 2: *Connecting the themes*

In this second step, again working with each case individually, the themes that had emerged from the first account were recorded on a large sheet of paper, to facilitate identifying connections between them. At first, this listing was chronological, but this was later changed to a more analytical ordering where the themes were arranged into meaningful groups. Themes within a case were clustered together to form subordinate themes, while other themes were identified as superordinate themes. Larkin and Watts (2006) explain how grouping the clustered themes for each participant into appropriate master themes which are pertinent to the entire research data allows for further interpretation or conceptualization of

the first-order analysis (Larkin & Watts, 2006). While this step involved an even higher level of abstraction, themes were also continuously cross-checked with the original transcript to ensure that they remained consistent with the participant's actual words. By subdividing the transcript text into meaningful components, the researcher was able to identify differences, commonalities and contradictions within each case (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Once this had been done, a diagram of themes which had been coherently ordered was produced. To avoid trying to respond to a topic that was too broad, the boundaries of the case were established by focusing on the research aim (Yin, 2009). This ensured that the researcher only worked with themes relevant to the experience of mothering and being mothered.

3.4.3.1.4 Step 3: Interpretation of individual cases

In this step participants' experiences were interpreted and integrated within attachment theory and with an intergenerational lens. Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, as outlined in Chapter 2, the numerous authors and issues expanded on by writers in the field of attachment made it possible to embrace the idiosyncratic nature of participants' experiences even while employing a theoretical model for interpretation. After the close analysis of the transcripts, IPA systematically makes more formal connections and produces across-account patterns of meaning through integrative coding. As in any qualitative analysis, it was important that the researcher remained open to material that did not fit the emerging patterns from other accounts. After confirming understanding, by revisiting the text, themes that contrasted with those from other accounts could more confidently be suggested.

A description process follows the interpretation phase, with the role of the researcher as central to this analysis. The practice of bracketing is important to ensure that any preconceived ideas held by the researcher are identified and acknowledged (Smith & Osborn, 2003). It is therefore recommended that IPA researchers explicitly state their subjective position (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In light of this, the researcher was specifically aware that she is a mother of two children, also in the developmental stage of middle childhood as required for inclusion for participation in this study. It was therefore important at all points in this study, that she engaged in a process of reflexivity and reflected on and recognized her own experiences and viewpoints, and deliberately compartmentalized them when interpreting the data.

The aim in the descriptive phase is to provide an overall structure for the finding by suggesting a hierarchical relationship between themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). This should be considerably deeper than just a categorization of data, and requires the

researcher to continuously return to the data to search for deeper meaning and understanding (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

The first two steps of the analysis involved working only with one participant's account at a time. Once the separate analyses were complete, superordinate themes and subordinate themes were identified. This required the researcher to reduce the data by deciding which themes were most significant in the analysis. As mentioned before, frequency of occurrence was not the determinant in assessing the significance of a theme. The richness of the passage from which the theme arose, its contribution to the overall narrative and how well the theme tied in to other aspects of the analysis, determined which themes were selected.

In this third step, meaning began to be made across all seven of the accounts. Smith and Osborn (2008) recommend two approaches to doing this. Firstly, the themes from the first account can be used to help to orient the analyses of the other accounts. However, the second option was used in this study, which was to put the themes for the first participant aside, and to re-use steps one and two to analyze the other participants' accounts from the beginning. This is recommended for IPA studies with small samples and also for less experienced researchers (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The approach required that care was taken to pick up themes and patterns that repeated themselves, while still remaining aware of any new concepts that emerged from each transcript.

3.4.3.1.5 Step 4: Cross-case analysis

This step in IPA involves cross-case analysis, requiring the researcher to seek connections across cases by comparing superordinate themes between cases, so that themes directly related to a particular case may be shared as a higher order concept between cases (Smith et al., 2009). This highlights a dual aim of IPA research, capturing both the specific idiosyncrasies of a particular case, but also identifying higher order concepts that are shared between cases (Smith et al., 2009).

The researcher transformed all the meaning units across cases into a consistent statement of structure of the experiences of mothering and being mothered for participants in this study. It is important to note again, that as stipulated by IPA, for the interpretative analysis in this study each participant's account was approached individually and a list of themes for each participant was provided. Smith (2004) supports this way of working by stating that cross-case analysis can only be conducted after all cases have been individually examined. The first account was not used to create a master list of themes, as this would have ignored a defining aspect of phenomenological research by compromising the individualized and

idiosyncratic nature of each participant's lived experience. All themes were then compiled into a combined list. Once again, the richness of data relating to the theme, and not the frequency of occurrence, determined inclusion.

It is recognized in qualitative research that themes emerging from the data will not always be identical for researchers and readers, and therefore complete agreement in working with the same material is not anticipated (Koch, 1999). The way in which the researcher came to the interpretation must therefore be clear and possible to follow.

According to Smith (2004), the results of an IPA analysis can be placed within the context of relevant psychological research and literature and may provide clarity or even critique for earlier findings. In this study, as discussed earlier, data interpretation was conducted within an attachment theory framework. It has been argued that a theoretical model serves as an anchor for a study and should be referred to at the stage of data interpretation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Larkin and Watts (2006) also affirmed that in IPA research, once a description has been captured which attempts to get as close as possible to the participant's view, a further aim is to follow a more overtly interpretative analysis in relation to a wider theoretical context.

3.4.3.1.6 Step 5: Interpretation of the cross-case analysis

The final step of the analysis involved creating a general meaning structure from the common events described in Step 4. A full narrative description of the meaning-making processes across cases was provided (see section 5.9). The previous steps aimed to summarize and reduce the information in the transcripts, but this final step embraced a more expansive approach with the aim of situating the themes in the broader literature and offering an understanding of the data from the researcher's perspective. The data was not analyzed with a fixed, predetermined theory, although an intergenerational and attachment theory lens were used to elaborate on the findings, once the participants' idiosyncratic narrative was established.

3.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Despite debate as to the suitability of evaluating qualitative research differently to that of quantitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Howitt, 2010), many authors suggest that qualitative research is best evaluated according to the principles of trustworthiness (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005; Golafshini, 2003). Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which research findings authentically reflect the personal or lived experience of the phenomenon being explored and

therefore enhance the credibility of the research (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). For this study trustworthiness was established by giving attention to dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research findings (Golafshani, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This was achieved by the collection of thick, descriptive data, prolonged and repeated engagement with the data, triangulation, purposive sampling, dual methods of collection, reflexivity (Guba, 1981) and the practice of self-awareness (Koch, 1999). Data was recorded via audio taping, journaling and reflexivity (Etherington, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

3.5.1 Dependability

While quantitative research makes use of reliability to ensure that research processes can be replicated by others, qualitative enquiry employs the concept of dependability to allow others to follow the process and logic behind the decisions made in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). To ensure trustworthiness of the research, dependability must be ensured (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Clearly this is challenging in that qualitative research is both flexible and influenced by changes in the context. It is useful then to consider Yardley's (2000) comment that the purpose of qualitative research is to produce just one of many possible interpretations. When this is acknowledged, trustworthiness is enhanced. To promote dependability, the researcher in this study followed Koch's (1999) suggestions of keeping detailed records of the process and decisions made. An audit trail and filed notes were kept to provide step-by-step information about where, when and how the study was conducted. Any difficulties that arose were also documented, as well as decisions made to address these concerns. Notes from all supervision sessions with the research project supervisor were made and filed for future reference. All interviews and the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed which allowed for re-checking. The researcher engaged in a continuous process of reflexivity, documenting any thoughts or experiences stemming from her own life position or her engagement with the literature that contributed to the research process unfolding in a particular way. Questions asked of herself included "how does this link to the original text?", "what would an outsider make of my analysis?", "to what extent is my own voice apparent versus that of my participants?". This self-scrutiny then was an attempt to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

3.5.2 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is the equivalent of the concept of internal validity in the empiricist research tradition. Credibility refers to how accurately the research reflects the participants' reality and experience (Babbie & Mouton, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; William, 2006). In other words, credibility speaks to the idea of being faithful to the phenomenon that is being studied (Braud & Anderson, 1998). Given the aim of qualitative research, discussed

in section 3.3.1, the only ones who can truly gauge the credibility of the research and its results would be the participants, as it is their experience which is being elaborated on.

It is also important to note that research, especially which is conducted from a phenomenological perspective, cannot be perfectly neutral as it will always be conducted from a particular position (Banister et al., 1994). However, as discussed, the importance of recognizing this is vital to addressing the lack of neutrality. In addition, a researcher can implement precautions in an attempt to enhance credibility. In this study, two ways in which awareness of enhancing credibility was addressed were the fact that all the data was collected by the researcher herself, and that she employed a continuous reflexive process throughout. Koch (1999) emphasizes the importance of the researcher's self-awareness when considering the credibility of a study (Koch, 1999). The fact that the researcher is herself a mother was also used to good effect, in that she was able to engage with the issues and concerns of the participant population group, which contributed to the rapport and engagement of the participants. In addition, the interview recordings enabled the researcher to check and re-check the authenticity of the accounts she was describing. It is common practice in qualitative research to address issues of credibility by returning to the participants to verify the findings (Harper & Cole, 2012). In this study, the extended nature of the contact with participants, namely, two individual and two focus group interviews over approximately one year, allowed the researcher to follow-up on issues raised by participants. This allowed her to confirm her understanding through dialogue with participants, and to build a sound rapport which presumably ensured that they were sufficiently comfortable to correct any mistakes or misunderstandings. This process is referred to as member checking (Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012).

3.5.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings apply to, or may be generalized to, other contexts (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Koch, 2006;). This is the equivalent of the concept of external validity in quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). However, as noted in section 3.3.1, the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize findings to similar population groups, but rather to describe the phenomenon or experience of the participants in a specific study. Therefore, while transferability can be enhanced by providing in-depth and rich descriptions, it is understood not to be the primary focus of qualitative inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Henning et al., 2005; Patton, 2002). In this study, every attempt was made to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973, Merriam, 2009), rich in detail of the context and circumstances surrounding the participants' experience of mothering and being mothered in order to facilitate a full understanding of the phenomenon.

In addition, further detailed description was provided in the form of a clear rationale for the use of theory and methodology in exploring the mothering experiences of mothers. Detailed information about the participants has been provided, as well as substantial narratives from the participants and an interpretive commentary. This study did not attempt to generalize its findings to a larger population. Rather, the aim was to provide an accurate reflection of six individual cases, and the focus group narrative, thereby providing a rich description of the participants' lived experience. However, the thorough literature review and detailed description of the research context does contribute to the transferability in that they contextualize the cases well. Furthermore, the use of verbatim quotations from the interviews formed the foundation for describing the experience of the participating mothers, providing enough detail for the reader to evaluate transferability. As mentioned in section 3.4.1, the participants in this study were chosen based on their ability to inform the study's purpose, which also enhances transferability (Nicholls, 2009).

3.5.4 Confirmability

Within quantitative research, objectivity is stipulated for trustworthiness in that it is required that the results can be confirmed by another study of the same nature (Cohen et al., 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative researchers do not claim that their findings can be replicated perfectly. They therefore make use of the concept of confirmability, as akin to that of objectivity. As Merriam (2009) indicates, through the establishment of a thorough and reliable audit trail, it is at best possible to repeat the research processes, thereby tracing the data as a means of establishing confirmability. If, by constant referral to the data and direct quotations from participants, the findings are additionally grounded in the voices of the participants, then confirmability is also promoted (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For this study, the seven participants were interviewed and the audio recordings immediately transcribed. All themes identified were drawn directly from this data, to minimize any form of contamination or selective reading.

3.5.5 Triangulation

In this study, two approaches to triangulation were employed to increase quality. The first, *methodological triangulation* involves the use of more than one method to collect and analyze data (Banister et al., 1994). But using a combination of methods, investigators or perspectives, it is assumed that the interpretations will be richer and potentially more valid (Cohen et al., 2011; Howitt, 2010). The experience of mothering and being mothered was therefore explored both through individual interviews and through the use of focus groups. However, Barbour (2001) noted that triangulation is somewhat more difficult in qualitative research, as each data collection method produces its own type of data. The aim then

should not be on yielding perfectly identical findings, but on confirmation and substantiation. All seven of the participants in this study were interviewed individually on two separate occasions and were also invited to attend two focus group sessions. This allowed a more holistic understanding of the participants' experience in that a variety of data was collected from them.

The second method of triangulation employed was that of *investigator triangulation*, in which more than one researcher is involved in the study (Cohen et al., 2011). This was used only to a limited extent in the form of the research supervisor, who was involved in the analysis of the data. However, the supervisor also served as a "sounding board" during the data collection process for the researcher, to check her understanding of the narratives of the participants.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Following the approval of the research proposal by the University of the Free State Committee of Title Registration, this study obtained ethical clearance from the faculty's Research and Ethics Committee (see Appendix B). The number allocated for this study was UFS-HUM-2013-23 and this ethical clearance was renewed when necessary. In the following sections the additional ways in which the ethical treatment of participants was ensured will be discussed.

3.6.1 Informed consent

Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study verbally during the initial sampling procedures and then in writing with a covering letter, containing all information pertinent to the research (see Appendix A). Informed consent was obtained using signed consent forms which emphasized the research and its purpose, how the data collection would be conducted and that the participants had the right to withdraw from the project at any time (Barret, 1995). The form clearly oriented participants to the sensitivity of the topic and assured the participants that their information would be kept private and confidential, and that pseudonyms would be used (see Appendix A). The general purpose of the research, the nature of the participants' involvement and their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time were also reiterated at the beginning of the first interviews and again at the first focus group. The provision of such comprehensive information and guidelines was designed to allow participants to make informed and knowledgeable choices about participating in the study.

3.6.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality and the right to privacy for all participants were maintained at all times as per the commitment made in the consent form. The audio recordings and the transcripts of the interview were stored on a password protected computer and hard drive. None of this raw data was shared with any third parties except for the research supervisors. The audio recordings were destroyed once they had been transcribed and were no longer required.

Pseudonyms were used in the transcriptions so that only the safely stored consent forms reflect the real names of the participants. The researcher explained to the participants that all information would be treated confidentially and that no identifying data would be made public without the written consent of the participant. The final report of the study does not contain any personally identifying information, and pseudonyms were used whenever referring to the participants in the report.

3.6.3 Consequences of participation

The principles of non-maleficence and beneficence were upheld throughout this study (Beauchamp & Childress, 2011). The potential negative consequences for participants in the research were identified and the risk/benefit ratio of the consequences of the research for the participants was assessed (Wassenaar, 2006). The major potential consequence of the research was that participants might feel distressed when speaking about sensitive and potentially painful experiences regarding their experience of mothering and being mothered. Responding to the need to prevent adverse consequences, a fellow clinical psychologist was approached to provide for any therapeutic needs that arose for participants as a result of the research process. This also ensured that the researcher's role was clarified as not being that of a therapist. In addition, at the beginning of each initial interview it was acknowledged that the nature of the topic might evoke painful issues. Participants were reminded that they need not talk about these things and could end the interview at any time. As the researcher is a trained clinical psychologist, she exercised her skills during the interviews to engage with the participants in a supportive and non-judgemental manner. She aimed to phrase questions sensitively and remained vigilant for any signs of distress. The feedback from participants, following the interview process and at the time of the final focus group, was that while the research had provoked thought and raised emotion for them at times, they had found the experience to be very meaningful and fulfilling. Having the opportunity to share their stories and to hear the experiences of other mothers was clearly a positive one overall and seemed to make participation in this study a valuable experience for participants. As such, it would seem that the participants received some benefit from being part of this research process and that no direct harm occurred as a result of the interviews or focus groups.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of qualitative research and argued for the appropriateness of this design for the current study. In doing this, a discussion of phenomenology and its relevance to this study was incorporated. The active role of the researcher was recognized as well as the contextualization of the participants of this study. This chapter then detailed the research process, with a specific focus on the use of IPA. The limitations and ethical considerations pertaining to the design and methods were addressed throughout the discussion to establish a balanced view on the methodology of this study. In the concluding sections, an in-depth discussion of the trustworthiness of the study and its importance as a consideration for producing quality research was presented. Finally, the paramount importance of ethical considerations was addressed. This overview of the data collection and analysis methods, as well as the general design implemented for this study, prepares the reader for the following chapter, in which the findings are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research findings of this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, according to the recommendations for an IPA study, the collected data were sorted into subthemes and main themes before an interpretation process commenced. In this chapter, to do justice to each case, the participants' narratives are presented separately. This reflects the researcher's attempt to maintain an inductive approach and provide idiographic descriptions of each. As a qualitative exploration, concerned with the experience of mothering and the meaning participants have made of their experience, these findings take the form of expressions from participants, based on their individual interviews and contribution within the focus groups. For the most part, the expressions are verbal, although at times non-verbal expressions which hold significance are indicated.

The emergent themes are described in this section, and illustrated as direct extracts from the original data, in the form of quotations. This enhances the trustworthiness of the study by grounding the findings in the "true voices" of the participants. The quotations selected were considered to be rich examples that would expand on the themes. In reporting the results, participants have been assigned pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. The verbatim quotations can be traced in the full interview transcripts in Appendices C-I by using the appendix number, the initial of the participant's pseudonym, the number of the interview and the paragraph number as indicated in brackets after each quotation. Thus, C[J1p18] indicates the source as Appendix C, participant Janet, interview 1, paragraph 18. The sources for focus group verbatim quotations are indicated by the appendix number [FG] for focus group, the number of the group session and the paragraph number, all encased in square brackets. Therefore, I[FG2p26] would refer to Appendix I, Focus Group 2 and paragraph 26. For the purpose of the focus group analysis, the same pseudonyms from the individual narratives are applied to identify the participants. When directly quoting participants, clarifying information appears within square brackets []; three ellipsis points (...) indicate a pause in the flow of the participant's speech, and four points (....) indicate an editing cut.

Each section begins with a brief description of the participant to contextualize them for the reader. In the interest of transparency, the researcher's reflections are also summarized in brief. As discussed in Chapter 3, interview and focus group data should be approached slightly differently in an IPA study. Interview data is concerned with personal accounts, while focus group data may additionally include group processes and dynamics. Therefore in

presenting the focus group results, attention has been given to the group process and how this may have influenced the data collected. In the focus group findings, themes and sub-themes which offered new insights, or which are important in contextualizing participants' experiences, are reported in greater detail than those which reflect individual concerns.

The aim of this chapter is to present the data, with very limited interpretation. In Chapter 5 full interpretations of the themes both within and across cases are highlighted and discussed, linking them to the relevant literature.

4.2 JANET: NARRATIVE OF CASE 1 - Mothering with intensity

Janet's case is built upon two in-depth interviews, held approximately 11 months apart. The case name "mothering with intensity" stems from Janet's manner of engagement and her tendency to view intensity as a necessity for meaningful connection. When she did use emotive language, which was infrequently, she chose words with powerful connotation. This was particularly evident in her discussion of being frightened of her mother and her desire to provide a different experience for her children.

4.2.1 Background information

Janet is a 36 year old, professional woman with a PhD. She has been married for 11 years to a man many years her senior. At the time of the research she had a biological son of 7 years and an adopted daughter of 5 years. Her willingness to participate in the research was expressed as the result of being herself a researcher, and therefore agreeable to assist in the projects of others. Janet is a White South African, but her husband is foreign and they are a two income family.

Janet explained that her pregnancy with her first child was due to an "over reaction" to a misdiagnosis of endometriosis and so she became pregnant without too much planning. She explained that "it wasn't very well timed" C[J1p37] and had been driven by distress about the possibility of never having children. This speaks to how important it was for Janet that she have children, "I think that (*her husband*) saw my distress at the possibility that maybe I wouldn't be able to have children" C[J1p37]. They therefore accepted the timing of the pregnancy and accommodated it into their lives. Janet enjoyed the physical experience of pregnancy and breastfeeding, although the birth process was protracted and resulted in an emergency caesarean section. Their second child, a daughter, was adopted and is of a different cultural and ethnic group. Janet had considered adoption casually, but once she began to explore it in earnest, she found she could not justify having a second biological child, knowing that an existing child needed a home.

4.2.2 Researcher's reflections

There was an intensity to encounters with Janet as she was extremely serious. Even when speaking about positive aspects of her mothering experience, it was without obvious joy and articulated in an intense manner. Janet displayed a very limited, closed affect. Initially she showed little humour or warmth in her manner, although later, there were moments of this. By the end of the second interview, some rapport had developed and the process seemed to be gaining some momentum as she more actively explored her experience. Her insight and depth of reflection were valuable both in the interview process and the focus groups. The researcher also appreciated that despite her reserve, she was prepared to engage in this research project and respond to questions that did not always seem comfortable for her.

Janet's narrative is divided into those responses which explored her experience of mothering and those which speak to her experience of having herself been mothered. These are then followed by her reflections on intergenerational aspects of her experience and how she has made sense of this.

4.2.3 Meaningful motherhood

4.2.3.1 Belonging

Janet spoke of mothering as providing her with a sense of belonging and fulfilment, stating "I think I always wanted to be a mother" C[J1p35]. Janet highlights the experience of a sense of belonging as beginning in pregnancy: "I did feel kind of, weird kind of sense of company being pregnant, like I have got somebody with me and I am never alone and that kind of thing was quite nice." C[J1p81]. Her bonding with her son was facilitated by physical recognition of him at birth and this sense of familiarity resulting from having carried him throughout the pregnancy: "I did feel a kind of sense of connection with him" C[J1p81].

Speaking of her son, Janet reports an all-consuming, positive experience of mothering her first child, especially in the early infant period. "It was really nice. I was really obsessed with him" C[J1p49] and "it was very overwhelming but I was very happy" C[J1p49]. She found herself absorbed with ensuring that she was the primary caregiver to him: "I had this weird kind of thing where I didn't want anyone to spend more time with him than I did" C[J1p61]. For this she felt she had to be the central figure in her baby's life. This can be linked with her need to be in control and competent, discussed later in Janet's narrative. Janet also expressed the view that "the mother-child bond is a particularly intense and long lasting bond" C[J1p33] and that much of her fulfilment arises from this intensity and connection. In particular, she made sense of her experience of feeling more loved since becoming a mother by her comment that as a mother, you feel more loved "because you are more, having more outlets for love. And more, just more love in my life, I suppose" C[J1p63].

Janet also commented that the “relationship you have with your child, particularly your own child is ... you don’t often have. There are few other relationships that I have where the person I am with makes themselves completely vulnerable to me.... there is a kind of intensity in that very open expression of love and so on which children give. Whereas adults tend to be a lot more measured in what they give” C[J2p18].

4.2.3.2 The “needed” continuum

“I sometimes felt like he didn’t need me very much” C[J1p93]. In her story, Janet not feeling needed by her biological child stands in direct contrast to the excessive neediness of her adopted child. She stated of her daughter that “she had nothing, no continuity” C[J1p91] and “I think because that was the constant thing that she had, was me, and so she was very, very scared to go to anyone even, if she was on the floor and someone walked in-between her and me she would get very distressed” C[J1p91]. Janet was very honest about how she had been overwhelmed by the neediness of this child at times, and yet rather saddened by the lack of need from her son. “She much more obviously needed me and that is rewarding to a certain extent but it’s a bit um like too much” C[J1p96]. Janet showed how she had tried to make sense of her daughter’s extreme need by reflecting on her history of being without a mother for the first 5 months of her life and seeking understanding “that must play some role in her degree of insecurity” C[J1p98] but also aware of the effect that her daughter had on her as a mother “the mothering wasn’t as rewarding” C[J1p100] and “I was a more ambivalent” C[J1p100]. In the absence of positive emotional connection with her daughter, Janet recognized that she did experience ambivalence and disconnection towards her child, which resulted in guilt. “I felt quite guilty cause I felt like I wasn’t giving her what she neededwhat she seem to need, and I’m not that kind of person, is me to be sitting on the couch cuddling her like the whole day. And I am not a sitting down on a couch kind of person” C[J1p102]. “I didn’t feel like I was able to give her what she needed a lot of the time..... so I felt I was quite guilty for that, and quite defensive sometimes” C[J1p102].

However, Janet later introduced an interesting contrast to her initial experience of disconnection with her daughter when she commented on her now being able to separate with ease and move independently in the world:

“And there is that kind of mixed feeling that you are impressed that this little person is grown up but you also miss the little person that ran to you to see you” C[J2p92]. Janet identified how mothering has changed for her as the children grow up. Shifts in whose needs have to be prioritized have altered and what each child can tolerate. “Both children are less emotionally demanding” C[J2p88] which Janet seemed to experience as a relief. But this was contrasted against a sense of nostalgia and loss when she spoke of the realization that “this might be the last time a little person collapses and falls sleep on my chest” C[J2p88].

4.2.3.3 Personal expectations and fulfilment

Janet's expectations of mothering a small baby were pragmatic: "I had this idea in my mind that I probably won't enjoy it much until he is about 2..... so I wasn't expecting to enjoy it" C[J1p49]. In addition, her son was an "easy baby" C[J1p49] by her account, who was responsive to her care. "I hadn't expected to be good at and I felt like you know I am doing quite well at this" C[J1p51] shows her low expectations and how she was then so pleasantly surprised. However, later she spoke about how these unexpected gains resulted in being less prepared for mothering a second child in that "I think I falsely thought it would be easy to have two children because I based it on a very un-needy (*first*) child" C[J1p154].

Janet experiences mother-child relationship as a source of freedom to relate with an authenticity and intensity which she finds satisfying. Her children's love and lack of reserve "opens up the possibility to the adult to return it in the same way" C[J2p18]. Giving an example of the freedom she feels with her children, she stated "Like the only people I will dance around the living room in a crazy way with are my children" C[J2p20].

Importantly, she expressed the opinion that "it would be very difficult to have that kind of relationship with anybody other than your child than your small child actually. 'Cause I think as the child grows up, our relationships with mothers as adults, is not, we are polite now and controlled. And we don't make extravagant demands and extravagant displays of love either. But children do. And so they invite that back in a sense" C[J2p18]. In essence, Janet identified that for her "they don't expect moderation" C[J2p20] and this allows her to respond in a similar way. There was a sense of intense freedom that this understanding gave her.

4.2.3.4 A change agent

For Janet motherhood was described as "it has been a very good experience for me, something that has improved my life a lot" C[J1p33]. Motherhood for Janet has brought personal change which has been most rewarding. She reported having made more social connections and established friendships but for her most importantly, she feels internally different: "I think I have become a less intense person and a less anxious person" C[J1p63] and "I think I'm just, I became a bit more laid back" C[J1p63]. On reflection, she concluded that she is "happier" C[J1p63] as she has less time to think and worry.

The need to be competent as a mother and her struggle when this was not how she experienced herself, was a powerful theme in Janet's account. As discussed above, Janet's pregnancy and early mothering experience with her son created an unexpected and very gratifying sense of competence within her. He inspired feelings of competence within her because of his easy temperament, low demands and high responsiveness. "He was a very

rewarding child to mother..... he did everything he was supposed to.... put on weight as he was supposed to, smiled, was happy, liked me” C[J1p49].

However, despite this feeling of competence that her son evoked, Janet also expressed concerns about how her positive response to him may be detrimental: “out of our family, he is the most sane to me.... I don’t want that to be a burden of expectation on him” C[J2p70]. She further questioned her impact on him in that her extreme focus on her adopted child may have left her biological child neglected in some way.

“I hope that (*son*) just didn’t doubt that I loved him” C[J1p111] referring to the amount of attention she was forced to give to her adopted, needy child in the early years.

“I sometimes worry..... maybehe had to grow up too quickly.....maybe that wasn’t good. I don’t know” C[J1p113].

Regarding her daughter, the challenges of taking over the mothering of a child with whom she had no history, was culturally different and who had been without a mother for the first 5 months of her life, fuelled Janet’s fears of being incompetent regarding her mothering of this child. “with (*her adopted child*) it was much harder ‘cause I had no sense of how she would look and so there was this person that I had to get to know” C[J1p81] and “I didn’t feel the same kind of, the same kind of recognition with her”..... she didn’t look like anybody who was already part of my world” C[J1p83]. This is how Janet makes sense of a more challenging forging of connection; as she did not have the same foundation on which to build the relationship, as she had with her son. In addition, her daughter struggled with separation anxiety and was extremely possessive of Janet for the first few years. This marked neediness was a challenge to manage: “it’s much harder to mother a child like that. Because you know, the kind of, the kind of child who is very, very anxious and distressed from being separated from you, but isn’t terribly happy when she is with you anyway” C[J1p91]. “When your child is not happy it’s just less, you don’t feel as good mothering her because you feel like you must be doing something wrong” C[J1p91]. This more challenging child produced less sense of reward and meaning for Janet, but greater doubt and feelings of incompetence.

“With (*her adopted daughter*) it wasn’t that bad but she wasn’t as affirming of me, she didn’t give me as much positive feedback as (*her son*) did and then you feel like well, ja, you should be able to overcome that. But mothering is a relationship so it is quite hard. It is much easier to mother a child whose face lights up when you walk in the room, more than a child who is like pick me up, who doesn’t seem very happy” C[J2p68]. Here Janet was very vulnerable about how her experience of the “easy vs needy child” affected her.

“I made the mistake I think” C[J1p91] – Janet was acknowledging an error in applying the same routines and practices to her second child as those which worked for her first. She showed insight into how she might have done it differently realizing that what worked for one

child, might not have been the best option of the second child. Here she demonstrated reflection on why it was so difficult and retrospective understanding of how her actions affected the child's anxiety. Initially, she expressed the anxiety she felt at not being able to adequately meet her child's excessive neediness. Later, however, she spoke of how the fact that her daughter having been adopted had appeased some of her guilt at not being able to make her happy, saying "it wasn't all my failure" C[J2p96]. Having also read literature on attachment with adopted children, Janet was able to conclude that "it couldn't have been entirely my fault" C[J2p96].

Another issue concerning Janet's experience of herself as either competent or incompetent was connected to the approval or disapproval she perceived of other people's opinion of her mothering.

"People don't always think she is totally your child so if you were to in public be doing something that those witnessing it disapproved of that the disapproval would somehow feels a bit stronger. How could *she* be entrusted with that child? You know like an adopted mother should be especially good mother" C[J1p146].

Janet also expressed concern about making a sound choice in the decision not to have another biological child. There was again the theme of trying to do the competent, "right thing" but being unsure what this was.

"I almost felt as if there was almost already a child that was in the process of becoming or would become anyway who would become my child who if I decided to produce another child I would then lose that child and that child would lose me" C[J1p71]. Janet demonstrates her sense of responsibility for the potentially adopted child. And also identifies her fear of the possible sense of loss and regret which may have ensued if she had not made this choice. The complexity of the decision is also expressed in her clear insight that the decision did not come without its price "there is a kind of sadness about my body is never going to do that again" C[J1p71] and "or my body is not being very fruitful it has only had one little fruit" C[J1p73]. Her meaning-making process for this choice is that she has provided a home and mother to a child who already existed, and this helps her to put the regrets to rest.

4.2.3.5 Intuitive mothering versus a 'model'

Janet was able to grapple with how she experienced moments of intuitively knowing how to be as a mother. "You just do what seems like the right thing to do and why does that seem like the right thing to do?" C[J2p141] and "I went with what felt right to me" C[J2p141].

"What I realize a lot of the mothering, the things that I do as a mother that seem instinctive are probably not instinctive but rather modelling myself on my mother in some way. Like that is the model that I have of what to do. So if that model was really bad, that would be really hard to break that 'cause I would be having to break a whole lot of habits all the time.

Whereas here, whereas in my case, it is more like identifying a few things that I would like to do differently” C[J1p130].

“And I think if one has this very oppositional view like you know, everything my mother did was wrong, I want to do it completely differently, that is quite hard cause I think that human beings are instinctively copying imitating animals so when you are not thinking you do what you have seen done so your whole mothering experience must be an attempt to not do that” C[J2p80].

Here Janet explores how for her, making subtle changes may be easier but she also demonstrates the need for a consciousness to this process. When acting in accordance with her intuition, Janet was able to express certainty about her role as a mother to her biological child, “I knew, I felt absolutely sure that I knew.... I had no doubt in my mind that I knew what he needed” C[J1p144]. However, with her adopted child her experience was different, “with (*adopted daughter*) I was less sure and I think part of it is this weird sense that somebody else has entrusted this child to you. And you feel a little but like you should do what other people would do.... I didn’t feel quite as sure that it is okay for me to do what I want to do” C[J1p144]. Her intuition was there but being accountable to others almost overrides it.

After reading about adoption, Janet found it reassuring to see that some of her intuitive responses had been sound and that “I could for myself explain that it wasn’t my failure” C[J2p96]. She had also been able to acknowledge that her intuitive sense of needing to provide consistency was sound although “I wasn’t always providing that” C[J2p98]. She expressed both regret and insight. “Now I think if I went back I would have said, I would have been firmer..... Supper is not going to be happening and just sat with her if that is what she needed.....I think I should have done that more” C[J2p98].

4.2.4 Being mothered

When discussing experiences of being mothered and what she knows of her own mother’s experience of being mothered, Janet’s responses seemed contradictory. She was able to provide information, insight, reflection and meaning at times but then also expressed an inability to recall information, and defensiveness around discussing these topics. “My experience of being mothered? I don’t know how to answer that really” C[J1p115] followed by “I don’t think I mother differently from my mother” C[J1p115]. However, prior to this statement Janet had pondered “I wonder if I am doing the things that my mother did that I don’t remember her doing” C[J1p115].

4.2.4.1 The invincible mother

Janet struggled to engage with questions relating to her emotional experience of being mothered. Initially, she responded by saying that she could not remember. However, gradually through a process of being encouraged to describe her mother, she was able to access somewhat more emotive experiences. In describing her mother she informed me that “she was a very reliable, present, dependable, um, mother she was quite strict” C[J1p117]. And then, later “I do remember her as being someone I was a little bit afraid of” C[J1p117]. However, despite this disclosure, Janet showed little emotional connection with her experience. In her second interview her description of her mother as the “constant person”, “really reliably there” and “present” was reinforced C[J2p38]. These descriptions exhibit the way in which her mother has been conceptualized by Janet.

“I do remember her as being, ... she was clearly like an authority figure in the house, not like a buddy, she wasn’t that kind of mom. She was much more of a mother-mother, but she was always there” C[J1p117].

“I never had to worry about my mother she seemed completely invincible to me actually” C[J1p117].

Janet also reflected on her mother’s experience of cancer when Janet was an adolescent. “I don’t remember giving her any care really during that time” C[J2p42] mused Janet, and she was clearly puzzled by her lack of compassion and remoteness towards her mother. “Even then, she didn’t seem vulnerable. Even then she seemed like of course she could manage” C[J2p42].

4.2.4.2 The scary mother

Janet used powerful descriptive terms to depict the fear she felt towards her mother at times. Later, she softened this by referring instead to a frightening mother as being “scary”.

“What I worry about sometimes is I was very afraid of my mother and afraid of getting into trouble so I didn’t tell her very much and I worry if something very bad had happened to me I wouldn’t have told her” C[J1p132].

“I remember being terrified that my mother would be really angry with me for all sorts of things that in the end she wasn’t. So I don’t know for what reason I was just a child that expected authority figures to get cross with me” C[J1p134]. Here Janet is reflecting on the origin of her anxiety and recognizing it as not always reality based, but her perception.

4.2.4.3 Intergenerational patterns

Janet was able to clearly articulate her thoughts about patterns which are repeated across generations. She raised the view that “Someone might end up implicitly endorsing the same values even while you have explicitly decided not to if you know what I mean...” C[J2p52]

suggesting awareness of unconscious processes at play in the area of repetition of parenting patterns.

“We don’t maybe realize sometimes that the extent to which we are doing what our parents are doing ‘cause the more routine things just seem like that is obviously just how we do it. We don’t reflect on them as much” C[J2p54]. Janet then linked this to her desire to be a less “scary mom” than she experienced her mother to be, commenting that perhaps this suggests a different set of values at play. However, she was also aware that it is unlikely that her mother’s behavior was intentionally “scary” and so doing it differently may not be successful for her either. Janet showed how she is able to recognize unintentional negative patterns and how entrenched they may be in values.

“One does things automatically and one is actually copying” C[J1p115] expresses her sense of awareness of the likelihood of repetition due to unconscious modelling. “I think if I parented my children the way that my mother parented me, I think that will be okay. That is not a disaster” C[J1p130] and then “Of course we always try to improve” C[J1p130].

When walking out of the first interview, Janet had commented to me that as she thought about her mother’s reactions to her (Janet’s) parenting decisions, she recognized that her mother felt criticized by Janet doing certain things differently. She cited the example of breastfeeding and how she had persevered with it and fed successfully, whereas her mother had tried but stopped. Janet said that without her inferring criticism of her mother, she believed that her mother had felt inferior. However in the second interview, when reflecting on her mother’s response to things that Janet does differently in her mothering, Janet commented that “because she doesn’t think she did everything 100% correctly all the time.... I think she is glad maybe she thinks I got right that she didn’t. I don’t think she is resentful of that” C[J2p48].

“It would be interesting for me when my children grow up.... if they do something very differently to how you did it, they are in a way saying that the way you did it wasn’t right. Otherwise they would do it the same way I suppose” C[J2p48]. Here Janet was acknowledging a possible implicit message in children changing how they parent and recognize that she too may experience it as criticism.

Janet made an important comment demonstrating her thoughts on how change in patterns may happen and the challenges it brings. “I think it would be easy to improve upon a mother who was terrible. But very hard to at the same time, ‘cause you don’t have the model” C[J1p130]. She shows awareness of having some form of foundation from which to work, and the importance of this for mothering.

In giving her mother's history Janet indicated that in her family background, there was what she termed a "positive trajectory" of mothering. Her grandmother's mother died in childbirth and she was subsequently raised by a harsh, punitive stepmother. Reflecting on her grandmother's parenting of Janet's mother, Janet expressed the opinion that "I don't think she was the world's best mother to my mother" C[J2p72]. She went on to explain that there were three children and her mother was the middle child. When she was 18 months, her brother was born, taking some attention away from her. Then before his 8th birthday, he developed brain cancer and died. Janet sees how her grandmother was therefore not able to be present for her mother as a result of her own emotional turmoil. However, she believes that her mother improved on the mothering that she received and parented Janet more effectively "So I think you know my mother mothered her mother and her mother mothered better than her mother, so I don't know if I can keep the positive trajectory going" C[J2p72].

4.2.5 The meaning for Janet of having been mothered in this way

Reflecting on Janet's experience of being mothered, it would seem that the meaning she has made from her lived experience includes her attempts to be more fun with her children. "My mom wasn't really a fun mother" C[J1p119] was Janet's response to identifying areas of difference between her own and her mother's styles of mothering. Janet sees this as something she would like to do differently, but also something that she has to do, because her husband does not take on this role, as her own father did.

"My memory of her was being not super fun, kind of like, my dad was the one to come home and have fun with us. My mother was the one who gets supper on the table" C[J1p119]. Janet appears to be feeling pressured to carry this role, as she recognizes it as something she wants for her children, but also that she will have to be the one to do it.

As a result of her experience of her mother as frightening Janet tries to remain aware of how she might be perceived as scary, even when she does not intend to be threatening. Janet then linked this to her desire to be a less "scary mom" than she experienced her mother to be.

Janet expressed insight and awareness of the power imbalances which are inevitable, "I think one doesn't realize how scary one is as a mother . So I sometimes think I might be just as scary to them as my mother was to me. So I don't remember" C[J1p117]. Janet, expressing both fear and insight into the possibility that this mothering pattern may be duplicated in her parenting of her own children, reflected: "I don't know if they are quite as terrified as I was of getting into trouble. I kind of hope not" C[J2p64].

"Now I don't want my children to not tell me if something bad happens to them for those reasons so I hope I am more approachable" C[J1p132]. And then later an expression of vulnerability and anxiety "I don't know if I am managing" C[J1p132]. And then again later,

with reference to her son, “at the same time there is that same thing of like not wanting to tell me something because he is scared that I am going to get cross with him and I can remember doing that with my mom and then I think I am repeating the same pattern you know” C[J2p58]. What is also highlighted is Janet’s exploration of how becoming a mother has influenced her perception of her own mother’s experience of mothering her. Janet has been able to find empathy for her.

“I wonder now, I wonder from her perspective I wonder how she experienced that, now that I am a mother then when I think back I think well what does she, how did she find that, cause it seems to me the circumstances under which she was mothering were harder than mine” C[J1p119].

Comparing her mother’s challenges to her own situation, especially her mother’s isolation and limited social support enables Janet to form the perspective that her own circumstances of mothering were easier than those her mother experienced. It is a meaning-making process through which she appears to be trying to account for some of her mother’s “lacks”. Despite the empathy displayed, there is little evidence in her account of an emotional closeness to her mother either currently or historically. Instead, when asked about this she responded with “Um, and, um, ja, so, so ja, I speak, I mean I speak to my parents regularly, that kind of, every week we phone or skype and we see each other when they come and visit so I do see them quite often and have you know, I get along with them” C[J1p128]. This speaks to what the literature says about the power of IWM and how difficult they can be to change. Janet, despite her intellectual engagement with her mother’s position, does not have an internal conceptualization of her mother as someone from whom she seeks emotional support.

4.3 NOKUZOLA: NARRATIVE OF CASE 2 - Mothering long before

Nokuzola’s case is built upon two in-depth interviews, approximately nine months apart. The case name “mothering long before” epitomizes Nokuzola’s experience of having been in a mothering role many years before she became a biological mother. Her narrative is an exploration of how she embraced and made meaning of the responsibility of this role, but also how she struggles with the burden that it has placed on her.

4.3.1 Background information

Nokuzola is a 32 year old, Xhosa woman and the mother of three biological children. Her eldest daughter, now 10, was an unplanned pregnancy when Nokuzola was 22 years old and completing her undergraduate degree. The relationship with her then partner ended and she had to negotiate single-motherhood for a while. She later married her current husband, with whom she has had a further two children, a son aged 8 years, and a daughter aged 4

years. Her third pregnancy was also unplanned. Their marriage is a traditional Xhosa marriage and was solemnized four years ago according to cultural customs. In addition to this background of Xhosa culture, Nokuzola's husband embraces the Rastafarian religion. Nokuzola was raised by both her parents in a rural, Eastern Cape setting for her early childhood. However, for senior primary and high school she moved to live with relatives in a small town, and attended a former Model C school. She has completed a tertiary level university education and qualified as a teacher. She is currently employed in a preparatory school.

4.3.2 Researcher's reflections

Prominent features of engaging with this participant involved her humorous and positive approach to life. She presented as gregarious and joyful, speaking at a significantly fast pace and moving in an energized manner. Her voice was loud and her laughter infectious. However, what was significant was that a sense of her pain lingered in the room after the interview and the researcher was acutely aware that Nokuzola's story held hurt and disappointment, as well as evidence of positive coping. This was a challenge for the researcher and required her to engage in a process of reflexivity to avoid abandoning the role of researcher and becoming the therapist to this participant.

4.3.3 Meaningful motherhood

4.3.3.1 Responsibility

Nokuzola made it very clear that she sees herself as someone who takes responsibility for her own life, mistakes and opportunities. This view of herself and how she takes action in her world is important and meaningful to her. Therefore, when she discovered that she had inadvertently become pregnant, her response was to manage the situation independently and with full responsibility. "I always take responsibility for what I have done...or what I get myself into. So it was just one of those things again" D[N2p93]. However, this was not without acknowledging the stress of the situation and that the timing was difficult for her. Yet she still stated, "I had to. What choice did I have" D[N1p38] and was even able to expect some positive emotion, telling herself "now I am going to have a baby so I better just look forward to it!" D[N1p30].

Her ingrained sense of responsibility is also evident in her expressing to her mother the reality of the pregnancy "So I said to her listen you don't have to take care of my child, you have to take care of me because I am your child and I will take care of mine" D[N1p30].

And later, she reiterated this saying, "And I had the same conversation with my parents. I said to them, you guys have NOTHING to do with this. This is your grandchild, you are

welcome to love her. But you take care of me, like you were, because I am not yet working to support myself...I will take care of my child” D[N2p93].

Nokuzola believes that her fierce need to take responsibility stems from childhood, where from an early age she felt accountable for the wellbeing of her younger sister. “I don’t know why I felt like I was responsible for my sister, for my little sister” D[N1p81] but despite being uncertain of how this evolved, she was motivated by this feeling throughout her childhood and into her adult life.

Referring to the limited availability of parental attention in her childhood home, due to the number of additional children for whom her mother was caring, Nokuzola stated that she knew that “this is the part where I think I learned to be more responsible” D[N1p103]. She also links this emerging premature responsibility to her mother’s making use of her as a confidante, discussed later under her experience of being mothered. The consequence of this learning is seen in her comment that “I NEVER call anybody! I try to sort out my own ish (*issues*). Can’t people just do the same thing?” D[N2p49].

Interestingly, when speaking about her approach to motherhood and responsibility, Nokuzola referred to her three children as “they came through me and it is good that I take care of them and make sure that they are safe and whatever but my kids are not for me, they didn’t come here for me. But I am just here to guide them and help them” D[N1p97]. Her comment suggests a shift in perspective from being totally responsible, in her early days of parenting, to being more of a facilitator of her children’s life experience and not the sole responsible caregiver.

4.3.3.2 Meaning through purpose and reflection

Being able to approach her unexpected motherhood in a practical and responsible way was very meaningful to Nokuzola. She identified changes that she has experienced in herself, resulting from becoming a mother such as “I have just calmed down, I think I was very all over the place before I got pregnant for some reason I feel like I was just centered when I had her I had to, I think I got some stability because I needed to be stable to support somebody else like even emotionally” D[N1p50].

Being emotionally connected and present for her children is part of what makes mothering meaningful for Nokuzola. When she was forced to be separated from her first child for an extended period, it was painful to her to lose a stable relationship with her daughter. She spoke of the importance of restoring this as soon as possible saying “we had to get into a routine and get her to love me again” D[N1p54].

Becoming a mother, even through an early, unplanned pregnancy seems to be the vehicle through which Nokuzola has attained some freedom from her role as extremely responsible and “you are such a goodie goodie two shoes” D[N1p81]. She stated that “when I was

growing up I felt like the one thing I would do is have children early” D[N1p81]. As a child she was used as the example for other children in her family and community to strive to resemble. This put her under pressure. However, she would be thinking “all the older people would say why don’t you be like Nokuzola and do this? And you know what? I am going to disappoint you guys! I am going to have a child early! And it actually happened. Not that I actually set out to go and do it and that is why when I had her I was not even upset I was like okay this is it let’s make this happen” D[N1p81]. The expectations of being good and responsible were stifling for her. In contrast she was freed from some of those expectations by early motherhood. “Oh my hat, let me do something wrong for a change!” D[N1p81]. Motherhood then provided a means through which she could change or adjust roles.

Despite her history of compliance and receiving approval for her responsible stance, Nokuzola described herself as “I am a bit of a rebel” D[N1p83]. This was in referring to her decision to try for a natural delivery following the caesarean birth of her son. Her use of such a term for herself is in contrast to the responsible stance also portrayed. However, it again links with the freedom that mothering has brought and how she has used the opportunity meaningfully to change how she operates in the world.

Nokuzola showed insight into how she perceives her role as the mother to her children, seeing the facilitation role she plays in helping them to find purpose and meaning in their own lives.

“I keep having talks with them and telling them that you know what you are here on this earth for a purpose and that purpose I don’t know about it, and you don’t know about my purpose, but I know about it so you guys need to find out why you are here” D[N1p93].

Her role as mother is to facilitate their finding of meaning and she trusts them to find their own path. Purpose and meaning are closely related for her and this may be linked to the trust she feels her mother showed in her to cope and manage.

“You know, this child is for the world.... That’s why sometimes it’s okay for me to not want to make choices for them....where I realize that it is not my life, it’s their life. I am just here to guide as best I can” D[N2p109].

“You know sometimes you lie and think, but we were not so. They have kind of made me adjust to who I think, why I think they are here and who I think I am and this process of them being here you see” D[N1p97]. Nokuzola sees her children’s existence as contributing to her identity and purpose too.

Nokuzola linked her children’s changing developmental needs to her own sense of meaning, reflection and purpose. “Hmmm...(long pause)...with maturing there are new expectations, and you must understand that that is the case...and you are always watching out for when there is a point, or a something or situation when something is acceptable or

not...you realize 'we need to work on this now.' It's no more on the okay side. It's on the side that needs to be aided in order for it to be okay" D[N2p87].

When asked if Nokuzola was referring to a process of having to adjust to how each child is, she replied "I had to, like seriously, I had to. But I actually enjoy learning and getting to know like what it is" D[N1p99] and then later, with a great smile, "I like these kids!" D[N1p101].

Showing evidence of awareness and reflection, she went on to add "having to mother my own kids I have had to think about that and think about myself and what has worked and what hasn't worked and all of that" D[N1p111].

4.3.4 Being mothered

4.3.4.1 The premature mother

When asked to recall what she had experienced of being mothered Nokuzola struggled to respond. She articulated that her own experience was initially unavailable for recall. "Yho! I don't like, I can't exactly put a finger on anything because my mom was very busy. Like she had, like she was busy, and we there were always so many kids in my house" D[N1p103].

In addition to her own children, Nokuzola's mother provided a home for various relatives' children. Nokuzola explained "I have no idea how she coped with nine kids because I would have broken down" D[N1p119]. However, as a result of this large number of children, Nokuzola's mother was unable to provide her with much attention.

"That is why it is so difficult to tell you what it felt like to be mothered because I am thinking do you know what, that is because it doesn't feel like, it felt like I knew how to mother before I knew what it was like being mothered" D[N1p107].

In describing her mother as a personality, Nokuzola created a picture of a busy and preoccupied mother, with strong values and a forthright manner. "And you know she gives of everything she has. Of her time, of her money, of the works!...And you think, sjoe dude, do you ever get time to just relax ne?" D[N2p25].

"So you know exactly where you stand with her, she is that kind of a person. But she is loving, like she cares you know, she cares...." D[N1p119].

"She is not the kind of mother who will scream and shout, she sets you straight nice and calmly and that is it so you always know boundaries, she has got straight serious boundaries that are always there and ja, She is controlled but warm" D[N1p119].

Nokuzola became a confidante to her mother, who shared with her daughter the stressors she was experiencing. "I don't know why she felt that she could talk to me but she was like oh she can tell me stuff but that stuff I don't think I wanted to hear but she would like tell me stuff" D[N1p103]. As she was made aware of her mother's stress, Nokuzola found herself being cautious about making her own needs known or stressing her mother further.

“You could sense she was actually frustrated so when it came to me needing money for whatever I would just say oh it is fine I don’t have to have it, it is chilled, don’t worry about me, make sure others get and that is what I have done even now” D[N1p103]. Nokuzola explained how she soon learnt to limit her requests in favour of those of the other children and minimize what she needed. She was aware of her mother’s tendency to self-sacrifice and did not wish to overburden her any further. Adding to this dynamic of protecting her mother and being a confidante, Nokuzola was also placed in a mothering role for her extended family and younger sister, “I was always mothering someone” D[N1p107]. She went on to say, “I think I knew before I had my own child that I had mothered my sister” D[N1p109]. Like I had to sort out her stuff before it even got to ma, because that thing about I don’t want to stress her out, she has already got enough on her plate” D[N1p109].

As a result of her family positioning and expectations, her response to her unplanned pregnancy was telling “No, I think I have always been mothering. So when I found out I was pregnant, I was like ‘okay, we have done this. We might as well carry on!’” D[N2p93].

Interestingly, despite her experience of not being “mothered”, Nokuzola stated with conviction, “I have always felt immense love coming from my mother” D[N1p111]. She went on to add,

“I don’t think I would have wanted it any other way because that for me made me very responsible” D[N1p111]. This indicates how Nokuzola has made sense of this experience by reframing it as a useful lesson. She also interprets her mother placing her in a caretaking role as a demonstration of her mother’s trust in Nokuzola’s ability to perform this role successfully, “even in mothering my sister I have always known what to do because I felt like she said, it was her approval, of saying you know what to do, so I trust that you will be fine” D[N1p111].

“I never felt that I didn’t have her attention where I guess her telling me all her stuff was attention but she, I really felt like she trusted me and she loved me” D[N1p111].

“now that I am saying to you I don’t know what it feels like being mothered, really I don’t. But I don’t feel like I lacked anything because she had in how she dealt with it, she knows that I will know what to do and she trusts that I will and I have always done it and she has always says that is a great thing” D[N1p111]. Nokuzola experienced approval from her mother for being independent and capable.

4.3.4.2 Intergenerational patterns

In her second interview Nokuzola provided a description of her mother which suggested some similarities in the way the two of them approach life, and patterns that Nokuzola may be duplicating in some ways. She explained her belief that “ultimately we do what was done at home, if we are not conscious. Because we can change it, it is not the default” D[N1p134].

This highlights Nokuzola's proactive approach, not seeing herself as defined or determined by her past.

"We go through very similar things as mothers and what actually impacts on all of us is how we have experienced, you know, growing up and who we were around and what we were trying to do to change it if we felt that it didn't work for us" D[N2p6].

When the researcher enquired as to how she made sense of the patterns she saw between own experience and own practice of mothering, she responded emphatically "I think it's always wanting to try to give the best" D[N2p12]. For Nokuzola it is as simple as that. A mother's *intention* drives this process, and she makes the assumption that it will be positively informed, saying "Because obviously if there was a specific thing you didn't like, you try to change it. So you think it is the best of what you can offer. It's not you simply saying, Oh! I will just repeat it. Do whatever because that's what mothers do" D[N2p12].

Nokuzola's experience of being mothered leaves her with a sense that mothers have good intentions towards their children. "I am pretty sure my mother was not raised the same way she raised me. She kinda took what she liked and chopped what she didn't like and just gave me what she would've wanted. Which obviously might not be what I would have wanted, or might not be the same things as what I give my kids.....and what I am giving them might not be what they want.... But you know that place where it comes from. That your mother WANTS to give you the best that she can" D[N2p12]. This again shows how *intention* is guiding her. Her meaning-making has a very positive and optimistic focus. She trusts her mother to have good intentions: "So that's, that's for me, that's the link. It's that the mother wants to give you the best – what she thinks that's the best" D[N2p14].

Speaking about her own mother's experience of being mothered Nokuzola commented that "she kinda had to be very responsible because her oldest sister was away working....so she basically had to look after everyone" D[N2p21]. She went on to add "you know that thing where you feel like your mother is already mothering when she isn't yet a mother?" D[N2p21]. The strength of similarity between Nokuzola's own experience and that of her mother is evident in her comment "She always had to be responsible for things" D[N2p23]. She then identified how as a child "when it came to me needing money for whatever I would just say oh it is fine I don't have to have it.... make sure others get and that is what I have done even now" D[N1p103]. Her responses reflect the emerging intergenerational patterns of self-sacrifice and responsibility, which Nokuzola still replays in the present.

Nokuzola reported a contradictory experience of her own role as a caregiver and her repetition of the caregiving pattern displayed and learnt from her own mother. At times she adamantly spoke of rejecting it and doing things differently. Yet in other moments, with resignation she recognized where she behaves similarly, "because I have kind of inherited

that! And I don't WANT to be that! NO! I don't want to be that caretaker!...So ja, I am really struggling with that though, to be honest" D[N2p35]. Nokuzola used the terms *caregiver* and *caretaker* interchangeably to describe aspects of her relationships with others.

"But it actually just hit me. I don't want to do that to myself...but I have witnessed it so much that it is just an automatic thing that I do" D[N2p35]. Nokuzola knows the effect on her of having this role model which informs how she must be in the context of relationships.

"I don't take care of myself because I don't know what it feels like to say I need this" D[N1p103]. This is a very important indicator of the result of being mothered in this way. Nokuzola is not too comfortable with her own self-care, but is not always able to consciously address this,

"...that is annoying but I have actually only now, am I realizing why am I doing this to myself?" D[N1p103].

When asked if she sees these patterns emerging with any of her children, Nokuzola sighed deeply and acknowledged that she sees it strongly with her first daughter "And so she gives them all and she doesn't have. And I am like (*name*) what are you doing? Why are you being so mean to you?...and I just see me in her" D[N2p55]. Nokuzola spoke of her clear desire to have this pattern changed, "You know, I am thinking, if I am struggling, let her not struggle with that. But Eish!" D[N2p56] showing her commitment to a better experience for her child and her desire to not have the pattern repeated.

An additional pattern that may be being repeated is that Nokuzola appears to have adopted and applied some of the benign neglect she experienced from her mother, by expecting her children to find their own path. She frames this as trusting them to find their own way, and this might be positive, but given their youth, also stressful. Nokuzola, however, does provide them with more scaffolding than her mother did for her. In her comment, "She trusted me enough to know for me to know I would know what to do and that has kind of empowered me....now I don't have to rely on anything" D[N1p111], Nokuzola displays how she has reframed this benign neglect for herself. She then goes on to say that these "values I hold" are important for her to teach her children "because she (her mother) gave me that trust to know what to do and as a result, I have always known what to do" D[N1p111].

4.3.5 The meaning for Nokuzola of having been mothered in this way

4.3.5.1 Cognitively inclined

What was evident throughout the interviews was Nokuzola's tendency to revert to positive cognitive reframing of difficult situations to facilitate her coping and move herself away from any difficult emotions. Her approach was therefore very cognitively inclined and she used this to remain responsible, make decisions and be proactive in her world.

Speaking of her response to her first pregnancy she explained that her thinking had been, “Now I am going to have a baby, so I just better look forward to it” D[N1p30]. She went on to say that she approached coping as, “You have to girl! What else?...You just have to deal with it! And make it work” D[N2p97].

Reflecting on difficult moments during her nuclear family’s short time living in Cape Town she stated, “I don’t know if I actually made sense of it.... Besides the fact that I knew I had to, just you know? we just took it one day at a time and that it was not a conscious decision.... it just had to happen, what else would you do but wake up tomorrow?” D[N1p60].

Thinking about her relationship with her mother and what she did not receive from it, Nokuzola recognized that her mother’s use of her as a confidante and trustworthy caregiver to her sister was burdensome in certain ways. However, she used cognitive processing to reframe and cope with this. This is clear in her statement that, “I don’t think I would have wanted it any other way because that for me made me very responsible” D[N1p111]. Nokuzola made sense of this experience by finding the positive and reframing it as a useful lesson. “She trusted me enough to know, for me to know I would know what to do and that has kind of empowered me....now I don’t have to rely on anything” D[N1p111].

Nokuzola’s approach to coping is epitomized in this statement, “I have always felt that I have the strength to, no matter where I was....or how bad it seemed at the time...you just sometimes need to have a good cry and then get up and make it work!” D[N2p99].

4.3.5.2 Individuality

A significant response to her own childhood experience is Nokuzola’s purposeful attempts to raise her children as individuals, with respect for their needs and ability to conduct themselves in unique ways. She finds joy in seeing them becoming themselves, rather than having to meet the expectations of others.

“For me it is like, individual.... that is what I am applying. Not that that was applied, because at home it is like at home you just have to do the same thing. And I guess people suffered because of me being the example. So you all had to be like Nokuzola! So that is for me, no I don’t want my kids to grow up like that ‘cause they grow up with resentment....uh uh, no this is not what I want my kids to go through” D[N1p111]. Here Nokuzola makes sense of why an approach which allows children to be individuals is important to her. Recognizing that this was not her experience growing up, and that the consequences of this were negative for herself and others.

“Sometimes I just sit there and laugh because I think actually I enjoy children that understand that they don’t have to be the same. For me that is a biggie, like, that is why for

me adjusting to it is easy because I like knowing that they know, it is okay to just be me” D[N1p99].

Allowing the challenge of letting her children be individuals is very meaningful to Nokuzola, “But it makes me learn as well because I go back and I think what is important because you know, you have values and mine seemingly keep changing all the time like you, because what I then hold to be a value and I find it is being challenged by all of these challenges I am facing with kids....if you see me tomorrow and I am singing a different tune just know I learned something in that process, I learned something else and it has informed my decision now” D[N1p132]. This flexible approach has made place for personal growth and change too.

Nokuzola was aware of her children’s development and change, as well as their individuality within this as they mature, “They are so different you keep adjusting what you think of them and what you think of your relationship with them and how much independence should you give them” D[N1p97]. Nokuzola showed her awareness of the individual nature of each child’s personality and enjoyed having insight into their individuality and how they are changing as they develop. This was expressed even when their individuality poses difficulties for parenting, as in “Oh my goodness! So she is a handful” D[N1p91] and “I get shocked all the time, like yho who is this child, really?” D[N1p95]. Nokuzola is struck by the strength of character her child shows, but willing to engage with it and understand it as shown by her comment “Yho! she has got a very strong sense of individuality.... I don’t mind her being different and knowing what she wants” D[N1p93].

Finally, striving to allow individuality in her mothering approach at times brings reflection for Nokuzola about whose needs are motivating the way in which she is approaching a particular child.

“And sometimes I sit and wonder, ‘is this her?’ or am I not trying to...make her, or turn her into something that I wish could have been for me...?” D[N2p63]. Nokuzola referred to wanting her daughter to be less self-sacrificing, acknowledging that there may be an intergenerational pattern at play here. She again put out the challenge that “You have to figure out what works for this one” D[N2p81] and that the meaning is found in understanding and being flexible about how this will change: “They are all different... and I am still figuring them out! It’s not a...as they are growing up I am sure it’s gonna get worse” D[N2p84].

4.3.5.3 Doing it differently

It was apparent that Nokuzola performs her role of mothering in ways that are very different to those of her own mother. Reflecting on her children clearly being comfortable with their individuality and how this has come about, Nokuzola showed insight into how she has

approached mothering differently. “I don’t know how it has happened that they feel they should be comfortable in it but I guess it is ‘cause I listen to them and they feel valued in that way that I don’t go, shut up, go play, go do this, I will beat you up type of thing” D[N1p113].

When questioned about what had influenced her and made it possible for her to behave differently to how her mother had related, Nokuzola responded “watching what happens at home and knowing this doesn’t sit well with me.... and just being aware of who I am. I guess for me it has always been what feels good for me because I always said to Ma, ‘I love you guys to bits but this is my life’....so I need to make sure that number one I am happy....no ways that I am going to live my life from somebody else” D[N1p126]. These statements present a direct contrast to her reflection in the second interview of how she feels unable to ask for what she needs. They appear very different to the placating and pleasing role she also reports fulfilling as a child and adult.

Nokuzola makes an assumption that all parents will try to change for their children the aspects of being raised that they found uncomfortable. Her reflection on the first focus group demonstrates this, when she mentions the similarities in participants’ responses to their own mothering and “what we were trying to do to change it if we felt that it didn’t work for us” D[N2p6]. For her, this desire for betterment is a universal response all mothers share.

Commenting on her mother’s tendency to live her life serving the needs of others, Nokuzola indicated that she chooses to do things differently. “What a chore! I could never do that! I would never live my life like that” D[N2p29]. It was also apparent that this has been a deliberate decision in the face of reflection about her mother’s way of acting, “So I will do something else! You know? I have come to that understanding” D[N2p31].

“You know I think I have witnessed a lot of mothers...when they become mothers that is their ROLE. It becomes their LIFE! Sjoe! That’s quite heavy for me....Surely Nokuzola still lives?....As much as I love them.... I am still happy to send them off....So as not to lose touch with who I am” D[N2p109]. She made sense of her decision to not be defined by her mothering role, as being a way to preserve good relationships with her children “it’s not that ‘I can’t do it because of the kids’. I don’t want to resent my children...I really don’t” D[N2p111].

4.3.5.4 Cultural roles challenged

A final area in which Nokuzola has proactively done things differently to her mother is in her approach to the cultural understanding of the role of a woman, husband and father. Nokuzola expressed challenges in remaining authentically herself in the context of the Xhosa culture and was inspired to say “ It’s like I want it to fit who I am.... I want to show up, be me, and know that people don’t expect anything more” D[N2p71].

She explained that “I love my dad....but listen, he is like a traditional man.... he will always find something to send my mother to do” D[N1p121].

Even as a child Nokuzola challenged her father. “I was always sure I put him in an uncomfortable position....Teaching my dad something” D[N1p115]. Nokuzola insisted on involving her father, particularly because her mother was so unavailable. She deliberately challenged cultural norms by speaking with him about boyfriends, menstruation and requesting that he buy her sanitary towels. She pushed him outside of what was comfortable and familiar, to ensure that he played a more fathering role.

“Shame and you know he felt so uncomfortable with this hugging business and kissing business because I didn’t care because that is what we wanted him to do. It is amazing because the relationship I have with my dad now you would think he was my friend because we talk about lots of things and I tell him stuff.... he has grown to accept that I force it out of him. Because I know he loves me” D[N1p117].

This pattern of insisting that a male figure does not just subscribe to a stereotypical role, is evident again when Nokuzola speaks of her choice of husband. She set out to experience a different pattern of relationship, “so I have none of that in my house because I knew I hated it growing up. I couldn’t stand how he was left with so much time and she had none” D[N1p121].

“That is one thing I made sure I would do. My husband, I don’t iron a single shirt of his because he has his own hands.... And he has to cook as well because if it was just me eating then I understand him not wanting to cook....seriously, he ate so at some point he has got to do his part” D[N1p121]. Nokuzola has made changes in very practical aspects because of her clarity of knowing what she wants and expects.

Referring to her husband’s role as the father of her children, she acknowledged that he sometimes replays harsh parenting patterns which he experienced as a child. However, she balanced this with acknowledging how he is working to undo some of these and is willing to own when he fails - “half the time he thinks before he ‘goois’ (throws) the harsh words but he is very involved in the fathering process, which I feel my father wasn’t” D[N1p134]. It is also interesting to note how Nokuzola has constructed a marital relationship in which she feels they share responsibility as parents.

4.4 AVA: NARRATIVE OF CASE STUDY 3 - Mothering consciously

Ava’s case is built upon two in-depth interviews, approximately eight months apart. The case name “mothering consciously” is derived from Ava’s frequent references to herself as a “conscious mom” and the significant meaning this holds for her in terms of the way in which she manages her role as a mother. Her narrative is one of resilience and striving to move

away from her own experience of being mothered, and to construct a very different approach to how she engages with her daughter and being a mother herself.

4.4.1 Background information

Ava is a 43 year old Coloured woman. She has one child, a daughter of 11 years of age and has been married to her husband for 13 years. They live in a small town and for much of her daughter's life Ava has not been employed but stayed at home to mother their child. She has recently re-joined the formal working sector, in a secretarial post. Ava grew up in a small Eastern Cape city, living in a home with both her parents and several other female, adult relatives. Despite her parents not being financially secure, she was able to attend a private school, due to the generosity of these other women in her life. She later went on to university and attained a Senior Diploma in education.

Ava initially had no intention of becoming a mother and had decided on a vocation as a nun, in a religious order that focused on education and teaching. She saw herself as being able to nurture children in this way, "from a very early age I had directed my life towards that, so I knew that motherhood was not going to be on the cards in the conventional way" E[A1p36]. She believed that she would be able to express her nurturing side in this way and that "it would not be necessary that I physically gave birth to the children" E[A1p36]. The decision to marry and then, to have a child, came much later in life. Ava explained that "I felt I was ready emotionally and I was in a good space in myself" E[A1p36], which then permitted her to consider motherhood.

4.4.2 Researcher's reflections

Ava's story inspired respect in the researcher who appreciated her honesty and striving towards health, despite her childhood history of abuse and struggle. Her pain and the still present "ghosts" of her past are clearly areas with which she continues to wrestle and her commitment to bettering herself, in order to be able to mother her daughter effectively, was moving.

4.4.3 Meaningful motherhood

Ava struggled to fall pregnant with her daughter saying, "I struggled to have children ...then I discovered I was going to have fertility problems and it was like, it was a difficult thing.... we tried for two years before we actually became pregnant and the year before we actually physically fell pregnant we spoke about the possibility of adoption" E[A1p38]. Ava's own mother had become pregnant as a teenager, and Ava was able to explore the irony of being herself so easily and inadvertently conceived but then not being able to have her own child, when she felt emotionally and financially ready. "I did think about it in terms of other

teenagers like people who are just popping out babies and here I was trying to struggle to have a baby” E[A2p34].

Her pregnancy came as a joyful surprise, but after the birth Ava discovered that her chances of a second child were extremely low. She pursued fertility treatment options for six years before deciding not to continue any further. “It was when I turned 40 that we actually decided...we weren’t going to try any more... we were very privileged that God gave us this child” E[A1p60]. Apart from the distress that the initial struggle to conceive caused her, Ava explained that infertility has posed two further challenges. She is faced with the grief for herself of not having another biological child, but also the pain of not being able to provide her daughter with a sibling for whom she longs.

“The thing that actually does affect me personally is when she asks me for a sibling.... that hurts, it is a tough thing. I try not to show her that it is tough when she asks me, it is the one thing that she wants from me that I really can’t give her and that is tough” E[A1p126].

The meaning of her infertility is not then only her personal loss, but also the pain she feels for not being able to provide her daughter with something that she believes would have brought value and meaning to her child’s life. “I think it would have been good for her. I really do...she would have made a good sister, and I can see that in her.” E[A2p36].

Ava and her husband did consider adoption but decided against it. “I would like to adopt but (*husband*) feels he won’t love the adopted baby as he would love his own” E[A1p60].

Ava is aware that this sadness remains as yet unprocessed and that both she and her daughter need to find their own peace with it. “I don’t want her to have to bear the burden of my pain so I carry it by myself but it is a tough thing that I would like to give her a sibling but I really, it is impossible, it won’t happen.... and I have to tell her that reality and I know it is hard for her” E[A1p127].

4.4.3.1 Conscious decisions

“The word decision is very important because I actually *decided* to be a mom” E[A1p32]. This was Ava’s opening sentence, when asked to discuss her experience of being a mother. She went on to say that “we had thought about it very much, about the impact on our lives and how we would be and would we be good enough, and so (*daughter*) was very thought of” E[A1p32]. For Ava and her husband “everything we have done has been conscious-decision based. E[A1p64].

Ava expressed pronounced confidence in this way of approaching motherhood saying, “I am a great mom ‘cause like I am a conscious mom” E[A1p70].

When asked to explain what conscious mothering means to her, Ava elaborated, “I think it is when you are first of all in the moment with the experience and then you think about consequences.... like I am aware of the narratives that I give to (*daughter*) so there are

many things that I think about, but I will never verbalize 'cause I know that might have a negative consequences in her life or she might take it this way. So I might think it but I don't say it because I am aware constantly of, I would like her to turn out to be a good little girl, a great little girl. And not a girl that needs therapy or whatever, you know what I mean? So everything I do is really conscious.....I would like to say it is natural but it is not" E[A1p72].

Later, Ava talked about how she is "calculated" in her approach to life and mothering, and her awareness of her struggle to be spontaneous. While she views this in a negative light, as the above quote indicates, there are times when she sees her extreme cautious "consciousness" as meaningful and necessary to mother effectively. However, she is aware that her way of being may be contrived because it is all she knows.

"I am very, you could say calculated in the relationships I choose, friendships and everything. I know it is good and not good and I am determined not to repeat what I saw my parents did which I saw was negative for them and so ja I am a little calculated, a lot. And I know it is not natural but it is the way I know how to be" E[A2p22].

Exploring how meaningful it is to Ava that she provides her daughter with a different mothering experience to the one she had, Ava stated "I just know that what I was given wasn't the best, and I want to give, because I know how I ended up I mean here I am, I am a calculated person. I calculate all my moves, I don't want, I don't want anybody to be like that and it shouldn't be that way, it should be natural, that is how life should be with people" E[A2p88].

Ava identifies her parents as having a role in her developing a considered approach to life. They cautioned her about not repeating the mistakes they see themselves as having made, and encouraged her to assess the consequences before making decisions. "Whatever I did was a conscious decision.... they actually taught me that, they actually said 'don't do what we did because this was the consequences of what happened to us'" E[A1p74].

Ava compared her own mothering with that of her mother's and stated "I am a lot more conscious as a mom whereas my mom was a teenager, and didn't know better" E[A1p104]. Here she was demonstrating a willingness to consider empathically why her mother responded the way she did. Ava also expressed confidence in her own ability as a mother saying "I know I have done it well 'cause of the consciousness of it" E[A1p126]. For her, this is the essential ingredient for good mothering.

With satisfaction, Ava was able to say that "I didn't want (*daughter*) to have the experience I had and she is not having that experience, which I find good....I chose right. I chose the right husband....my circumstances that I chose have been good" E[A1p159].

4.4.3.2 Control

In her experience of being a mother, Ava shared many areas where she has found it important to be in control of her circumstances, in order to try to ensure that her daughter is protected. From the moment she found out she was pregnant this is apparent. Her then working environment was stressful and so “to give the baby the best possibility to grow up in me” E[A1p40] she and her husband decided that she would resign. Ava made changes to her diet and lifestyle to promote the health of her baby and Ava views her controlled, considered approach to mothering as having positive results. When Ava spoke about her daughter being a confident young girl, she made a significant addition to her statement, saying “I am so proud of her ‘cause she just, she is just out there whereas I wasn’t. I was like the tortoise behind the couch. She is not....I would like to think that my calculated thoughts and the way of parenting had something to do with that” E[A2p16].

Commenting on her experience of the first focus group Ava said that what she found useful was hearing how other mothers find it important to allow their children to do a lot of exploring. She realized that she struggles to do this, saying “there are fears involved in that because fear of influences. I guess so I need to....that is a challenge that I need to take on where I need to be less afraid to just let her be her own person” E[A2p2].

Ava recognized how her need to be in control limits her responding naturally to situations. She contrasted her way of being with that of her husband, who she sees as “just so natural” E[A2p8]. She sees his influence as helping her but her struggle with this clearly causes her anxiety as she again reiterated “Some people say, Oh you are so calculated, it is how I am and I don’t know how else to be” E[A2p10]. Discussing how her daughter is growing up and starting to wish to stay at friends’ houses overnight, Ava acknowledged that “I have to let go and I don’t let her know that I am struggling with it. But I need to let go within obviously safe environments” E[A2p64]. She added that “So now that process of trusting is the hardest thing I have ever done. Of letting her go now. Out of my safety” E[A2p66]. Ava showed insight in how her daughter’s needs are changing as she matures and that subsequently, Ava’s mothering must adjust to fit these. She stated “And it is also shaped towards starting to learn to trust her to be able to act for herself in those situations because of the grounding she has been given” E[A2p70].

4.4.3.3 Positive motherhood

The meaningful nature of Ava’s mothering experience was evident from the start as she recalled “physically it was a good pregnancy, it was a healthy pregnancy” E[A1p40]. Ava viewed the birth in a positive light, despite it not being the type of delivery she had hoped for. Her trust in the medical staff to act in the best interests of the baby was complete and this left her satisfied with the outcome of a caesarean birth. “The actual experience was

awesome 'cause I trusted everybody, I really did and (*husband*) was so great in everything, he was so supportive and the doctors themselves were like great, they were just awesome" E[A1p48]. Ava then made an interesting comment, in light of her need for control and forethought discussed above when she stated "And also it is nice when you don't know what you are expecting. It is like go with the flow" E[A1p50]. Some of the positivity she felt about the birth experience also may be linked to not feeling a need to be in control, and knowing that the professionals would serve this role.

When asked how she would describe her experience of being a mother to her daughter, Ava replied, "Awesome!" E[A1p66]. She then went on to elaborate: "I find it's like nothing else has been as great as being her mom. So, it's something that I am very proud of and nobody will, like you can tell me many things about myself, but you will never be able to say I am a bad mom because I am a great mom cause like I am a conscious mom" E[A1p70].

"I feel like I have grown in myself you know, I feel like being (*daughter's*) mom has given me a lot more confidence; before I was not as confident, but I feel a lot more confident" E[A1p122].

4.4.3.4 Books and other "authorities"

The significant role of reading parenting and popular psychology books emerged strongly in Ava's story. Her relationship to books and their role as surrogate parents, is portrayed in the quotes,

"So, books were my salvation....from when I was a teen I read psychology books and self-help books and things....I think through the self-help books I might have come through some transition stage" E[A1p90]. Her voracious reading during adolescence opened her eyes to the dysfunctional nature of her home environment, as well as to options for improving herself despite this background.

"I didn't know it was abnormal cause you think it is, this parenting is the way it is supposed to be cause you see it around you in your community and it is only when you start reading that you realize this isn't supposed to be that way, so ja, from about 16 I was reading psych books, self-help books, just my gut telling me that this is not right" E[A2p14].

Ava's search for substitute role-models and other "expert" voices was also evident in her use of television talk-show hosts like Dr Phil and Oprah Winfrey to assist her in developing herself as a mother, "because of the books I read and because of all the programmes I have watched and you know, I have done the whole Dr Phil thing so I know, I know I am doing a good job and it's not maybe for her, it's not maybe the best job..... I know that the things that I do that she hates is the things that is good for her" E[A1p126] and "Oprah has this thing which has been like a mantra in my head 'if you know better then you do better' and as long as I know better I will do better" E[A1p163].

Ava's involvement in her own personal therapy has also been an opportunity for remodelling and healing the pain of her childhood, so that she can mother more consciously, "I am very happy with the therapy I went for and in the therapy also that unveiled a lot for me" E[A1p90].

4.4.3.5 Negotiating mothering without a "blueprint"

Ava conveyed an urgency to improve on her own experience, but also an awareness of how hard this is for her, given the lack of foundation her childhood provided.

"I do want to do it better, I don't necessarily want to get it perfect. I do want to improve on what I was given.... my parents did the best they could with the circumstances that they had but it wouldn't have been how I would have done things but it is how they knew how, and I think Oprah always says when you know better you do better and I know better and I try to do better. I don't get it right. But I try to do better" E[A2p12].

"I know that I was damaged and I know that I don't have to be defined by that damage so I can choose differently even though my, you know you play your tapes even though your tapes keep telling you, I am aware of them so I switch them off sometimes I just automatically go into them again but then I just forgive myself and I move on" E[A2p16].

When introduced to the idea of our childhood providing us with "blueprints" from which we then operate in the world, Ava commented with reference to how sexuality was approached by her parents, "no, mine was psycho, it was crazy!" E[A2p80]. Now, in mothering her daughter she is being challenged to adopt a different frame of reference to help her daughter negotiate impending adolescence, "It is another challenge. I know I am going to be able to do it, because of you know, cause of other things that I have got through but the blueprint hasn't been great. So now I have to rethink and re-talk and what, what, what that blueprint when I am talking to (*daughter*) about sexuality which it is unfamiliar territory for me" E[A2p80].

Ava already has a plan for how she will negotiate this phase of mothering and compensate for not having been equipped by her parents, "I am going to use the books, because the blueprint hasn't been good....I have bought a book already and I am going to go for it. Redefine my blueprint" E[A2p82].

4.4.3.6 Role of husband/partner choice

A further resource for Ava in compensating for her childhood lacks is her husband. In the role of parent, she described him from the early days of pregnancy as being "very involved and very aware of me and what I need" E[A1p42]. She also expressed complete confidence in his ability to fulfil his father role saying, "I knew from the start he was going to be great" E[A1p56]. Ava trusts her husband to provide both support and guidance. The importance of

this relationship to her is very powerful. “He doesn’t try and molly-coddle me if I haven’t done something or whatever. He will be like, take it in the gut, this is how it is and then I am like okay that is how it is you know so I have got him as my sounding board and he gives me a lot of accolades in terms of motherhood” E[A1p163]. She summarized her position saying, “(*husband*) has been my healing hey! (*husband*) has been that healing right through” E[A2p114].

4.4.4 Being mothered

4.4.4.1 A “teen mom” and domestic violence

Providing the context for her childhood experience, Ava began by saying “I had a very bad childhood, a very difficult childhood” E[A1p74]. She then explained that her mother was a teenager when she became pregnant, and was unprepared for motherhood, marriage and parenting.

“My mom was very vulnerable at the time and so she.... had a relationship with a guy who then rejected her and in that rejection she fell into the lap of my dad.... Who.... could charm the socks off anybody and the two of them then met and that is how she fell pregnant.... he was very pushy.... And they met, had a baby, not ready for marriage, not ready for anything, they weren’t financially stable, no jobs, they had left school so the circumstances into which I myself was born wasn’t great” E[A1p74]. The theme of being born to a mother not ready for motherhood and not equipped to rise above these difficult circumstances, was woven throughout Ava’s narrative. In addition to these challenges, however, there was also a family legacy of violence and substance abuse.

“My dad came from a very abusive um relationship with his parents and his father and whatever and he brought that abuse into our family. And so we were, well I was physically abused right through my childhood” E[A1p80].

“My dad was an alcoholic and a drug abuser.... he was a drunkard. He kept his jobs; he kept all of his jobs amazingly.... we had like money and income and stuff but on weekends he would like just get sloshed and then he would like beat the hell out of everybody” E[A1p100]. Ava spoke of how, as her realization of the dysfunctional nature of her home environment developed, she made a personal commitment to not repeat such patterns,

“So I grew up in that home, in that type of thing and I knew that I didn’t want that for myself and if I was going to bring a child into the world I was not going to have that in my life world, I knew that you could stop abuse yourself and so it stopped with my sister and I” E[A1p80].

4.4.4.2 Protection from abuse

Ava spoke of a watershed moment which changed her perception of the relationship she had with her mother. A school teacher, for whom she had great respect, was critical of a piece of writing Ava produced describing her mother. She told Ava, “you have a very unrealistic picture of your mom.... your mom seems perfect: too perfect. Moms are not perfect” E[A1p108]. Ava was deeply shocked, and reported “that moment was a great moment for me because it helped me face the reality of my mom and then for the first time at about 13 I saw myself as separate from my mom and that was like a, like ‘ah-ha!’ moment for me, like ‘okay!’ I can do things differently” E[A1p108]. This encounter, although challenging, was a turning point for Ava and allowed her the opportunity to act in ways that differed from her mother. “The reason I saw my mom as perfect was because we were in this abusive relationship and my mom was always protecting me from the hits and hidings so obviously I am going to see her as my guardian angel so that was my reality” E[A1p114].

For Ava, her mother’s protection of her represented one of few situations in which her mother was able to perform what Ava perceived as roles of a mother. “My mom did everything, she shielded me....and I am very grateful that she did that because that is what a mom does....you protect your cubs and she did do that” E[A1p116].

4.4.4.3 Parent-child and confidante

Ava’s mother confided in her, resulting in Ava having information about her parents that was uncomfortable. “So the relationship that we had was more of two teens growing up together as opposed to a mom and a daughter and so therefore when I decided at some stage if I was going to become a mom ever it wasn’t going to be like that, I didn’t enjoy that experience, I wanted a mom who I could um, go to for advice or whatever, not a teenage friend you know” E[A1p74].

“I knew everything,....I knew the whole story.... I knew where I was conceived. (Laughs). I even knew the dress I was conceived in, the dress my mom had and still has today” E[A1p78].

“She shared everything with me so it’s not good to share with your child everything but she didn’t know any better and she shared it with me. It was inappropriate but um, it was the reality of how she didn’t know like as I said any better, she didn’t” E[A1p80]. For Ava, it was like having a teenage friend, rather than an adult figure in her life and she struggled with the absence of guidance and support she believed a mother should offer.

“She is not a type of mom that one can rely on in terms of advice and stuff. So I know that I would never get that from her but just I know she is my mom, you know what I mean, um, and she tries, she really does try hard, and I think she never grew up you know?” E[A1p86].

Having such in-depth information about her mother has enabled Ava to develop some empathy and understanding of her mother's struggles, but with a cost to herself. "My mom often used me for therapy herself, I was like the listening ear or whatever" E[A2p34]. The cost to Ava is clear in her statement of "There were things I shouldn't have known. It kind of even today still haunts me and I always have to stop the record you know, because it just haunts me and I didn't want to know that kind of as a child....I never had an opportunity really to be a child and I don't think I am ever going to have that opportunity" E[A2p58].

Speaking of their current relationship, Ava explained that "we have a strange relationship in that, I am like her mom and she is like my child so we are a bit like that if you could say that is the kind of relationship we have" E[A1p86].

4.4.4.4 Raised by a village

Ava's capacity to seek alternative influences and resources, to compensate for what her parents lacked was an important thread in her narrative. "You know they say it takes a village to raise a child?" E[A1p142] and then, "I did have a village of women.... my granny, my own mother, my uh, my aunty (*name*), and there was aunty (*name*), so the four of these women, you could say raised me" E[A1p144]. Ava's gratitude towards these women is clear, "They were on social security and whatever I needed they gave and so I know that I am, I am because they were" E[A1p144].

Ava still experiences their influence in her current life and in her role as a mother, "I still sense them around" E[A2p104]. In the context of her mothering of her own daughter, she was asked to respond to how they have guided her. She mentioned that one of her aunts spoiled her as a child and she feels her influence "at the times that I spoil (*daughter*)" E[A1p148].

Ava also explained "Look my gran was a hard person, she is not the type of granny that you could sit on their lap and cuddle with" E[A2p100]. And so the times when she feels the influence of her gran in her mothering are, "My gran played a very protective role over me and so when (*daughter*) is being hurt by someone I can see my gran in that because I become like a feisty woman you know" E[A1p152]. Ava feels that she modelled herself in certain ways on her grandmother and so "I am, a lot of how I am is because of her as opposed to my mom" E[A1p82].

Ava oscillated between describing her grandmother in the past and the present tense, despite her having passed away. She explained that her grandmother was outspoken and she also taught Ava that "you must rely on yourself, you have got your friends but never rely on a man....she was independent" E[A2p98]. And so Ava concluded, "my gran taught me that kind of thing that you don't fall apart because of someone else. You are strong in your own self. So she mothered me in that way" E[A2p98]. Ava was able to find substitute care for

her unmet needs from these three women. Her grandmother's strength and her two aunts' compassionate care provided a balance for Ava. "In a way the three of them had what a mom should have been in one, you know?" E[A2p102].

4.4.4.5 Empathy and repair

Ava was able to reflect charitably on her current relationship with her mother and express how this has changed over time. However, Ava is realistic about her expectations of this relationship, "um, she is not a type of mom that one can rely on in terms of advice and stuff. So I know that I would never get that from her but just I know she is my mom.... and she tries, she really does try hard, and I think she never grew up you know" E[A1p86]. What is noticeable is the compassion and understanding she demonstrates for what her mom was able to offer her and why she could not provide the emotional care Ava needed.

"I think at some stage my mom was always that 18 year old that fell pregnant and at, she is 60 something now and she is still like that but I know that is her.... there was a time in her life that I knew that she wasn't going to be the way I wanted her to be, and that that was okay you know and so I accepted the way she is" E[A1p86]. "But I appreciate her, we do have a great relationship.... I take her out places, I try to give her a little bit of um, what she never had when she was growing up in her own marriage" E[A1p86]. Here again the role reversal of the parent-child comes through in Ava's depiction of her current relationship with her mother.

In her own therapy, Ava needed to work through her anger and disappointment at not receiving the parenting she required. She was also able to acknowledge that despite their failure as parents they "always tried to give me everything that they didn't have even though my dad was a very abusive guy" E[A1p90]. Ava is able to separate their intention from the reality of what they provided in parenting, and is empathic in understanding their position. As a result she is able to state "I have forgiven him.... through my own therapy, I actually face to face forgave him" E[A1p90]. Interestingly, she feels less resolution and forgiveness for her mother.

The effect of being a mother herself on her relationship with her own mother was described as "well it made me realize how difficult it is to be a teen mom!" E[A1p134] and Ava then elaborated "or how difficult it is to be a mom when you are not ready for it. So she wasn't ready, my mom wasn't ready and so her life was tough and mothering for her was tough" E[A1p136].

"I have forgiven my mom, maybe less than my dad but there is forgiveness there, there is an understanding, because she had like a bit of, I want to say a difficult childhood too but not the abusive child side, my, I discovered late in life that my grandmother was actually a lesbian" E[A2p54]. Ava finds her father's traumatic childhood easier to see as the reason

behind his abusive negligent parenting. She also respects his recovery from this. With her mother, she views her life circumstances as providing less “excuse” but does see how they have influenced her.

She also does not see her mother as having addressed her issues adequately, “so I now do have empathy for how she grew up and her understanding of her world. I don’t know if my mom is ever going to grow up, she is sometimes still like a teenager you know. She throws tantrums and that kind of thing so she is different to my dad in that way where my father processes, I think my mother finds processing a lot more difficult” E[A2p54].

A last reflection offered by Ava, shows her engagement with the unfinished nature of her relationship with her mother and recognition of issues which remain.

“Maybe I am not compassionate enough with my own mom. There is still a little bit of something there, like I am not able to hug her like from spontaneous things or whatever, maybe it is still because I still see her as I am the parent” E[A2p102].

4.4.4.6 Healing

Despite Ava’s acknowledgement that she may still hold certain reservations and hurts relating to her mother, her story is evidence of significant healing and recovery from a difficult childhood experience. This has important implications for her mothering experience. “When I was going through therapy I went through a mourning process.... where I mourned that I was never going to have the mom and dad that I wanted, that I needed but that was my reality....and what was I going to do about it (laughs)” E[A1p92].

A significant event for Ava in her own healing has been her father’s ability to acknowledge his failings and in particular to recover from alcohol abuse and remain sober for 11 years. The birth of her daughter seems to have provided the catalyst for this. Ava respects him greatly for this achievement.

“It is not complete yet, my healing, I don’t think it will ever be to a space where it is complete but I know when it is happening and I can feel it” E[A2p62].

4.4.4.7 Intergenerational patterns

While Ava is aware that there are some patterns that she has carried over from her childhood and her own experience of being mothered, she has also purposely chosen to not repeat much of what she experienced:

“So I grew up in that home, in that type of thing and I knew that I didn’t want that for myself and if I was going to bring a child into the world I was not going to have that in my life world, I knew that you could stop abuse yourself and so it stopped with my sister and I” E[A1p80].

Ava recognizes similarities between herself and her grandmother, in their “battle mode” E[A1p154] of a protective parent and when Ava becomes what she termed “a feisty woman”

E[A1p152]. Although she did acknowledge that “I know I have a lot of my mom in me as well, a lot of the good stuff in my mom I have in me” E[A1p82], she did not make the link between when she is protective of her child, and how her mother was protective of her in the context of domestic violence. Instead, she identifies only with her grandmother in this role. However, the intergenerational pattern of protectiveness is evident in Ava’s account. She portrays her grandmother as serving this role, speaks of her mother as being able to provide this for her despite failing to fulfil many other mothering roles, and she too sees herself as a very protective mother of her own daughter. Speaking of her tendency to be protective of her daughter, Ava said that “I don’t know if it is the right thing to do but that is how I am, that is my reality that is what I do” E[A1p159].

Reflecting on how her daughter experiences her as a mother, Ava mused, “I would love to know what her experience is when she is older. I am going to ask her one day” E[A1p159]. She then went on to say how she had once asked her daughter if she was a good mother. The response had been in the affirmative, with an explanation that “you always look after me; you look after me very well” E[A1p159]. Here again, the importance of the mother as a nurturing protector is being replayed.

Ava has become accepting of her role as a caregiver to her mother, and has been able to step aside and allow a grandparent-granddaughter relationship to develop between her daughter and mother. However, she commented on the nature of this saying,

“Her mothering experience could be, I think she is experiencing it through (*daughter*) now, she is not like the granny and she is more like the mom and I let her be, you know I give her that....in the beginning at first when (*daughter*) was a baby and I was like any negative experience or any bad things that happen, even if they had an argument in their relationship I would take (*daughter*) outso I would take her out of that experience but now I am a little more comfortable if they have a little argument (*daughter*) knows that that is how ma and pa are, mommy and daddy are not like that. You know so I trust a lot more” E[A1p120].

It is very important and meaningful to Ava to not repeat the mistakes of the past and to mother differently. With this in mind, her need to identify with her grandmother rather than her own mother is understandable, as she clearly respects the form of mothering her grandmother was able to offer.

“But my granny again was a conscious mom and she married later in life and had a child later in life so um, the two of us, my granny and I were very like alike. I take a lot after my granny” E[A1p138].

“I am still in a long process.... but I am aware of my own parenting and my own mothering and trying not to, I don’t want to say repeat the mistakes of my mother and father but trying to be aware of how I knew they didn’t, they didn’t have all the skills, they were young, they

were teenagers and those things that come with being a teenage parent. I am different” E[A1p6].

4.4.5 The meaning for Ava of having been mothered in this way

The findings clearly indicate how meaningful the experience of mothering has been for Ava, both as a personal growth opportunity and as a chance to repair and perform differently to what her mother was able to do in being a mother to Ava. Acutely aware of her need to mother differently and more mindfully than her mother, Ava has used the experience of her own mothering to become a “conscious mom” E[A1p70, 138 & 179]. While she may lack spontaneity she believes this sacrifice is worth making for the sake of not repeating the errors she perceives her parents to have made. Ava strongly believes that she has achieved her goal of mothering her child effectively but also reports, “you know so it is not just my own knowledge of I am doing a great job and you know what, funny enough my mom and dad they tell me you are a great mom. So I know I am doing a great job because it came from them....it was very meaningful, not so much from my mom but it was very meaningful when it came from my dad and he said, you have many faults but I can’t fault you on motherhood” E[A1p163]. A significant quote from Ava, sourced during the final focus group, has relevance here to her personal sense of the meaning of being a mother to her child. She reported that when her daughter was five years old, she was asked by her teacher “what does your mom do?” you know, as a career. And she said, “my mom’s a mom” I[FG2p260].

4.5 DEBBIE: NARRATIVE OF CASE STUDY 4 - Mothering for who you are

Debbie’s case, based on two in-depth interviews, conducted 11 months apart, is titled from a quotation “you are who you are” which Debbie repeated throughout her interviews. This saying epitomizes her path to self-acceptance which she applies in mothering. Debbie’s background failed to equip her with a sense of personal agency and goal directedness, yet through her experience of becoming a mother she has attained these and strives to now provide them for her children.

4.5.1 Background information

Debbie is a White, English speaking 44 year old woman, living in a small Eastern Cape town. This is her second marriage, following a brief marriage and divorce when she was very young. She has been married for 15 years to her current husband and has fraternal twin daughters aged 6½ at the time of the initial interview. Debbie struggled for eight years to fall pregnant and the twins were conceived following extensive fertility treatment.

Debbie was raised by both her parents in the town in which she still lives. Her father died several years ago and her mother has only recently moved from the family home. Debbie’s

older sister also lives in the town with her husband and two children. Debbie was a pupil at a local government school and achieved a matriculation pass. She attended a single year at university, also in the same town, but failed her subjects because she was viewing the year as a social opportunity rather than working towards a degree. She has been employed in various sectors, but once her children were born the pace and travel requirements of the position she held at the time no longer suited her lifestyle. She therefore studied accounting and bookkeeping to enable her to run her own business, “and eventually found different jobs until I found what suited me for my time with the kids” F[D1p72]. She currently works full-time and her children are cared for after school by a nanny. Debbie’s husband travels throughout the world for his business and so family time together is precious to them.

4.5.2 Researcher’s reflections

Debbie was an engaging participant because of her positive approach to life and her willingness to embrace challenges and look for value and growth opportunities within them. The researcher noted that her optimistic outlook did not deny how difficult some of her life experiences have been, but rather demonstrated how she has integrated and resolved her struggles. Debbie’s story left the researcher with a sense of having interviewed two people: the Debbie before she had children, and the Debbie after having her twins. Her personal growth was so pronounced following her struggle with infertility and becoming a mother, that it seemed as if much of her former self has been ‘reworked’ and a more mature, accepting personality had come to the fore.

4.5.3 Meaningful mothering

4.5.3.1 Infertility

When asked to tell her story of mothering, Debbie began, “I think it would start with that need for wanting children that you don’t understand why you have to have children. You know, it’s just this internal need and you will do anything to get it..... we decided that we wanted to have children and it was this thing that had to be fulfilled. That we would stop at absolutely nothing until we had children” F[D1p20]. Debbie expresses being driven to have this, but not understanding where this drive came from. Her description contains both desperation and focus.

Debbie and her husband were unable to conceive without fertility treatment. Investigations to discover the source of the infertility and the subsequent interventions took their toll. “And you know you spend eight years focusing on nothing else but falling pregnant....Everything, every mouthful you eat, everything you do, every step you take, you are so, I became so in tune to my body, that is why I knew I was having twins cause I actually felt each egg taking. I

convinced myself maybe but you know, it's possible you can feel it and I was convinced that I knew" F[D1p50].

"But it was very, very difficult and in the end I had actually given up. I said, this is our last treatment, it is killing me. I can't do this anymore. And we moved on to adoption because there was no doubting that we were going to have children" F[D1p46].

"It is funny how your goal posts move. You change what you will do to get those children....And so you eventually, you'll do anything" F[D1p46]. Here Debbie speaks in the third person, distancing herself from what was clearly an agonizing process. The goal of becoming a mother was maintained despite having to face the possibility of not being a biological mother to children.

Apart from physically becoming a mother, the successful pursuit of fertility treatment has another meaning for Debbie. "This is the first time that I ever really doggedly completed something" F[D2p74]. She went on to explain, "I think I am also very proud of it that I saw something through. I was always a person who gave up very easily and that was one of the first things in my life that I saw through so it gave me a sense of achievement" F[D2p72]. Debbie finds positive meaning-making of this hard experience, recognizing the growth it brought within herself.

4.5.3.2 Mothering twins

Through the fertility treatment and intervention, Debbie became pregnant with fraternal twins. The experience of this pregnancy and the mothering of twin children is a significant chapter in her story.

She described a very healthy pregnancy once the twins were conceived "I felt I felt like a queen for nine months. It was special but I think just having twins is the most special thing so you feel extra special I think that is why I never wanted to be pregnant again because I just thought it would pale in comparison. (Laughs)" F[D1p30].

Debbie expressed satisfaction with her twins, but also a concern of not wanting to spoil the experience or take the risk that it would not be positive a second time, "I just feel that everything is so perfect.... that having a third pregnancy....it's not going to be perfect we have also got (*twin 1*) who is just like dad and (*twin 2*) who is just like me and I worry where would a third one fit in. (laughs). We have got such perfect harmony. I just don't want to rock the boat. Although I always wanted to have a large family" F[D1p32].

Providing humorous but practical guidelines for how she managed the early years of mothering twins Debbie noted, "And the best way coping with twins at baby stage, is don't try and do anything else!..... Do not try and watch TV, do not try and read a book, do not try and do anything, don't try and have a cup of tea. I don't think I had a cup of tea for four years cause what is the point? And you know I just dedicated myself completely but I think it was

an easy thing to do because I wanted it so desperately” F[D1p72]. Debbie has a positive spirit and a profound sense of gratitude for her children, which enabled her to embrace the challenges in an optimistic way.

“Only once did I phone my mom and she found me in the playroom floor with these two babies on my lap and I was in tears and.... I said I need help and it was only once.... by then I was so exhausted you know ‘cause I hadn’t slept now for almost two years. But generally I could really cope and I enjoyed coping and I enjoyed the puzzle solving of having twins....and if you look at it with that attitude it’s fine” F[D1p80].

Debbie explained that each of the twins resembles one of their parents in both physical features and personality. Because of this, she identified with (*twin 2*) who she said, “She is a little me” F[D1p84]. Initially, Debbie felt very guilty about this, but her mother-in-law helped her to understand that “you are able to connect with children at different levels” F[D1p84]. So Debbie was aware that “(*twin 2*) for me, I find easy to understand and connect with because we are so similar....I am able to understand her better than I am able to understand (*twin 1*). Not that I don’t love (*twin 2*) more or less but I love her differently” F[D1p84]. Realizing this, Debbie had to make a decision early on “I think in my mind I needed to make sure that I didn’t let that....show in my actions” F[D1p84]. Identification with *twin 2* has been a source of bonding for Debbie, but due to her self-awareness she has tried not to let it impact on the relationship with her other daughter.

The differences between parenting twins and how their very distinct twin connection influences mothering and decision making for Debbie was clear from the excerpts below.

“The girls have such an upbeat personality.... they laugh and giggle and tease each other.... it’s called twin escalation syndrome, but they do it in happiness and laughter and silliness and it just goes up and up and up until they are both lying on the floor screaming with laughter and it is just hysterical.... and, I treasure that, it is happy noise” F[D1p96].

Debbie explained that “it is only recently have I really taken seriously the twin bond.... I never gave that any thought, I tried not, and I never refer to them as twins, they were my girls....only recently.... I started doing research” F[D1p98]. Debbie has discovered how profound this bond is for her children and how her mothering needs to take account of it. “Those children have been together for ever” F[D1p98] and “although they come across as so strong and independent there is an underlying strength that you don’t understand because you never had it. And I can see it now and I really, I have to make sure that I nurture it” F[D1p98]. Debbie described an experience of ‘disenfranchised grumbling’ as a result of having gone to such lengths to conceive her children saying, “but another thing was you can’t complain, because you wanted it so badly” F[D1p72]. She felt that complaining about the challenges and difficulties of having twin daughters was unacceptable, as if her

deliberate pursuit of motherhood invalidated her right to grumble. “You almost felt too scared to complain that you made such a thing to get these children you can’t complain now, you wanted this” F[D1p76].

“I also find I couldn’t ask for help. I think it was only when they were four or something like that and eventually they were walking, I realized you know, not once, leaving Pick ‘n Pay with twin babies, a pram and a trolley did I ever ask anybody to push my trolley and you think why didn’t, why couldn’t I just ask somebody to push my trolley, you know, there are thousands of people push trolleys you know and I think when they were four I all of a sudden, why didn’t I do that? You know and I just think, I don’t know, I just did every single thing myself. But because I wanted to, because I wanted to experience every little, I couldn’t bear anybody doing anything” F[D1p74].

4.5.3.3 Certainty and knowing

An empowering aspect of the infertility struggle was that Debbie was extremely confident in her ability to manage motherhood once she was pregnant. This confidence seems to have emerged from the trial of struggling to have children. She explained her thinking as, “It has taken me this long, this is what I am doing and now I can carry on and this was my goal” F[D1p54].

Making meaning of her infertility struggle, Debbie stated that “the journey that we went through to get the children and the time that it took just made me....I just think it gave me so much confidence that once I had had my kids, this is us and I know what to do to look after these kids and I just felt very, that it was so right, you know” F[D1p52].

“I didn’t need anybody telling me what to do....I had come through such a journey that now I can take over (laughs) you know? It felt right” F[D1p52].

“I got that much older in the process you know, maybe all the reading....that by that stage I had already decided what I needed to know and what I didn’t need to know but I didn’t need anybody’s input, I was very confident and very, and I think that played a huge part it was what I was able to do for my kids you know, I never doubted, my instinct” F[D1p54].

“I think I learned to read my body maybe and learned to trust how I felt and what I wanted and maybe was able to trust what I knew I wanted to do for my children. You know that I didn’t need to second guess myself, I think maybe that journey led to that. It could have you know” F[D1p54].

Attaining her goal of being a mother led to this confident certainty and ability to trust her intuition. Even in deciding against breastfeeding Debbie felt an intuitive certainty of what she could manage, “I wasn’t enjoying it. I think if I was enjoying it I may have pushed on but I was in terrible pain and I just hated the whole sensation” F[D1p60], indicating a self-knowledge of what she could tolerate. Again the certainty of knowing what she wanted

helped her to cope with a challenging experience and make decisions for how to address it. "I knew for myself that this was the right thing for us" F[D1p70].

Although Debbie had to go back to work when her twins were eight weeks old, she made adjustments to her working life to enable her to spend more time with her children. "Once I had those children and I went back to work, I said, right, I don't travel anymore...because being separated from them getting on an airplane was just, it broke my heart, I couldn't do it and I said that is it, I am not travelling, sorry (crying)" F[D1p72]. Even speaking of it now evokes strong emotions for Debbie. She therefore restructured her qualifications and working life to accommodate motherhood, "my children do definitely come first and I didn't, I had to change my working environment and it was a slow change that I had to wiggle things around until I got to where I wanted to be" F[D1p72].

Her response to motherhood is encapsulated in her saying "I think again, wanting it so badly, being older, just allows you to enjoy that instead of being scared of it" F[D1p82].

4.5.3.4 Growth and development

Debbie experiences mothering as a profound growth opportunity. "The thing is you are changing and learning so much every day as a mom that never for one minute you are thinking the same as a week ago because there are so many influences and everything is changing so constantly and as your children are growing you are learning and growing with them. I don't think it is a constant, it is just moving the whole time, it is always a shift" F[D2p14].

"If you are dogged in your ways and your children are growing, changing and evolving in front of your eyes not only are you going to, you are going to alienate yourself from them.... your relationship is going to be strained and you are not going to see it from their point of view" F[D2p20].

Debbie identifies for herself that growth and development is important for the relationship maintenance in mothering. "You have got to re-evaluate....I say it's called evolving. It's when you find that you have outgrown something and you need to change it, you need to change it to make it more useful" F[D1p174].

Debbie wants something different for her children to that which she experienced as a child. It is important to her that her daughters are allowed to grow and change, "I was a child who was brought up, you can be seen but not heard and you will stand in the corner, and you know....I don't want to box her....I want to give her those opportunities" F[D1p178].

In her mothering, and through the timeframe in which this research happened, Debbie changed her outlook on her role, seeing her function as more to provide support, encouragement and acceptance to her children, rather than strong pressure to strive for success. "And now I am not so much, I was always like I have got to do the best for my kids

and now I have got, sure I have got to do the best for my kids and give them opportunities but I can't make them the best. That is for them and that is where I used to blame my mom but it was myself who never chose to strive in whatever direction I thought I should have now if that makes any sense (laughs)" F[D2p30].

The research process appears to have a part in the development of this insight, as Debbie reflected on her relationship with her own mother and that of herself and her daughters. She began to express that the dynamic of trying to compensate for her own childhood experience is not what her children need. Rather, she now hopes to create opportunities, but simultaneously generate within her daughters, love and acceptance for who they are.

Critiquing what she feels she does poorly in facilitating the development of her children she mentioned, "one thing I do lack is I don't give them independence" F[D1p90]. Debbie spoke about not having the space or time to give the girls individual time, but then also honestly commented "But I also think maybe I don't want to" F[D1p90]. Because time with them is scarce, she relishes it and does not want to miss out on one twin for the sake of the other. Her husband is also away a lot, and so family time is precious. She did say though, referring to a need for them to be more independent "as twins they do everything together and I understand the importance but maybe it will just have to come a bit later you know" F[D1p90].

The importance of growth and change is evident not just for her children but also as something that Debbie values for herself. Discussing how her mother and sister were unable to support her in her fertility struggle, and did not know what to do or say, Debbie explained how she understands being so different from them.

"You know I think, I cry a lot, I cry all the time and I am a very emotional person and my sister always says you never used to. I think as a child I was completely different to how I am now and I think it is through my children that I have become who I am and that I have become so much more open and sensitive to other people and I am, and I think maybe going through my fertility treatment thing has made me who I am and having to talk to psychologists about personal stuff has made me realize that it is all okay and that you can talk. So I think my journey just taking a different journey 'cause my sister and I always used to be such good friends and now the only thing we have in common is to talk about our children. So I think we just took different roads you know. And now we are just completely different people" F[D2p62].

4.5.4 Being mothered

4.5.4.1 No expectations

Debbie began speaking of her experience of being mothered by saying emphatically, “my mother never expected anything of me. Ever! My father never expected, I mean he was so amazed that I learned how to drive ‘cause after all I am a girl. He was a complete chauvinist, complete, never expected anything of me. He wanted me to go to university for one year just so that I could enjoy it and see what it was like. He never thought that I could amount to a career or a degree or anything like that” F[D1p102].

Debbie’s mother acknowledged that as a couple they lacked ambition for their children but this had consequences for Debbie, “they had a lovely life, and that is the life they chose and you know going through all of this in my mind, I was at first anxious and angry with the fact that they never pushed me in any way, to do anything.... I never studied a day in my life at school, I remember studying for my matric exams, and that is all. We never did, I never had to work you know, I was never expected to” F[D1p102]. Later she added, ““My mom never forced me to do anything I didn’t want to do” F[D2p22].

“There is nothing wrong with that approach but when I got to this stage in my life and I needed to have a career change because of my children I had no degree to fall back on, and I actually became a bit bitter towards my mom. Not that I showed her, but in myself. I felt I could have easily done a degree....so I regretted that” F[D1p102].

Debbie gave an example of how she was left to make her own subject choices for High School and made immature decisions which limited her career options later. “My mother had no input.... she let me make all my decisions at that age. I mean what did I know in Standard 6....? I mean, to me it is an absolute, it is a terrible thing that happened, but anyway, ja, the fact that my parents just were not, not that they weren’t interested, they loved their children, but they just had different, maybe they have just got different values in their lives to the values that I want in my life and I have” F[D1p108].

The significance of this lack of guidance and firm encouragement became apparent for Debbie in later life, “It is only because, through having my children I realized now what I don’t have and needed which my parents never gave me” F[D1p152]. Once she started to need a qualification and also when she began to nurture her own children’s potential did the lack become glaringly apparent for her, “Only once I started wanting to do stuff for my children I was like why didn’t anybody do that for me you know? How come I wasn’t pushed to do anything, why do I want to push my children but nobody pushed me?” F[D1p154].

Debbie spoke of the type of involvement she would have liked her parents to have established. Despite not equipping her for the workforce, her parents expected her on leaving school to find work and become financially independent.

“I feel like I never got that from my parents and I had to figure that out for myself when I was older and it was almost too late” F[D1p104].

“I never gave my future much thought. I never ja. I was wafting around you know. I was a teenager for far too long. Because I didn’t have any of those building blocks and I never learned how to study.... I did not know how to sit down and work” F[D2p88].

4.5.4.2 Childhood family atmosphere and influence

Debbie’s parents’ relationship was a positive one, from her perspective, but also one that left her feeling excluded at times. She felt that the marital relationship was prioritized over the parenting role. “She and my dad were always very much in love, I always think of them as the forever couple and I think they always came first 100% to each other and the children, which is the right way to do things, I mean (*husband*) and I are also very close but we have brought our children up within us if I can say that.... whereas I remember looking on at my mom and dad and definitely feeling apart. Like they were a unit” F[D2p170].

The home atmosphere in which Debbie was raised was also influenced by her father’s approach to children and women, “my dad was a chauvinist that for girls it doesn’t matter....that we never had to work hard, we never had to be academic....go to university for a year, see if you can find a husband, you will be fine” F[D2p38].

“That is my father....it was like what have you broken now, you don’t spill or mess, you don’t, very fastidious very, but at the same time he was a heavy smoker and an alcoholic you know (laughs)” F[D2p152]. Debbie’s parents promoted a very sociable approach to life, but this was in direct contrast to some very controlling attitudes by her father at times. “I thought it was perfectly normal, my parents’ behavior was perfectly normal but we were, everybody wanted to come to our house, it was the popular place to be and I thought that was the coolest thing ever but you don’t realize and it was only as I watched my dad get old and when you really realize that is an alcoholic that you realize how bad it is and that actually where does social drinking end and where does it begin you know” F[D2p160].

In keeping with the social emphasis of the family and the lack of expectations discussed above, Debbie mentioned that “You know when we were brought up and young, we were actually given absolutely no boundaries as children, I mean we had our bed time and routine, you know, but when it came down to being teenagers we had no boundaries and we could go out as late as we wanted, drink what we wanted, have as many people over as we wanted, no curfews....so as teenagers we weren’t given any boundaries at all and I think as kids we were given too many boundaries maybe you know” F[D2p154]. Again, her comment shows a contradiction between a *laissez faire* approach and over-control at times.

4.5.4.3 Different values

Debbie debated when speaking about her view on how her parents raised her, “maybe they just got different values in their lives to the values that I want in my life” F[D1p108]. She has made sense of how differently she mothers by understanding this in terms of a different set of priorities and values. Debbie explained that her childhood home environment was characterized by a highly sociable, drinking lifestyle, “our home in (*name of town*) was always, everyone was always welcome.... my mom and dad were the easiest going, all my friends loved my parents.... So cool and so much fun and our house was the party house and fun house” F[D1p102].

“My parents also drank a lot, and I came from a family where it was all about the party and I learned to live like that for a long time as well because it was normal. It was like my year at varsity was an amazing year, I had the best time ever, I don’t think I went to one lecture and my dad was kind of proud of that you know. And when I had my children, I haven’t had a drink since the day I had my children or since the day I fell pregnant because I haven’t, my life has changed, I don’t, and I also, I don’t want my children to see that that was the right way to live, I really feel that I lost so much time of my life because I didn’t see the importance, not that it is important, I am sure you must have fun, but there, it is important that you have to study and achieve stuff and move on” F[D1p102].

Debbie sees the role of parenting differently to how her parents approached theirs, saying “there are things you do have to do and there are things you do have to learn and so although you don’t have to push to be the best, there are things in life that are good for you and you need to learn what is good for you” F[D2p32].

She does see some positive aspects to the way her parents valued family and socializing, “So it is to keep the family-ness there and the music and merriment but in a positive and healthy way you know” F[D2p164] but she would like to strike a more moderate balance, “my parents just didn’t know when the family-ness had to end (laughs). It was all about that and nothing else” F[D2p126].

4.5.4.4 Relationship with mother

Debbie began speaking about her relationship with her mother by saying “but my mom isn’t a helping mom” F[D1p140]. She explained that even when her mother came to her home expressly to help, it was not useful or supportive for Debbie, “with (*husband*) away so long, so much she would want to come and stay with me and then I would be like oh great now I have three kids to look after (laughs). And she would insist on coming for a week at a time and then all of a sudden you have to cook properly” F[D1p140].

Debbie’s reflections suggest not only a lack of practical support from her mother but also little emotional support and poor communication. Although she stated “there has never been

any antagonism in our relationship, we have always gotten on famously and I have never held it against her personally but I have always thought it“ F[D2p32].

Debbie does not experience her mother as someone to whom she would express vulnerability or turn to for support or guidance. “My mom....would have said put yourself together and let’s move on. There wouldn’t have been any time to talk about it or say how it made you feel or my mom was always just put a smile on your face, you know, you don’t talk about, nothing is difficult, it is all just chin up you know (laughs)....that is how she would have handled the situation” F[D2p50].

Referring again to her struggle with infertility, Debbie recalled, “we are very much a happy loving family and we don’t just, when my fertility treatment for eight years, my mom and sister, never mentioned it to me. Not once. We don’t talk about (laughs)” F[D1p108]. Even if Debbie deliberately raised this painful issue the response would not be supportive but instead, “Yes, and often I would often talk about stuff and it would be yes there, there....they didn’t know how to even handle that” F[D2p54]. Her mother and sister’s inability to support her during fertility treatment is a source of pain for Debbie, “it was terrible....I missed that from my mom and sister....Now I can look back and understand why they couldn’t, they just didn’t know how to” F[D2p60].

Debbie, identifying with her twin daughter who is similar in personality to herself, has found herself wanting to shield this child from her mother saying, “I always used to try and protect (*twin 2*) from my mom cause my mom doesn’t believe in the way that I bring my children up” F[D1p144]. Debbie’s mother believes that Debbie is too lenient and allows her children to disagree and assert their will in ways that she finds unacceptable, especially as she subscribes to what Debbie terms the “children should be seen and not heard” style. Debbie reflects here on the very different values and goals for parenting across the generations.

Over time, however, she has come to trust that her daughter and mother will find their own way to address their relationship. “I always used to defend (*twin 2*) and defend Nana and now I am like you know what, sort your own relationship and that wisdom came from (*name*), my mom in law. Everybody has to sort their own relationships out. It is good for (*twin 2*) to have to learn what Nana’s rules are and what Nana’s way of doing things are, and I can’t change Nana and the way she is, that’s Nana and (*twin 2*) needs to learn to respect Nana and they must sort themselves” F[D1p144]. Laughing, Debbie sighed and noted that “that is my mother, that is who she is....and this is my daughter and we are not going to change her too much either (laughs) cause I kind of like that fire!” F[D1p146].

Asked to respond to how she had experienced her mother’s ability to attune to her needs as a child and now as an adult, Debbie replied, “She was not in tune at all. She was a good mom and we never wanted for anything. But it is the same with that fertility process, she was never in tune or understood but it is so difficult again to try and remember back. My

childhood memories are so sparse. I don't... But no" F[D2p170]. Initially Debbie responded with a certain negative, but then appeared to second guess herself, perhaps as it sounded too harsh and critical to her. Her positive and balanced approach had already inspired her to say relative to a reflection on the focus group experience, "I listened to the other ladies that maybe you don't have to be so hard on your mom. She has made her mistakes and we are making our mistakes" F[D2p10].

4.5.4.5 Mother's mothering experience

Debbie's knowledge of her own mother's experience of being mothered involved speculation, based on what she knows of her maternal grandmother.

"The most amazing mom but I think she was a tough mom.... But my gran was an amazing woman but she had my mom very late in life, she was 42 when my mom was born and 44 or 45 when my aunt was born....It was because of the war. My grandfather had been in the war and just got back but he went back to war, 'cause he was away for my mom's first two years and then came back." F[D2p134].

Debbie's grandmother seems to have been a local personality in their home town, but may have provided quite a strict upbringing for her mother. She was described as a "most remarkable woman, she was, everybody still talks about Nana.... As a mom she was a tough, old fashioned, da da da mother" F[D2p134]. Debbie qualified her supposition that her grandmother may have been something of an old school mother by adding "But then again I really don't know, I am guessing....but I imagine she would have been" F[D2p148].

Debbie recalls that from the age of 11 her family had to move to her mother's home town and take up the responsibility for caring for her grandmother, in her mother's childhood home. "That was terrible for my mom 'cause this was her chance to make her own new home and she ended up moving to her childhood home and living with her mother. So it was a huge sacrifice for my mom but we all lived together which was a fantastic upbringing, it was I loved that three generation kind of, and I am very, family orientated myself" F[D2p136]. Her grandmother, although living in the family home with Debbie's parents, was not involved in a mothering capacity with her at all, "I really battle to remember. I remember her shouting at me as a teenager and I was awfully stropy....but I don't remember her mothering me at all. She was just there" F[D2p138]. Her grandmother's role was clear in that "I think she didn't interfere the same as my mom....I don't think she ever interfered in the upbringing, that was my mom's job" F[D2p140].

4.5.5 The meaning for Debbie of having been mothered in this way

4.5.5.1 Self-acceptance and acceptance of others

Debbie is a remarkably positive person, showing self-acceptance as a way of coping with her own history. She has also developed this as a result of being a mother. “I have become a far better person in myself and happy with myself and happy with my life. And because I see in my children I have learned so much from them you know” F[D1p124]. Realizing that you cannot change others, even when you dislike or disapprove of their behaviour has been valuable to Debbie. Several times in the interview process she referred to “another thing I have learned from my children and from my mother’s thing is you are who you are” F[D1p108] and later she elaborated, “you are who you are but there is so much room for you to grow” F[D1p114].

Through mothering her twins, Debbie has developed the awareness that it is not just talent, like (*twin 2*) has that determines success but also motivation and drive “it teaches you what you need to be a star. That there is so many components that have to come right together” F[D1p116].

“You are who you are and you see (*twin 1*) and (*twin 2*) run together and (*twin 2*) runs straight and strong like this and (*twin 1*) wobbles and runs like, because that is who she is and she is never going to be a brilliant runner you know and it was such a life lesson for me to look at that and say....there are things you are not good at, you need to find the things that you are good at and build on that you know” F[D1p120].

Commenting on how her less talented child actually has the most motivation, Debbie said, “I put a lot of that blame on my mom but I could have done it for myself. There are so many people who don’t need to be pushed. They find their own course in life and strive for that so at certain times I always blamed my mom that I never did certain things but in actual fact that is who I was, I wasn’t the person to strive out, I didn’t think of all of those things at that time and that is just fine. I think I put so much pressure on what you have to achieve and now I am realizing you have to accept your limitations and who you are” F[D2p22].

Her current challenge is learning how to allow her children to balance some ambition with self-acceptance. “To offer them the opportunity and just to I don’t know how to say it, to show them what is possible, that anything that they want is possible. If they work hard, and just have those values to go through in life you know, that you can people can come up through the ashes and create incredible things and you can do whatever you choose to do but if you choose not to do anything then that is also absolutely fine” F[D2p80]. Her personal learning was articulated as, “I think that is a huge life lesson for me to learn...I always imagined everybody wants to be perfect....and actually this is perfect being you, now” F[D2p82].

4.5.5.2 Doing it differently

Debbie was very clear about what she aims to do differently for her children and how this is unfolding, “I do consciously think of how my childhood was and how different I am doing it for my kids” F[D1p152] and “I would like to be different from my parents” F[D2p42].

“I was told that I couldn’t do anything, I am a girl, you know, don’t worry, you will get married and so on and someone will look after you, it’s fine you know and my children, I want them to be strong and independent women and I think they are independent already and you know, give them the skills to cope not, don’t shut them down” F[D1p148]. Debbie wants to compensate for her own childhood experience but is proactive in the change process.

“And I have got to take what I learned from them, what I liked, what I didn’t like and change it for what I want for my children. And maybe I am not doing it 100% for them either you know, I also don’t want to be the dragon mother where they are two year olds having to learn the violin and the you know but I am definitely more aggressive to my children in letting them know what they are capable of” F[D1p112].

“So, you can’t, at the same time as saying you are who you are with hard work, if you want to change who you are you also can, you know? And I think you have got to give your children those possibilities and ideas” F[D1p166]. However, Debbie then went on to say, “but it is difficult to create those opportunities also without creating the pressure” F[D1p168].

Debbie’s goal was expressed as “I need to teach my children now what is good for them and they can make their own decisions later, but I have to show them as far as I am aware and whatever knowledge is available to me at this time that these things are important” F[D2p32].

“I mean to accept that once they have been shown the ambition that if they physically can’t do something or choose not to do something that that is fine. They have been given the opportunity and shown what is available and that is my job” F[D2p80].

Planning for the future, Debbie indicated that “also I am going to be a lot stricter about going out and learning responsibility and that kind of thing. I mean my sister and I are lucky we are alive, you know, I often think of the things we got up to that my mom had no idea. Not that she had no idea, she knew we weren’t at home but didn’t know where we were” F[D2p156] and “also like with alcohol and drugs and drinking I am going to educate my children you know, all we were ever shown as kids were the parties is all that matters and that is all I thought for the first 10 years of my adult life, it is all about the party you know so I think it took me a long time to realize no, it ain’t. And so for my girls not that I am going to forbid anything but they are going to be well educated and stick to the law” F[D2p158].

4.5.5.3 Consequences of being mothered this way

Debbie discussed a clear and conscious commitment to instil different values relating to striving for growth and development in her children. However, Debbie also spoke about a response which appears less conscious when she mentioned how as a mother, she had seldom asked for help, despite balancing the needs of twin babies. When asked to reflect on this, she said “I don’t think it was about trying to be strong, I don’t think it was about the need to do everything on my own. I think it is just that you are so focused and busy on what you are doing that you don’t lift your head to think” F[D2p98].

Debbie was not seeking help as it did not occur to her to ask. Not asking for help and coping alone seems to be a learnt pattern that Debbie is less aware of. It may be linked to her emotional experience being invalidated by her mother’s inability to empathize, or even her own invalidation of her right to complain due to her proactively seeking motherhood. However, in response to a tentative suggestion that there may be a link to how she has experienced her mother [i.e. “not a helping mom”] with her self-reliance, Debbie responded with curiosity, saying “Maybe....my mother will come and say can I help with anything....and you know giving her the instruction and helping her you know it is more effort than just doing it yourself, so yes, I agree” F[D2p102] and Debbie then followed this statement by musing, “You want to get things done? Do it yourself” F[D2p104].

4.6 HELEN: NARRATIVE OF CASE 5 - Protective mothering

Helen’s case is comprised of two in-depth interviews, conducted 10 months apart. The case name “protective mothering” was chosen because of the dominant theme of protection threaded throughout her narrative. Helen’s somewhat emotional approach to mothering is encapsulated in her fiercely protective stance to her children and the way in which her childhood history informs this.

4.6.1 Background information

Helen was 44 years old at the time of the first interview. She is a White, “stay at home” mother, living on a farm outside a small Eastern Cape town. Helen has been married for 12 years and has two children, a daughter of 11 years and a son of 8 years. She explained that because she and her husband were older when they married, and they both knew that they wanted children, they started a family immediately. Between their two children, Helen had a miscarriage at 12 weeks gestation, which was a difficult experience for her. She expressed the desire to have had many more children “I could easily probably have six kids if I have to” G[H1p31] but that due to financial constraints, this had not been possible.

Helen grew up in a small, rural Eastern Cape town and lived in a home with her parents and two younger siblings. She has no tertiary qualifications but attained her matriculation

certificate in 1988. Since having her first child, she has chosen not to be employed. The family struggle financially, as the farming in which her husband engages is not lucrative.

4.6.2 Researcher's reflections

Helen demonstrated a surprisingly reflective capacity as the interviews unfolded. She seemed to enjoy and be familiar with a level of introspection. Helen is an emotional and volatile personality, and the impact of this was evident in our encounters, as she frequently became tearful when mentioning situations that sparked a protective response in her.

4.6.3 Meaningful motherhood

4.6.3.1 Mixed blessings

It was clear that becoming a mother was a life goal for Helen. She explained that, "I have always thought of being a mom. Um, my, even before I got married I have always had little children around and looked after other people's children and I have always had a feeling in me that I want to be around children" G[H1p27]. Helen's experience of being a mother has come to define her identity and current way of being, as indicated by her comment "My children are my everything" G[H2par42]. However, sadly for Helen her experience of her first pregnancy was marred by her own mother being diagnosed with cancer. The shadow of this made it more difficult to focus on the baby she was carrying. Helen commented, "I went through stages of where I had to feel that I have to choose my mother or my baby" G[H1p41]. Her mother's illness was protracted and she lived for the first five years of her granddaughter's life. However, this situation and the subsequent loss for Helen, has clearly influenced her mothering experience.

"It was very difficult, I can remember fighting with God and saying what do you want, you know? There was a stage where, and I regret it today, but there was a stage that I actually said to God take (*daughter*), just let my mom come back, I know my mom, I don't know (*daughter*). We didn't know if it was a girl or a boy because we never wanted to know so, you know for me at that stage it was just take the baby if you have to. To leave my mom alone because I knew her so much" G[H1p61]. Despite this heartache, Helen has found mothering to bring her the fulfilment she had anticipated. When asked how she experiences being a mother to her children, Helen replied, "It's....happiness and feeling that I am, I honestly have come to point to say that God wants me, that is what I need to do, that is where, that is what I was born for.... That is where I can accomplish things instead of studying or working or doing anything else, being at home with my children is where I really feel the most comfortable and where I feel that is where I am born to be" (Laughs) G[H1p57].

4.6.3.2 Stressful contexts and coping

The context in which Helen became a mother was changed by her mother's illness and death. The impact of having lost her mother and being unable to access maternal support and advice for herself in her mothering recurred throughout Helen's narrative. In addition to this significant stressor, the family experience constant and significant financial stress. For Helen, the financial strain impacts negatively on her ability to enjoy and engage with motherhood. "It is hard at times....there are the finances pressing....whatever you are stressed" G[H1p59]. Even with the financial concerns overshadowing her mothering, Helen has not come to the point where she considers reversing her decision not to return to work. Reflecting on coping with challenges in life and mothering, Helen stated that "I think if you open headed and you actually working through it yourself you actually get to know yourself a bit better. You know about why things happen and when, you often ask why and you actually know why if you just work things" G[H1par95]. Helen showed openness to self-awareness and growth and a way of finding meaning, even in difficulty.

Helen explained that her way of coping with all difficulties was "Yho! Lots of prayer. Um, I think I don't think any normal household that's my personal opinion, can cope without it. You know, it's, you have to be on your knees all the time.....And you just have to try and pray and to say okay, now they are in your hands Lord, you have got to take over there so to cope" G[H1p65]. Her spiritual belief is a powerful coping mechanism for Helen. This was particularly evident in her response to her bereavement with her mom and in managing the miscarriage she experienced between the births of her two children. Referring to the miscarriage she stated that "God had his plan" G[H1p83] and that the resulting age gap between her children "it has actually worked out very nice" G[H1p83]. Helen makes meaning of the loss, by seeing the advantages for the current sibling relationship and recognizing that she'd had mumps during the aborted pregnancy and therefore "you don't know what would have happened" G[H1p89]. She does not however minimize how emotionally painful it was, saying instead "when I had the miscarriage it came back to me full blow that I asked God to take (*daughter*). (Laughs). So ja. So that I had to work through because you know you want, you asked for this, um, so that was a very dramatic, very hard" G[H1p85].

4.6.3.3 An emotional mother

Helen's initial statement before the first interview even formally started was "I am a very emotional mommy so I might end up in tears more than once. One gets emotional even talking to teachers about my kids" G[H1p1]. She later referred to this again, citing this as something that has been exacerbated for her, since becoming a mother. "For me a lot of times is to fight with myself and tell myself to stay calm and just to...because I am a very, I get stressed up very quickly with certain things and ja often you find yourself like fighting and

afterwards you think, it wasn't really necessary but you. Ja....(Laughs). It's ja, it is a hard one to try and stay calm when there is all these things going around" G[H1p65].

4.6.3.4 Separation and being at home

Helen was working while pregnant with her first child, and returned to work briefly after the birth, taking her daughter with her. However, once the child became mobile, she had to consider the option of day-care. Helen experienced powerful emotional responses to this separation and found the experience overwhelming. She explained that "Because I had to drop her at the aftercare, at a day-care, and I promise you it was so dramatic for me, every time I dropped her, I cried all the way back to work. (Laughs). So it was, it didn't seem to stop, it was just every time I dropped (*daughter*) it feels like something's lost. And that was the ultimate that actually made us, (*husband*) actually said to me too that maybe I should think of staying at home then" G[H1p47].

"No it was awful. You really can't explain it. It feels you know, and some of the parents there when you drop (*daughter*), used to see my crying and they would say to me oh no it will get better but it never did for me because every time I dropped her I just felt like something is lost, something is missing and then you can't wait to actually get finished so that you can fetch her" G[H1p49].

Even now, 12 years later, when speaking of the possibility of needing to find work to augment the family finances, Helen believes "there is just no ways that I can feel that I am going to be okay being away from the kids when they come out. It's a very... It feels like your heart is poured out or pulled out or whatever when you (Laughs). Ja" G[H1p53].

Helen is proud of being so intensely available to her children, and their dependence on her gives her pleasure, "Yes, I can remember (*daughter*) and (*son*) being small and my mom saying to me one day, she can't believe that kids and their moms are so over each other because you know, it was, the kids also could not, could not do anything without me around at a stage" G[H1p55].

Although she later addressed the changes that have come as the children mature, Helen still sees it as important to be intensely involved in the lives of her children. She demonstrated her preoccupation with her role of mother saying, "My children, even now when they are school, you know you drop them in the morning and if there was a little crisis in their lives then you think of them all the time" G[H1p65].

For Helen the change from being a working mother to staying at home with her children was very positive. The personal meaning and fulfilment of being able to mother this way is shown when she spoke of "I have always said that, you know my parents worked when we were small and they often missed things and I have always said I don't want to miss things on my children's growing up and I want to be there with them through each step of what they are

doing” G[H1p47]. Helen has made changes to her mother’s approach because she was adamant that she would be available for her children. Despite the financial strain this has caused, Helen has chosen to prioritize motherhood and caretaking of her children.

4.6.3.5 Protectiveness

To Helen, the importance of mothering emerges in her protective approach to her children. Speaking of how protective she can be, Helen commented that she would give her life for her children. She recognizes that this is a different and more extreme response than she felt for other children she has known, adding “I would do that for mine, you know.... it’s a much stronger feeling that, I want to protect them, I want to be there, nothing else can come in the way” G[H1p71].

Helen is very protective towards her youngest child explaining that “With (*son*).... is a very soft young guy and he has had a lot of little issues in his life.... he struggled to talk, so for him, I have a very soft spot because I, you sort of want him to get on his feet so that he can fight, be a, stand his own place, and that other people don’t always interfere and put him down” G[H1p73]. Helen realizes that her protectiveness becomes extreme at times.

“Sometimes I am working very hard on it and sometimes (*husband*) comes second and he is not in that position where God put us because the kids are my priority and they come first and I have to fight very hard if he wants to give the kids a smack or he is trying to tell them that they are wrong or whatever....I am trying to work on ‘cause I know it is not, I know (*husband*) loves the kids and he wouldn’t hurt them but I jump in there like a lion or elephant...” G[H2p42]. Helen then went on to add, “I realize that it is not protecting them, because they, most of the time if I think about it they were wrong but I am trying to keep them away from getting hurt” G[H2p44]. Helen is able to process the irrational nature of her response in her recognition that her protective intervention is not always appropriate. When she does react in a particularly protective way she sometimes regrets it afterwards, particularly when it relates to incidents with her children on the sports field or having conflict with their friends. This was epitomized in her comment that, “Sometimes I only realize it after it has happened and then I think ooh I should have just kept quiet there but hopefully as it gets on in life I will know when to keep quiet. Because ja at the moment I just jump in and then I realize afterwards I shouldn’t have done that” G[H2p48]. The potential adverse effect of her impulsive protection is understood by Helen. “And I very much don’t want to be the mother that is going to walk around and everyone else is going to say, or my son eventually says mom don’t come to my things because you are, that sort of thing so that is my motivation of trying to form a...” G[H2p50].

In explaining how her protectiveness had developed, Helen said, “My mom was often like that and she was often seen as a cross person or you know because mom was always a

quiet, I remember some of our friends used to say they can't come and play with us cause mom is cross or mom is a grumpy, I don't know what the word was, but I used to try and protect my mom and say she is not like" G[H2p58].

Speaking of her grandmother, Helen further speculated about the origins of how her protectiveness had developed, "Maybe from watching my gran?" G[H1p143] and she went on to say "She used to come up for my mom too always, I remember her when my brother and sister are naughty or when they do things then she will go and talk to them and she will tell them not to be like that with mom or whatever. She used to very much protect my mom and be there" G[H1p143].

Helen went on to identify how her own daughter defends Helen when there is a disagreement between herself and her husband, saying "*(daughter)* will protect me and get up and want to say things" G[H2p38]. Helen expressed this as a positive aspect of her relationship with her daughter.

Although Helen could see the intergenerational patterns of protective reactions from both her mother and grandmother, and replayed by her daughter, she was able to understand that her need to act on behalf of her own and other children, also has a deeper origin, "I don't want children to suffer because of parents' decisions and parents' things" G[H2p70]. She explained that she also feels protective towards other people's children whose mothers are not available for them. Furthermore, she has a tendency to try to offer care to them, as well as to her own children, and sometimes feels pressured and compromised by this.

"I think that is probably why I protect children and get involved in helping other children. I know *(husband)* and me often have this debate that I am too involved in other people's lives than in mine and often for the, where my kids in my life come first I often think they sometimes don't come first because I see other kids mummies working and not around and I tend to want to do things for them" G[H2p70].

4.6.3.6 Mother-daughter relationship

Helen finds reward for her full-time mothering in the close relationship she experiences with both her children. In particular, she sees her closeness to her 11 year old daughter as resembling a friendship, rather than a mother-daughter bond and this pleases her. Helen frames her daughter's protection of her, particularly in conflict between Helen and her husband, as a positive sign of their deep connection.

"And now, *(daughter)* and me are quite, we, how can you say, we have a strong friendship relationship you know. She sort of comes up with things and understands things that you wouldn't believe. And ja, we can connect, we can chat and she is sort of protects her mother all the time, it is quite a thing, so ja. Daddy loses all the time. (Laughs)" G[H1p73].

“I think that is because we understand each other, we are on a friendship level at this stage more than a mom and child I think. Because we’ll say to each other what we feel or how we feel” G[H1p133].

Helen identifies something of her relationship to her mother in later life, with what is happening now between her and her own daughter, “I often see with me and (*daughter*), I often think that this is how me and my mom were in a lot of ways too. But I was older you know, (*daughter*) is very young, me and (*daughter*) have the relationship on (*daughter*)’s 11 years that me and my mom had when I was in high school. You know. That sort of thing. Because ja I don’t know, (*daughter*) is a very wise little girl, she is a very, picks up things very quickly, ja and she can tell you very quickly how you are feeling to her” G[H1p137]. Helen feels a close connection with her daughter and she identifies with some of the ways in which her child relates to her, recalling doing this with her own mother in childhood. She also expressed similarities by recalling how as a child, she would need to be the one to repair the relationship after an argument with her mother.

“My mom and me were like (*daughter*) and me, I can’t remember ever, we used to have a fight and then mom would sometimes, mom used to be very teary, mom always used to get cross and start crying and she would go and sometimes I would find that she would feel sorry for herself. I remember often saying oh mom is feeling sorry for herself or whatever and then we would be the ones to go and say we are sorry and apologise” G[H2p82].

For a moment, Helen seemed less confident in the appropriateness of this type of connection with her young daughter, saying “I almost think she is too grown up for her age?” G[H1p139] but then she quickly added “but there is nothing we did to make it. She is just, that is just (*daughter*)” G[H1p141].

4.6.3.7 Changing phases

Helen recognized that her children’s relationship to her and their needs have changed as they matured. Speaking particularly of her relationship with her eldest child, she noted that “there is different stages, when before (*son*) was born, um, it was really, we could lie on the bed and do different things and just chat and go away. And then (*son*) came.... he was the focus and although she also took part in a lot of it, I think for a little bit of time she wasn’t as close, you know, she had to do things on her own now, because she was the big girl. And I think that was a bit of, um, lesson that you know I had to learn, is to try and spend more time with her too and not just with the baby” G[H1p73]. As her children grew up, Helen saw her closeness with her daughter being reinstated again.

However, Helen also identifies a growing need for dissention and independence in her daughter who is approaching adolescence. She was also able to recognize where her daughter is more assertive and confident than she was as a child: “as we grow up as

children, you know, when you are small everything your parents say is cool and you adore them, then you get older and you have your own things and you, and I think very much of that happens throughout because I had times that I can't recall it all but there were times that I went against my mother and wanted my own stand and with (*daughter*) going into teenage years I can very much see that....I can very much remember doing that myself when I was at her age" G[H2p12]. Helen again identifies with her daughter but uses this understanding to allow and support this appropriate independence. She is also surprised as how much more assertive her child is able to be, saying "often I see where I did that....she is more vocal though where I used to be too scared" G[H2p12].

4.6.4 Being mothered

4.6.4.1 An unavailable mother

Initially, when asked about her experience of being mothered, Helen responded saying "I can't remember, you know there are little glimpses of, that you remember as a child, um" G[H1p99]. However, there was no reserve or defensiveness in her response. She soon went on to comment "I remember mom working a lot" G[H1p99]. This image of an unavailable mother and Helen's struggle with not receiving enough of her maternal attention and time, dominated her recollections.

Helen's parents were shift workers on a telephone exchange. Helen's father worked the night shift and so he was the one who ran the household during the day, "Dad was always involved because mom was working. My dad sort of took the role" G[H2p74]. It was added that "Dad did all the cooking and all the looking after us. Dad did all the shopping. What I feel mothers should do" G[H2p74].

Helen also explained that due to the nature of their work, her parents were not allowed to take holiday time off together, "so a lot of the holidays we only had one parent" G[H1p107]. Although she recalls boasting to friends about how this meant she and her siblings were able to go away first with their mother and then with their father, in reality "in the family set up when you thought of it afterwards it wasn't so nice" G[H1p109]. Helen went on to say "which is why I feel so strong that we have to do things as a family, together" G[H1p111].

Speaking of the absence of someone in a mothering role, Helen stated "Growing up from small we were raised by nannies....and there is a point in your life where you sort of, as a child, get very angry about it. Because why is mommy working all the time, she is not spending all the time with you, why can't she go to your school things, why can't she go to your sport and things like that? And then you get older and you get through a stage where you realize that if it is not for their working you wouldn't actually be able to have the proper school uniform, or have the, you know, they can't pay school funds, they won't be able to

give you a tennis racket and things like that.... Then you go through that and then you come back to a stage again where you think you know, couldn't you have just gone, had a bit less but had more quality time with your parents when you were small. Instead of having nannies around you all the time which was great but you sort of feel in yourself that you are missing um you are missing something although you don't know what you are missing, you know, there is always that thing of that you have missed something" G[H1p99].

Helen identifies how she made meaning of her mother's availability according to her own developmental stage and what she could understand at the time. She identified the initial response of anger, then understanding the situation and finally, understanding again but with the regret of knowing what this denied her. There is also evidence of gratitude, "And then I think of how much other time and effort my mom put in, as you get older and you think about all these things, you think you know, she did do the best she could with what she had at that stage" G[H1p99]. Helen is aware that her mother may not have wished to have been away from her children. She explained that "She had to work. There were times she tried to resign and be with us. I think in my mom's heart she probably felt the same as I did in wanting to be with the children but she just couldn't because she had to work to be able to put bread on the table" G[H1p99].

The last statement led Helen to comment on her decision not to return to work, "I am probably shooting myself in the foot at the moment with saying I don't want a full time job or a whatever because of that because my husband is in the same situation as my dad was" G[H1p99]. Despite her understanding of her mother's position, Helen still chooses to make different decisions regarding employment for herself as a mother.

4.6.4.2 Memories of care

The experience of an absent mother is tempered in Helen's recollection by a strong sense that her mother was available in certain times of stress, such as when Helen had to change schools, or during exams. "Mom used to sit up with us when we had to write exams, she used to go through things with us. I will never forget the one big thing and I am so grateful, I thanked her for it before she died, I was in standard four, grade six, and the school at that stage, I was in an English school and at, you either had to be sent to hostel in (*name of town*) or you had to move to Afrikaans and this was in the middle of the year and mom and dad made the decision that she was adamant that she is not sending me to hostel, we will go into Afrikaans. My mom sat evenings and evenings re-writing the English stuff and trying to get me to understand it all in Afrikaans" G[H1p99]. "It is thanks to my mom that I could do it and didn't fail that year because she spent ages sitting at the table with me going through that. So ja that is why I say in her heart she probably would have done anything to be with us but she couldn't" G[H1p101]. Helen is deeply grateful for this, but also uses it as justification

for her belief that her mother did not prefer being away from her children and only worked because it was needed. She was, however, saved from going to boarding school by her mother's commitment.

During the second interview, Helen made the connection between her mother's intent commitment to not having to send Helen to boarding school and her own, possibly negative experience of boarding school life. "She definitely had the commitment in trying to help us get, with coming out today I actually think that maybe that was that she was in a hostel. She used to try and get us to learn with her sort of stuff because she didn't have that with her mom. I only thought of that with today's conversation" G[H2p74]. Helen made the connection that her own mother may have been compensating her children for what she never received because she was in boarding school.

Helen commented that she also tries to give her daughter exam support, by staying up late at night with her child to study, but her child gets frustrated. Helen smiled and said, "whereas in our, in my schooling, I wanted mom to be with me, I wanted mom to help me" G[H2p74]. Both Helen and her mother seem to have tried to provide their children with what they would have liked to have had available when they were children.

4.6.4.3 Mystery mother

When Helen was asked about her knowledge of her mother's childhood and experience of being mothered, she explained that she had little information about her mother. "We never heard anything about my mom and her life. What I know and what I heard was from granny and my mom's family. We never heard things directly from mom" G[H2p62]. Helen paints a picture of a very reserved and private mother, of whom little is known. Their relationship had only become closer when Helen married and had children. Helen explained that her mother, "used to think things a lot but she didn't talk a lot. My mom wasn't one that would verbalize how she felt about things" G[H2p20].

The sense of being raised by someone whose inner thoughts were something of a mystery, is captured in Helen's telling of "a week or two before mom died she used to on the phone talk to me about meeting an old school friend of hers. That was the first time I had actually heard anything ever about mom's schooling with this friend that she suddenly met up and she went through photos with us telling us, she showed me photos of her friends and the school friend and their matric farewell and things like that which I never, mom used to always take a back step from dad" G[H2p62].

Helen's mother believed that once something was over, there was little need to dwell on it, which contributed to her not speaking about difficult or troublesome events. Instead she would say, "When things are passed, they are passed. She never, I can remember a few

times asking her about things in her past and she would say to me it is finished, those things belong to the past, whereas I tend to dwell on things” G[H2p18].

Although it was not something that was discussed, Helen is certain of her mother’s love for her and her siblings. “And she was very proud of us and things like that but you would feel it more than what you would hear it. I mean I knew she was proud of us.... I did hear it how she was telling a friend about how proud she is of her three kids which she wouldn’t have told us that. I don’t know that is probably how they grew up or whatever” G[H2p22].

Despite the lack of information, Helen believes that her mother cared deeply for her and her siblings. The loss of her mother was made all the more difficult by the fact that Helen experienced a deepening closeness developing as she entered adult life and had a family of her own; her mother’s death deprived her of the possibility of further intimacy.

4.6.4.4 Substitute mother

Until she was 26 years old, Helen’s maternal grandmother was a significant presence in her life. Her role and importance is described by Helen as “I often used to say that my granny is like my mother. Because my granny was there for me and granny used to be around and read bible and talk about things.... from when I can remember....granny was always around....and gran to me was like my mommy because mom wasn’t around..... I feel bad about it because I know my mom was there, she was, but I often think that you know there are some songs that play on the radio and you think back of your gran, and I think now why didn’t I think of my mom....granny had a huge role to play in my life” G[H1p43]. Helen, as a child, had thought that “I always used to think my gran was more my mother. My, this was just my theory as a child is my dad is my sister’s adult, my mom was my brother’s adult and my gran was my adult” G[H2p36].

What is also noteworthy about this experience of substitute mothering from her grandmother is that her granny was not a constant presence in the home. Her impact on Helen’s life was gleaned from two visits a year, “she came twice a year to us for like a month and for us, for me that was the highlight because and she used to share a room with me too so gran, I used to watch gran read bible and watch everything she does” G[H2p38].

Helen would have liked her daughter to have benefitted from the presence of a grandmother in her life. “I used to get very cross with God because he took my mom so quickly, because (*daughter*) lost out. I had my gran until I was 26 and there was so much we could share and talk to and write letters and go through things” G[H1p151]. Later, Helen also expressed regret that her mom never knew her son, as they had both missed out on that relationship. Helen feels that her children have been deprived of having a connection with the previous generation. Helen’s granny served as an intermediary between Helen and her mother at times of conflict. Helen would have liked this for her children too.

4.6.4.5 Sibling relationships impact on being mothered

An important aspect of Helen's experience of being mothered involved her mother's display of favouritism towards her over her two younger siblings. Helen felt excluded by her brother and sister, because they were so close in age and she was older, but her mother frequently took her part because she was less confident than her siblings.

She indicated that "I was a very scared, um, scary child" G[H1p121] and "I was a very nervous child" G[H1p125]. Being less adventurous than her brother and sister meant that she spent more time with her mother than they did. This seems to have resulted in a relationship akin to that which Helen currently describes between her daughter and herself, "And then at a point it came where my mom was much more my friend than what my brother and sister was. We used to like sit and chat about a book or do something together or whatever and I knew it, my mom did protect me more against my brother and sister because they were sort of mates and they were always teasing and nagging at me because I was more soft or something....And mom used to often protect me by shouting at them or smacking them" G[H1p125] The similarity between the protectiveness that Helen feels towards her own son and her mother's treatment of her is clear. However, Helen has reflected on the negative side of this situation, and now as a mother she is concerned not to allow favouritism to mar her children's relationship with each other. "My brother and sister used to always, even growing up, say I am my mom's favourite, you know, so thinking back you sort of, I don't want to make the same mistake with my two children because I know that mom did, you know, not prefer me but mom did take my side more, or help me more than what she did with them.... I am just praying that I don't do that" G[H1p129].

For Helen, this experience with her mother gave her support and protection from her siblings, but as an adult she recognizes the negative impact of this. Not only does it still play a part in her adult relationships with her siblings, but it informs her managing of her own children's sibling relationship.

4.6.4.6 Intergenerational patterns

Numerous similarities between Helen's way of relating to her own mother, and how she relates to her children, especially her daughter, emerged from the findings and have been indicated throughout Helen's narrative in various themes. In particular, Helen sees a trajectory of "protectiveness" emerging, as discussed more fully in section 4.6.3.5. She notes that her maternal grandmother would come to the defence of Helen's mother at times, siding with her against her children or her husband. Helen recalls feeling protective towards her own mother, and defending her to her friends. Now as a mother, Helen sees that her daughter behaves similarly but is even more assertive in the manner in which she enacts this protectiveness: "so I think that that is where (*daughter*)'s strong will comes from is that

she has niched onto that too that and she will always tell her dad off too. You are doing this wrong or you are trying to protect me almost as if, I often have to fight with her and say (*daughter*) don't talk and don't get involved" G[H2p72]. Helen is identifying some patterns of protective type behaviour spanning generations.

"She would say what I used to think, that sort of thing so I don't know if it is good or bad, for her dad it might be very bad but I used to often want to tell my dad where I thought he was wrong but you were too scared to do it whereas (*daughter*) would say it and often I have to remind her that it is still her dad and she needs to back off a bit" G[H2p12].

Helen also noted that as a child, she was quite reflective and that she sees this tendency in her daughter now too. Again, Helen identifies with her daughter because of the similarities. "I used to mull about things even from small and I often see (*daughter*) doing that...she is also a very sharp little girl in the fact that we would discuss things me and her on the way home and then she would talk about school and about a friend or something and she would come out so like she has thought it through whereas I think others kids at her age haven't thought of things like that" G[H2p58].

4.6.5 The meaning for Helen of having been mothered in this way

4.6.5.1 Doing it differently

Helen is aware of the negative consequences of her mother intervening on her behalf with her siblings and favouring her, and so she has tried to ensure that she does not do this with her own children. "I am very careful before I do a thing. And because (*son*), (*son*) is a soft spot in my life, I often have to take extra care of what I do with (*daughter*) so that I do spend time with (*daughter*) too" [H1p131].

Helen shows awareness that her special needs son requires more attention, but that she must balance this somehow with her daughters needs or repeat what happened with her siblings. Helen also tries to hear complaints that her daughter may have regarding impartiality, and respond in a constructive way.

"She is a bright little thing in the way that she will quickly tell me, mommy you are always doing things with (*son*)...then you know ooh now you must make a plan or do something. Whereas I don't know if you know if my brother or sister did say something to my mom what the come out was or whatever, you know" G[H1p131].

Helen identified approaches to discipline as something she is doing very differently from her parents. Although not entirely happy with her own methods, she does not agree with their use of physical punishment, "At that stage all you could do to try and sort your kids out was

smack them or whatever. So you sit with all that and then you think how you can change it and I'm one of the parents who are very anti-smacking. For me smacking is not going to solve a problem....so I am very careful with how we do things and what we do. What I do do, which I know is also sometimes wrong, is I get to a point where I shout" G[H1p133].

Helen saw similarities in her mothering and her family life in areas such as routines and values, such as "be on time" and "look neat" G[H2p14], as well as practices such as "they have to eat all their fruit and veggies" G[H2p14]. She is also aware of repeating aspects of mothering that she particularly enjoyed, such as her mother's habit of making time in the evenings to read with them or play a game.

Helen believes that her approach is more flexible to that of her parents, in that she will be more lenient with her children than her parents were. She summarized this approach saying "The things I didn't like I don't sort of force on my kids and then the things I liked I put into place" G[H2p14].

A final area of difference noted by Helen was in the power balance of the marital relationship.

"I don't know but mom was a very, dad is the boss, dad is in charge, she takes a back step sort of thing whereas with me and (*husband*)'s relationship we are both equal. We both make decisions and we both have says, in my mom and their relationship it was totally different. Mom never said anything if dad said something so I think they grew up different" G[H2p22].

This power imbalance that Helen perceived in her parents' relationship nearly caused the marriage to dissolve when Helen was a young child. She recalls praying that God would keep her parents together and help them resolve their differences because she did not want to have to choose between them. This experience has significantly influenced Helen in her choice of marriage partner. She recalled, "that is one of the things I asked her before she died was why did you want to leave dad and what and it very strongly came out that she sort of missed her personality and herself and whatever which is probably one of the things that I am so strong willed and you know I am adamant that my husband must not take over what I believe in and what I feel" G[H2p70].

4.6.5.2 Self-reflection as a habit

When asked what Helen feels influences her way of mothering, she replied "how I want to be a mother is how I grew up" G[H1p143]. Helen enjoys trying to understand and reflect on her childhood and how that influences her current experiences in life. She said "So I think a lot of my upbringing" G[H1p133] and she tries to make sense of patterns.

"I don't know if it is just the person I am or what it is but I am a very, I decipher everything (Laughs). I sort of take things apart and break them up and I always try and work out you

know, how things, so before I even got married I used to go through our childhood and our, my brother and sister's reactions to things and things like that. So, my mom used to one day say I will still be my own Professor one day whatever because that is the way I work things out" G[H1p133]. Helen's familiarity with self-reflection is evident in the way she approached participating in this research study. She enjoyed the opportunity to identify patterns in her current mothering and how she experienced being mothered. In her second interview, when reflecting on the focus group experience, Helen shared that "Because I suddenly thought, it doesn't matter how we grew up there will be something we are not happy with" G[H2p4].

4.6.5.3 Self-sacrifice

As Helen recognized in her mother the risk of losing her own personality in the face of a dominant partner, she also acknowledges that her attitude of self-sacrifice towards her children puts her at risk for a similar experience. "I often think she wasn't fully herself in that sense because she could never, she never pursued her things and her dreams, because the husband and the children had to come first" G[H2p22]. Helen knows that she has changed since becoming a mother and that this has involved some compromise to herself that might not be entirely healthy, "definitely I am much more emotional and wanting things for my kids than what I was at that. You sort of want them to have the best, you want them to be able to stand on their feet, it's, for me, my part of mothering is wanting things for the children all the time. It's, you are almost happy to go without things as long as they are okay and they can cope and to get them to be able to say no to certain things, or to know what to do or how to do it. Ja" G[H1p69].

Helen's need to find similarities between herself and her mother is powerful, despite the different life circumstances in which they mother. Here she identifies a pattern of self-sacrifice that they share, "And then if I look at my life in a lot of ways that is me too. Although I am doing what I want to with the kids there is lots of things that I would like to do that I am not doing because I am also doing what you know my husband and kids come first but sometimes I don't see it that way because I am doing so much for the kids I feel like they come first but now that I have said it there is a similarity you know mom used to always like, you know that was first priority in her life although our lives were so different" G[H2p22].

4.6.5.4 Closeness to own mother later in life

Helen explained that she felt that her relationship with her mother deepened when she married and had children. The change in relationship was facilitated by their being drawn together by similar life experiences, "and the amazing thing was how close me and my mom got when I got married and had children and we had the same things to share. Talking about our husbands and our children and things like that. It sort of brought, I was at my closest with

my mom from the time when I got married about different things that you could share” G[H1p151]. The meaningful nature of becoming closer to her mother in later life brings a bitter-sweet flavour for Helen. She expresses a gratitude for it but also a profound sense of loss for what she never had as a child, and now cannot ever acquire. Her mother in fact, remains irreparably unavailable.

“I thought if my mom had lived a bit longer I would have been able to talk to her about things because there is things now that is coming out that I think mom and me could have discussed this or spoken about this. In the last week there have been two or three things that I have been thinking if my mom lived I could have found out how she would have coped or we could have spoken about some things” G[H2p28].

“I would have liked to have spoken to her to find out how she solved it or coped and what she did and there wasn’t time for those things” G[H2pr30]. As she matured, Helen developed a new connection with her mother and felt more entitled to request advice and information. Her sadness in this premature loss is both for the relationship and for the resource that it denies her.

Just as Helen still longs for her mother to advise and guide her, this excerpt suggests that her mother may have experienced a similar moment, when she also reflected on what *her* mother would have thought at the birth of her grandson, “she was with us with (*son*) and she sat in the hospital and it will always be with me, I still see the photo that we took of her holding (*son*) and she used to say I wonder what my mother would have thought now. So I always, always remember that because you know and then often that question comes up to me, what would mom have thought and I think when she said that cause was a granny already and she was thinking, what would her mother have thought” G[H2p18]. The moment suggests that the need for a responsive mother does not change with time.

4.7 THANDI: NARRATIVE OF CASE 6 – Mothering in disguise

Thandi’s case is built upon two in-depth interviews, held approximately 11 months apart. The case name “mothering in disguise” stems from Thandi’s challenging life circumstances of having been raised to believe that her biological mother was her older sister and that her maternal grandmother was her mother. This has resulted in Thandi feeling that she has not been mothered, because the person in the mothering role was later revealed to have been misrepresenting the relationship. Furthermore, Thandi’s experience of mothering her own children has taken place in the context of an unhappy marriage, which involved violence and physical abuse. Even before the relationship escalated to this point, Thandi was aware that she was parenting her children alone.

4.7.1 Background information

Thandi is a 39 year old, Xhosa woman with two boys aged 10 and 8 years. She married at the age of 22 and waited six years before starting a family, as she wanted to feel ready for this responsibility. "I felt I didn't want to have children right away and again this was comparing with my mom's experience, she had me young and I was sort of unplanned, she wasn't married when she had me and all that so I waited about six years before my first child and, I had moved into a new town as well so I felt like I wanted to settle into marriage and settle into the new place and settle in the job that I wanted to do" H[T1p18].

Her second child was not a planned pregnancy and she struggled initially with the closeness of the age gap between the children and the challenges this brought. In addition, both boys have severe, chronic asthma and eczema which requires daily management. Thandi's marriage was a difficult one and she divorced her husband of 15 years in 2012, following years of conflict, estrangement and physical abuse.

Thandi was raised in the rural Eastern Cape by her maternal grandmother, as her mother's pregnancy had been unplanned and she was not married. This situation was concealed from Thandi until she was nine years old. She therefore believed until this time that her biological mother was her sister and her grandmother her mother. Her granny ensured that Thandi attended a rural school while she lived with her. However, in Grade 3 when her biological mother married, Thandi was taken to Johannesburg to live with her and her new husband. She completed her schooling there and received a matriculation pass. Thandi has subsequently completed a variety of diploma courses in computers, accountancy and also in the cosmetics industry.

Even before her divorce, Thandi described herself as a married-single mother. She now lives in a hostel setting with her two boys, and is a warden of a boarding house. She is employed in an administrative capacity at the school her children attend. Her ex-husband remains uninvolved in the life of her children and it is unclear whether this includes financial support or not.

4.7.2 Researcher's reflections

Thandi has clearly engaged in self-reflection about her childhood experiences and was articulate in expressing the painful nature of her early life. The researcher noted the urgency with which Thandi told her story, as if the opportunity to be witnessed in this way was precious to her. What was also noteworthy from these encounters was how Thandi has determinedly striven to address and confront aspects of her past that have caused her pain. Although her account showed some unresolved emotions, the researcher felt great respect for how she has negotiated her difficulties.

4.7.3 Meaningful mothering

4.7.3.1 The beginning: Pregnancy and early mothering

Thandi made a decision to delay motherhood until she felt emotionally and practically ready. When she believed herself sufficiently mature and having read up on parenting, she then planned her first pregnancy, “so I was ready to be a mom, I feel like I was ready, well you can never be 100% ready but I felt like I was ready. The timing was good for me” H[T1p34].

“Funnily enough when I made that decision I didn’t have my mother in that, I didn’t even think my mother had me young. I just felt that I wanted to be ready....Only now that we are talking about it that okay actually, ja, it could have in hindsight been that cause she couldn’t raise me” H[T2p50]. Thandi made the connection during the second interview that her choice may have been informed by her own experience of being herself an unplanned pregnancy to a young, unmarried mother.

The process of being pregnant was very positive her, “For me I always say if I could be pregnant I would be pregnant over and over because it was the most exciting part of the whole thing.... seeing your body change.... and being pregnant for the first time so it was very exciting. I read the books and went through all the milestones with pregnancy....I just had the beautiful pregnancy” H[T1p26].

Thandi had healthy pregnancies and caesarean births. She spoke about her first child with joyous memories, “It was beautiful, you know, we bonded, that love seeing your child for the first time, and breastfeeding, all those things just happened smoothly with him and they told me he was a slow feeder and he fed every two hours and all that, but even that didn’t bother me....I used to wake up just before he started crying, every two hours.... even by the time I had gone back to work it was still the same routine and it just never tired me out, I was just so excited you know, to do this” H[T1p36] .

“And yes, so it was just really a lovely experience and he was such a sweet baby. Well he cried a lot but it was manageable” H[T1p36]. Clearly this was a very enjoyable experience for Thandi, even to the point that she minimizes the difficult aspects as an afterthought, because this was something that she really wanted.

Her second pregnancy, although healthy, had a less positive flavour for her. The baby was unplanned and Thandi felt that this cheated her firstborn of the opportunity to have the undivided care she had wanted to lavish on him. She had looked forward to being able to have a second child when her first one was ready for preschool, allowing each child the chance for a special bonding time with her as mother. “By the time he turned two I was pregnant again which was unplanned so all of these things were happening all at once. I remember I actually cried when the doctor told me I was pregnant, I cried because I felt like I was cheating on him, you know, now I am going to have to share him and he is going to share me with the other baby and all that” H[T1p38].

However, her sadness at having to give up being able to move at the pace of her first baby is clear when she spoke of her decision to wean her first child once she was pregnant again, “I would have been one of those moms who breastfed until he doesn’t want it anymore. So that is how much I enjoyed motherhood” H[T1p42].

However, Thandi realized that this was “the one set back but I again had to bounce off it and say he is not going to be happy if I am not happy and you know worrying about the other one and all of that so it was difficult time but I feel like I sort of managed it” H[T1p38]. She was able to find a way to find the motivation and prepare to cope with impending motherhood of two children.

“I am that one person that no matter what happens I will go down and then I try and get out of that situation again, I felt I had to do that for him and prepare my mind for the next child and just be positive about it because I mean it was going to happen whether I was crying about it or not” H[T 1p52].

“Culturally it is expected that you go and live with your mom when you have a child but I wanted to be that hands on” H[T1p48]. Thandi did not have this, because on her way to be with her, her mother had a car accident. This meant that Thandi did not have that support when she returned home from hospital, but she said, “So it happened that I then had to deal with, be alone with my baby literally, without her help or anybody else’s but I didn’t really mind it because that is what I wanted to do and I was really enjoying it and I didn’t feel like I wanted anybody else to interfere with my relationship with my baby” H[T1p48]. Even though she is part of a culture that expects this of her, Thandi preferred to mother in her own way and with “hands on” commitment to her babies. She wanted to be the primary caregiver to them.

Thandi spontaneously related this to “I wanted to be like the best mom and this was because my mom....um, when my mom had me she had to ship me off to my granny because she was working, she was a domestic worker so she couldn’t have a baby there so I felt like I don’t want that with my children, I want to be there, I don’t want to miss out on anything. I even hated the fact that another person would have to look after my child and I miss out all the things they do during the day so um ja, but I really, really enjoyed that. It was a lovely time” H[T1p42].

4.7.3.2 Children with allergies

At around the age of two years her eldest son presented with severe eczema and asthma, for which he is still treated today. Her second son also developed the identical conditions. Although this requires significant intervention and management, Thandi attributes the fact that “I just took it calmly” to her being an older more mature mother. She read extensively on the subject, and still does now, to stay up to date with management options. She seems to

have coped by remaining proactive and positive because mothering had been her choice and decision.

“So it was a whole learning experience, you know, learning with a child with allergies, is extra work because you have to read every label, check everything they are eating, but I enjoyed it” H[T1p52]. Thandi has reframed her son’s special dietary and medical needs as a positive challenge.

The need to manage his allergies and asthma brought Thandi closer to her first son, as they were united in their struggle against the conditions and in explaining the management regime to other people “but it was like a learning curve for me, he was like my guinea pig child, tried everything, every medication you get hold, try this for the skin, try everything.... and it actually made him a very special child for me” H[T1p54].

Thandi reported that it “makes my mothering I feel that much more special because I had all these problems to deal with and not just be happy with the baby but be happy with a baby you can’t use bath soap and all these nice fancy things.... Then going back to my mom, she didn’t understand all of this fuss about the allergies.... she is just like not into that, so we fought a lot over the phone about the allergies, she just couldn’t understand.... so we had that relationship where I even had to educate her all the time” H[T1p54]. The absence of maternal support and understanding is evident here. Throughout the interviews, without prompting, Thandi would reflect on her mother-daughter relationship in connection with her mothering of her children. It is clearly quite prominent in her mind.

Thandi’s approach to managing the children’s skin condition and asthma was one of extreme self-reliance. “I am going to do everything myself, you can’t just look after the baby and then now it is an added job you have, you have a day job and you come home and you have to do all these things, prepare the food yourself.... so I was like that overly dramatic mom, cause I had to do everything myself and say all you do is just look after and clean the house and ja” H[T1p58]. She was very proactive, “I was that active mom in having to learn and decide I am going to do this my way and try and learn as much as I can about it so ja” H[T1p56].

Although she seems to cope well with her children’s needs, the severity of their conditions is brought home in her statements such as, “the eczema is still okay but the asthma was really, everybody gets scared, especially in a black community” H[T1p54] and “Cause it is very scary to see your child having an attack or having both....an attack and then the eczema flares up” H[T1p58]. Despite her generally positive attitude, Thandi acknowledged, “you worry a lot. You worry a lot” H[T1p60] and later she stated “It has been, it has been bad” H[T1p70] when she told of hospitalization and one occasion where she did not take her eldest son to hospital during an asthma attack because she could not juggle two little children in an emergency. Here Thandi showed that she can be self-reliant to the point of

even taking significant risks, as she chose to stay at home even when she knew that her child should have been placed on oxygen. “And it was the dumbest thing to do because I was worried what if, you know, but we were okay” H[T1p70].

4.7.3.3 Mothering different temperaments

Although both children suffer from eczema and asthma, Thandi explained that their way of approaching their condition is completely different because “they are totally different children” H[T1p70]. She has therefore had to learn to individualize her approaches for them, both regarding their medical condition and in all other areas.

Thandi spoke about the different temperaments of her two boys and how inconsolable her youngest son could be at times, crying to the point that a child-carer left her employ. “So it was hard, so ja, the emotions you know, you try this nothing worked, everything I tried with (*son 1*) didn’t work with (*son 2*), nothing worked, even my nannies, the one nanny left because of (*son 2*)” H[T1p74].

“When he cried he would turn red and he would sweat and you would actually have to change him cause he was wet from sweating” H[T1p70]. It was a very different and far more challenging experience of mothering with her second child. “Everything I knew I had to throw out the window and start afresh with him” H[T1p70].

In the difficult times, Thandi recalled “there were moments where I would be angry again you know going back the day I heard that I was pregnant with him and then (*son 1*) will be peacefully sleeping and (*son 2*) will be screaming and now you think oh my goodness, now he is going to wake that one up and then I am going to have two crying children” H[T2p72].

Her desperation during this time is apparent in her statement that “I mean it was stressful for me as well to have a colic child and the doctor said no, it happens, the babies are like this, I have tried every, I even phoned, I remember when I used to phone the hospital, the nursery there, I said please anything can you just tell me what else can I do, any tip you can give me, and just nothing worked. Until this day I still wonder what was wrong with him ‘cause he really, really was a baby that cried, that nobody enjoyed him and ja.” H[T1p78].

The cost of this experience for Thandi was that she began to comfort eat and gained significant weight. Her marital relationship also took further strain, “I mean their father was like I was, I used to joke and say... I am a married single mother, literally that is what it was, even with the two little children he just...he actually got worse when (*son 2*) was the way he was. He actually said he hates him. He hated him” H[T1p74].

“Ja, it was terrible. And our relationship in the home was bad, bad, bad, it just got worse. It got worse, he actually blamed me for the pregnancy that I didn’t take care so it was so terrible” H[T1p84].

However, despite all the pain and stress, Thandi spoke fondly of her second son, “Yet I loved him so much, I loved him, he was such an adorable chubby little baby and his brother learned to love him as well” H[T1p84].

4.7.3.4 Single parenting

Thandi’s divorce in 2012 has left her the official primary parent to her sons, having to fulfil the role of mother and father, “at this point I am both being a mom and a dad to my kids so again I cannot distinctly say this is what mothering is. I can talk about parenting. Because that is what I feel I am to my children, that I am a parent” H[T2p18]. Thandi referred to the uncertainty she has about this role both from her lack of her own childhood experience but also because she has to serve dual roles as a single parent to her boys, saying “it’s hard to say what is motherly” H[T2p10] and “There is no second person....So for me it is just that so I am having to be a parent” H[T2p18].

She explained that “in my conversations with them I talk about parenting, I try and not to talk about mom and dad I talk about your parent or if I talk about family situations I always say parents ‘cause I don’t want them to feel they are missing something. And I know they do, but I try and avoid, hence the reason I cannot even explain what being motherly to them is because in my, I have trained my brain to not think motherly, to think parenting” H[T2p20]. Aware that this helps her to manage her dual role, she added, “it is my coping mechanism and for me to forget that I don’t have a father figure in the house, so if I think parenting it makes it easier” H[T2p24].

This approach also benefits Thandi who feels acutely aware of her sons’ lack of a male role model and her inability to fill this gap, “so I can’t go kick a ball with them so those are the things I want to do and I do try but I don’t feel I create enough opportunities....those are the moments when I feel so guilty about, or when I have my periods when I want to be alone so those are the things that irritate me about being a woman that I am, I can’t do as much, especially them being boys, they expect more physicality from me and I can’t provide that” H[T2p30].

“There isn’t time to relax and talk but we try and catch up but sometimes there are always other things and I look, when you say, things, things that I would like to do differently, I always look back at conversations and I always think about how I had to cut that one off cause we always have to go and do the next thing and he was trying to tell me” H[T2p32].

4.7.3.5 Positive growth and change

Thandi’s powerful statement, “my life history I feel every incident, when I look back, has prepared me for where I am now” H[T2p28] epitomizes how she views her entire challenging childhood and adulthood from an empowering and meaningful perspective. She makes

sense of her experiences as stepping stones towards re-building herself, particularly with respect to being a mother, "I have grown, it made me grow" H[T1p98]. "It just made me understand human beings much more better and relate to people in a different level you know and just respect human beings because I feel like I have had these two human beings that I have had from scratch that had nothing and I had to be with them from when they were born until now 10 years later and just watch them grow and they are different personalities. I look at them and I see like everybody else through my children's eye and I understand, I feel like even my relations with people improved" H[T1p98].

"So I have really learned to appreciate just human beings as a whole and hone my experiences in dealing, even now with my job as a warden I think all of that, I remember in my interview they brought up, you have never been in a boarding house and I said being a mom what can you not do if you have been a mom. And I know it sometimes sounds so cliché but it is true, if you have been a mom you have dealt with every crisis.... so I use the mothering as a basis of many of the things I do in life, in my interactions with people" H[T1p98]. Thandi's mothering role provides her with a sense of expertise and self-esteem and has become a foundation of her identity. However, Thandi recognizes that because she frequently assumes a mothering type role in other relationships "I let people walk all over me because I try and be the mother and be understanding....even with my relationship with my husband....the mothering was there even before I was a mother" H[T1p100]. Subsequently, for self-preservation "I have become more selfish and try and find time for myself, and want to do things for me not just for other people and forget me in the process" H[T1p106]. She also sees this as important for her boys, as it fosters more independence in them if they do not always have her to lean on. "I am learning to do them but it is for the betterment of my children 'cause I don't want them to be, 'cause I felt like with the divorce situation um, literally I have been with them 24/7 since the day they were born" H[T1p108]. "It really has been, I really I am loving every moment you know I have made a lot of mistakes and all of this but we learn from our mistakes" H[T1p114].

This positive growth within her has evolved as her children matured and Thandi anticipates each development as being of value in later parenting years too.

"Because I feel like we all go through the same, you know, when you had a child like the teething stages and all of those problems then the baby teeth fall out again so for me it is a repetition of the stages of life and I always say it is like teenage, when you have children that age, the tantrums and all that, for me it is like preparing you as the mother for the teenage years 'cause I think all of that comes back again (laughs) when they are teenagers so it has just helped me with that view of human beings just watching my children grow and compare them with adults and just like we are really repeating all these cycles all over again, in a different tone in a different manner but it is the same" H[T1p98].

4.7.4 Being mothered

4.7.4.1 Grandmother as secret substitute mother

Thandi's narrative of her own mothering experience began with, "I was mothered by my grandmother, I referred to her as my mom, I mean I didn't even know that my mom was my mom, and um, I can't really say how it is to be mothered because she wasn't my mother, she was my grandmother and she was much older" H[T1p116].

"You know the first seven years of your life, um, which I spent with her 'cause I only joined my mom back again in Johannesburg, I was going to do Grade 3.... so that is when I lived with my mom" H[T1p116]. Thandi described life in her grandmother's home as, "She was a very loving person and she still is in her own way but she is a very rural woman who had never gone to school but she really took good care of me, I mean, I had great memories which could have been memories I shared with my mother" H[T1p116].

Thandi recalls her time with her grandmother in the first seven years of her life as "I mean my granny watching me write and doing all the things you know moms do, preparing meals together and um, but that also, I feel like that also taught me to be independent in that I taught things to myself and I compare myself to my kids. The things that I could do in Grade 1 and 2, like I remember our uniform was pleated, I could iron it, like every pleat and we didn't have electricity, we used those cast irons" H[T1p116].

A memory of particular significance to Thandi was, "And she never went to school at all. I remember when I did my Grade 1 and Grade 2, one thing I pride myself with, I taught her how to write her name. And it is like one of the special moments I had with my granny.... I decided I am going to teach her how to write and when I left (*name of town*) she could write her name" H[T1p116].

At the time, for Thandi her biological mother's Christmas visits were the visits of an older sister, bringing treats to her younger sibling. Thandi did not know that this was in fact her mother, until much later when her mother announced both her marriage and that Thandi would be returning with her to Johannesburg to live with her new family.

"I even have fond memories where my mom would have come in December and she would buy me these fancy, I remember Kellogg's, I remember Rice Krispies.... so that is how I think I don't know how it was to be mothered because it was just for that moment. You are happy but then she wasn't my mom, she was my sisi, my sister. So she would come with all these things but I didn't care much honestly I just enjoyed being with my mama at the time and the things we did" H[T1p118]. Thandi spoke about this relationship, although understood at the time as one between siblings, as very positive saying, "I had very good memories with her and how she lived her life and how loving she was" H[T1p118]. However, the confusion of the mother roles in Thandi's life is evident even now as an adult, as she frequently used the word "mom" for both her grandmother and her biological mother in her account.

Although her grandmother fulfilled many of the practical roles Thandi associates with mothering, the available emotional care was limited. “My granny is not very affectionate, like touchy, touchy feely but I felt the love and I still do. Only now with (*son 1*) she hugs and kisses him, and I am like where does this come from, you never kissed me but she loved me and I know that she loved me” H[T1p118].

Despite her grandmother not being demonstrative, other family members had been jealous of her grandmother’s affection for Thandi and this had caused rifts and conflict in the extended family. As a result, even now in adulthood, Thandi knows that “it was just causing a little trouble and that is why I am saying as much as I know the affectionate love and all that and that mother-daughter love....so we love each other from a distance ‘cause the other people just feel very offended and all that” H[T1p118]. However, despite this Thandi believes that “we always had a bond and I could talk to her about anything, literally anything” H[T2p74].

4.7.4.2 Biological mother revealed

The reality that she was the child of the woman she had been raised to consider her sister was revealed to Thandi when she finished Grade 2. “When my mother came to fetch me.... that was in 1983, December 1983, then they sat me down, told me all these things and now she was (*words inaudible*) with me and that was then” H[T1p124] and “it was confusing” H[T1p126]. Thandi’s account became momentarily inaudible and less coherent as she relayed this information.

“Honestly I don’t know, I can’t think back to that moment to say what I felt but it was very confusing and I just accepted it. And I think I didn’t want to think about it, I just thought about the now. And then a man who was not my father was now marrying my mom....but then that was not discussed. It was just this is dada and this is mama and that’s it, we are now going to live in Joburg and that was it” H[T1p128].

Thandi offered a confused account of her mothering experience which accurately reflects how it was for her, as she struggles to conceptualize either her grandmother or her biological mother providing her with mothering. “I can’t answer, how it made me feel to now to learn my sister is my mother.... she loved me, in her own way, she brought me things, so there was a bond with her. But again when you asked me about how it felt to have a mother, I couldn’t tell what feeling it is to have a mother. Because like I said my granny is not an affectionate person so I was loved but in a different way than a mother” H[T1p136].

Once reunited with her mother, Thandi’s home life experience still did not provide her with a warm emotional, mother-daughter connection.

“Even my mother is not that, very affectionate especially when you are older. To the baby she will lovey, lovey but to you, “do this, do that!” So I don’t know how it feels to have a mother.... I have grown to understand why my mother was like that ‘cause her mother was also that way you know, she loves but not cuddling and all that” H[T1p136].

When Thandi went to live with her mother, she was the oldest child in the household and received little care as a result. Her mother had other children with her new husband and Thandi was expected to help with housework and child care tasks. “My mom was also busy.... she had all the other children.... there was such a gap between me and my brother so there was just no space for me to be mothered so to speak, like when I started living with her.... there wasn’t much she was teaching me cause my gran had taught me most of the things to do, it was just maintenance really.... so I felt neglected to some point” H[T2p32].

Thandi believes that her mother expected more from her because of her own need to prove to her new husband that she was not favouring her child from a previous relationship. She was therefore punitive towards Thandi and demanded more of her than the other children, “So she was harsh on me, and coming from, living with my granny, my granny was also harsh but I was a disciplined child, I know that for a fact. So I wasn’t really a difficult child but I felt like sometimes she just punished me to just prove to this man that you know she doesn’t love me more than the other siblings of mine, so ja. It was really, really hard” H[T 1p156].

Thandi recognizes that the needs she had for mothering as a young child were not met by this new family arrangement and the dynamics made it difficult to accept the authority of her mother. Explaining this, Thandi stated that “so as much as I say, I wasn’t really, I think I was mothered as a teenager. My only mothering that I recall. And it was like the worst one when we fought a lot you know, arguing a lot as a teenager and again with my mom.... So my mothering with my mother, her mothering of me was difficult... maybe I am making excuses for her....she over disciplined me, simply because when I look at it, she didn’t want to show too much love to me like the other children of this man that she married” H[T1p156].

The pain of this experience has motivated Thandi to continue to address it with her mother, despite having long since reached adulthood. This has helped her to achieve empathy for her mother and some personal understanding of what happened, “but I have spoken to her about it as best as I can and she didn’t know better and you know she was trying to save her marriage.... and I found him to be more nicer to me than my mom.... I was in such a difficult position because if he showed kindness to me then she used to worry, is he not going to abuse this child now so it was like a really difficult situation to be in if I put myself in her shoes” H[T1p156].

“I know she loved me and all that, but I think she was put in a difficult situation, she didn’t know how to, I mean even the cousins, we had a cousin that came to live with us and she

was six years older than me and I was expected to do either as much as she did in the house or more. And only now it all makes sense because it used to make me hate my mother at the time” H[T1p156].

While her mother’s deliberate harshness towards Thandi may have been an attempt to limit any suspicion of impartiality, Thandi experienced it as cruelty and contradictory to what a mother should do. She did not experience her mother’s behaviour as like that of a “mother”.

“She didn’t feel like she needed to explain anything to me.... she felt there is no need, she didn’t want to confuse me, she was protecting me so it was just hard. For me at that time it was really, really hard to a point I remember crying and telling one of my uncles and asking is she really my mom” H[T1p156].

Again, Thandi’s ability to make sense of the experience shows in her summary of “but I love her.... I am this person I am because of my mother and I think her being harsh to me, as bad as it sounds, it helped me, it gave me character, it made me the person I am and I think I didn’t fall apart in my marriage because I think all of those things made me stronger you know, her being harsh to me” H[T1p164].

4.7.4.3 Mystery father

Information about her biological father was also concealed from Thandi, who only discovered who he was when she was an adult. She explained, “I only found out by the way about my father.... when I was about to get married, I was 22, but then I found him, I found him when I was pregnant with (*son 2*), like the first phone call to finally find him” H[T1p156].

“Only when you are older somebody sits you down because even finding out about my biological father was even through my aunt, my mother’s sister, that told me just before I got married and she was shocked that my mother hasn’t told me and then my mom wasn’t happy about it, but I didn’t tell her then, I only told my mom much later cause I was trying to find my dad and I was struggling....in the meantime, she knew where he was and she was even in contact with his brother’s wife” H[T1p164]. Again, Thandi reveals how significant information was concealed from her even as an adult.

4.7.4.4 A history of unmothered women

The history of her own mother’s childhood experience showed similarities to Thandi’s. With empathy, she commented “So my mother as well didn’t have an ideal family. She also, actually spent a lot of time with her granny....all she remembers of her own mother was that she was very strict and she used to shout at them” H[T2p88].

However, her loyalty to her maternal grandmother necessitated her attempt to contextualize her mother’s situation. Thandi explained, “my granny as well in her defence....she was the first born and growing up in the rural areas she never could go to school. She was expected

to herd the cattle she was the first girl so she had to be a boy” H[T2p88]. Unable to go to school, with her role determined by cultural norms and traditions, Thandi’s grandmother was still able to grow up to be a strong woman who was aware of where she was not prepared to compromise.

Thandi continued, “my mother’s father wanted two wives, what do you call it now, polygamous marriage? And my granny wouldn’t stand for it cause she wanted a proper marriage and all that....so my granny, when she was fed up with the whole setup she then decided to leave the rural areas and went to (*name of town*)” H[T2p86]. Her grandmother’s strength has served as a powerful role model for Thandi.

“My mom as well, she never grew up full time with her mother” H[T1p158]. Thandi’s mother lived in various households, sometimes experiencing harshness and deliberate denial of privileges from relatives in favour of their own children. The rural community in which she grew up had no schools which covered primary and senior primary together, and so Thandi’s mother had to frequently move homes to accommodate proximity to primary, senior primary and high school. “So I was just that she never really had good, spent that much time with her own mother so it, and then I was the one that spent time with her mother (laughs), so I just said uh uh I can’t do that” H[T1p158]. Thandi acknowledges that this was a way of mothering that she was not prepared to accept for her children.

“My mother was also the eldest in the family and the only thing that know as well coming from my granny was that she was very disappointed in all her children cause all she ever wanted was for them to study and then my mother went off and had me and then, she didn’t, the reason she left (*name of town*) was not because she was pregnant she left because I think there was a craze in the 70’s where all the black females wanted to be a domestic worker, it was the thing, so she left school and she wanted to be a domestic worker and then she met my father and they had me” H[T2p88]. Thandi’s grandmother had hopes for her children that did not materialize. She would have liked them to improve their lot in life significantly more than they did.

The relationship between her mother and grandmother sees Thandi acting as a mediator between them “But they had a relationship but it wasn’t as close mother and daughter. I would at time reprimand my mom about how she is talking to her or angry at her and you know you had to understand so I always had to play these mediations between the two of them and taking my gran’s side in it” H[T2p88].

4.7.4.5 Cultural pressures

Despite Thandi’s strong determination to be mindful in her life choices and mothering, she is aware that limitations are imposed on her by cultural expectations, “our culture there are things that you can’t do” H[T1p146]. She finds that she needs to balance what she considers

right, with the beliefs and traditions where possible, “I say I am trying to do things differently I know that there is a lot that I learned from them. Just mixing it with my own things that I learned” H[T1p146].

Thandi recognizes the influence of culture and the difficulties it imposes on people who want to grow or make changes. “I feel like in my growing up I was, I mean I grew up in Joburg literally, from when I was nine, I was in Joburg so you grow up with all these different cultures and my mother only grew up with the Xhosa culture and never exposed to anything else but she worked as a domestic worker and she learned a lot of things from being in a white person’s household and it helped her change a lot from, and do things differently from her mother.... I mean she actually was called names by family back home, how she did things” H[T1p148].

“There were things that she did that were frowned upon by people in her generation because she was exposed to other things and she still is that person and she likes, I mean my mother, we are not rich at all but she loves her *Niveas* and all those special things and hand creams and stuff....I am like her in so many things ‘cause I love all these nice things that I can’t even afford sometimes” H[T1p152].

Thandi strives to acknowledge both the power of cultural and traditional ways of being, as well as the times when they are restrictive or have less than optimal consequences. She wrestled with her understanding and recognition, from personal experience, of the cultural basis of her family childhood circumstances, while still validating for herself the pain it has caused her. This was particularly with reference to the secrecy about her true mother and father, and being raised by her grandmother.

“And I think with us black people it is just the way children are raised, those things don’t matter, so you find even in families there will be a cousin that grows up in, like for instance my biological father, it was his aunt that raised him simply because she could never have children. So they gave her this son to raise as her own..... so that is why it didn’t matter for anybody to tell me because how the culture is like that, that it doesn’t matter. You raise a child.... and you are the mother, no questions asked and there is no distinction that it is an adoptive. That is why I don’t know if you have heard there is no adoption, I don’t think any African country has that as part of their culture. It doesn’t need to be official. It is just leave a child there and can just give a child away and say you raised him as your own.... so that is why you can’t even begin to be angry about that..... That is how my mom has grown up in many households and she was just one of the children and nobody distinguishes that.... So that is where the problems actually I feel it creates, there is a goodness in it but it also creates a lot of problems especially in today’s society. That is why I have mixed feelings about the thing, I don’t know what difference it would have made they had told me the truth, I don’t know, and I can never know unfortunately” H[T1p190].

While it is difficult at times for Thandi to take a stand against some of the cultural expectations and ways of thinking that her family impose, she is both strong and willing to do so when she feels justified and informed, “I like challenging things, I don’t want to do things just for the sake of doing things....and if it means going against what everyone else is doing, as long as I feel or have a sense that what I am doing is correct, then I will.” H[T2p52].

4.7.5 The meaning for Thandi of having been mothered in this way

4.7.5.1 Compensation

Compensating for her own lack of affectionate mothering, Thandi is aware that “I think sometimes I over-do it. I am very touchy, I tell my children I love them, I kiss them, I do all the things that were never done to me” H[T1p138]. Responding to a reflection on her decision to mother differently to her own experience, Thandi affirmed that she decided to approach it “totally differently, which is why I kept everything to myself and wanted to do everything” H[T1p140].

4.7.5.2 Doing it differently

“I thought about it a lot.... I think as you grow older whatever your past was you try and make it better, whether it was a rosy one, you make it every rosier, I think it is within every human being, I think that is how we were created, you have a sense of making it right somehow” H[T1p174].

Thandi expresses a strong desire to improve for her children on the quality of mothering she received. However, as a single parent, she recognizes that this is often not possible: “I am trying to do it differently although.... because of the circumstances I don’t have the space to do it as much as I would have liked....I always reflect at how I grew up and I want to do more than my mother could do but in real life it is impossible” H[T2p30, 32].

The concealment of her biological father’s identity from Thandi leaves her feeling deprived of having contact with her paternal grandparents and this side of her heritage. With her sons, she responds to this by “And I have even tried to make sure that they know their grandparents you know I am trying not to repeat the things that happened to me....but then you make more mistakes while doing that and then they are hopefully going to have to right some of it when they grow up” H[T1p170]. Thandi has insight that even in trying to improve on her own experience of mothering she will make errors which her children will have to find ways to address.

4.7.5.3 Intergenerational patterns

Recognizing the foundation that was laid for her despite the heartache of her upbringing and how she has built on this positively, Thandi stated, “I think I am a better mother than my

mother was but again it is all the values she taught me, like to have a sense of loyalty, integrity....so it is all those things and I do that” H[T2p62]. Thandi noted when speaking about her children and extended family “I see a lot of patterns” H[T1p142]. Some of these patterns appear in personality traits and others in mannerisms. She mentioned that “we both care so much you know.... my mom would, I know she would kill you know for her children. I mean even for her grandchildren”. This focus of committed mothering is seen by Thandi as shared by her and her own mother, even though they approach it quite differently. She mentioned how her mother has become the caregiver to Thandi’s deceased brother’s children saying “She is now their mother so I know she cares a lot about their wellbeing and my granny was like that and I see a lot of patterns” H[T1p142].

Thandi also sees that her youngest son has certain personality traits like his grandmother, which Thandi described as “very OCD” H[T1p142]. Thandi shares mannerisms with her mother and knows that like her mother, she speaks very fast “She speaks very fast and I do too and I hate it because I know people don’t hear what I said and all of that so ja a lot of things that I have taken from her, and this is now from her mothering me” H[T1p156].

Even in her own mothering style Thandi identifies that “I sometimes hear my mother through me talking to my children, like the way she used to be angry with me....so yes, it does happen and even the way when she used to tell me how her mother dealt with her....the pattern is there” H[T2p2].

Thandi also pointed out that her mother sacrificed herself for others and that this is something that Thandi has modelled but is now needed to reverse as it is not healthy for her. “The mothering that I have I think is watching her do things for other people and never do anything for herself” H[T1p118].

She concluded that although she knows that she has similarities to her mother, she is not afraid to make adjustments and parent her children differently. “Even when I am talking to my children, I think this is what my mother would have said....but when I feel I want to change I do change and say okay I can achieve the same results but slightly doing it differently so that is the only thing. So I stand by her values” H[T2p62].

4.7.5.4 Healing hurts

In the telling of her story it is evident that through introspection Thandi has found meaning and acceptance of certain aspects of her past. However, it is equally evident that there are still areas of raw pain which are as yet unresolved. Thandi has no memories of being seen as precious when she was a tiny infant and nobody who has recalled this part of her history for her. Subsequently, she was greatly moved when she attended a family gathering in 2014 to meet her biological father, and was introduced to a woman who remembered her as an infant. She recalled “I cried when she said it, because I never had anybody say to me I

remember when you were like this tiny. It is those conversations I have never thought about, they had never crossed my mind, it was just so heart-warming and feeling a sense of belonging with someone who held me when I was just a few days old” H[T1p184]. Thandi is recognizing that her unplanned birth was not a source of pleasure or excitement for her young mother and that she was hiding it from people and not celebrating it. This is such a contrast to her own joy on being pregnant and even her determination to manage her unplanned second pregnancy in a way which welcomed the child into the world.

Thandi also recalled a memory of being in hospital alone as a young child and wanting her sister to be with her. “I wanted her there for comfort because she loved me as a mother but I didn’t know that.... I don’t know, I think the love she gave to me was motherly love and she hated the fact that she had to leave me here....” H[T1p188]. There is poignancy to this in that because Thandi did not know that she was her true mother, she could not experience the care as motherly love, and so still felt deprived of this.

Reflecting on the past and her mother’s treatment of her when she went to live with her in Johannesburg, Thandi stated that “Now that I have got all of the facts, I can now put everything into place, yes, you know it is understandable. But I still say you didn’t have to be so harsh, you didn’t have to, but I know where it came from” H[T1p160]. Thandi shows understanding of the circumstances but still finds her mother’s behaviour unacceptable saying “I had a lot of resentment really but I didn’t know why, why does she hate me ‘cause it felt like hate, why does she treat me like this....that didn’t make sense you know” H[T1p162]. Thandi could not make sense of her mother’s treatment of her at the time, but now that she does, it is a little easier for her to put it to rest. She also read many books, watched movies and television programmes where the content showed other traditional African families which helped her to “see how many children grew up with no parents.... so it is really eye-opening to see how many children, especially in the black communities, just displaced, they grow up, just like me growing up with your granny thinking it is your mother” H[T1p162]. However, this experience remains painful for Thandi despite her insight.

4.7.5.5 Current relationship with mother

Something of the unresolved nature of her pain shows in how Thandi currently relates to her mother. Thandi still has a powerful need to process and address the past hurts within her current relationship with her mother. She frequently challenges and addresses issues from the past, particularly now that her mother is responsible for the mothering of her grandchildren from her deceased son. Thandi positions herself as a better informed adult who can guide her mother.

“If I were to measure I would say probably I do try and do better than my mother did because I actually do talk to her.... she is raising my late brother’s two children.... I feel like I am always counselling her on how to parent..... but I told her when she does, we are both raising children at the same age and literally have deep talks with her where we argue a lot and I tell her, you have an opportunity to right the wrongs when you raised me” H[T2p32].

Thandi perceives her mother’s role of surrogate parent to her grandchildren as an opportunity for her to be a better mother than she was for Thandi. She therefore is distressed when she sees her mother repeating behaviours that she experienced as destructive when they were imposed on her as a child. She mentioned, “the way she speaks to them when she is angry! My mother never really used.... physical discipline, she would shout and yell and sometimes the things would come from a very sad space and she would say the worst things to you....And she does it and I get angry with her cause it brings back my childhood and I don’t want them at my age to be thinking about their relationship with her at this age to be that” H[T2p32]. As part of her own healing, Thandi wants her mother to embrace this “second chance” to mother better.

“I do try offer help and we always argue about it and she reminds me you’re a child and I tell her she went wrong” H[T2p32].

“When I say those things then she makes me feel I haven’t forgiven her but I just don’t want, it hurts me to see you do the exact same things you did to me when and you can actually you know step back and do things differently” H[T2p34]. Ensuring that there is a more positive childhood experience for her nephews and nieces is very meaningful to Thandi. “She comes out with me judging her but not really, I am just seeing things from the outside and she says you don’t live here and you don’t understand but I can see what I can see, but I am trying to protect your relationship with the children” H[T1p36].

4.7.5 6. Sources of strength

Apart from reading many books to augment her knowledge of allergies and parenting, Thandi also watched television programmes which helped her to sleep and toilet train her first son before the birth of the next baby. Thandi found this resource invaluable. However, it also highlights how she was without guidance from her own mother, family or husband in this experience of mothering. She was desperate for guidance and found this in the books and “experts” but had no human relationship to guide or support her, “I loved it because I felt I needed to have this midwife and that book was my midwife” H[T2p60].

Thandi was driven to succeed at this task of motherhood that she had set herself, “I wanted to be that super mom and prove to myself that I can do this” H[T1p96]. Responding to a query about where she draws her strength from, Thandi replied “seeing both my mom and my gran surviving” H[T2p64]. Thandi’s grandmother had died in the time between the two

research interviews and she reflected on her life, saying “my philanthropic nature comes from her” H[T2p64]. She added, “I draw my strength from them and even her mother, you know my granny’s mother, you know, the way she did things” H[T2p64]. Thandi sees herself as coming from a legacy of capable women. She recognizes the flaws, but also embraces the way in which she has been strengthened by the hard times.

“I grew up in this dysfunctional family but I was protected and that helped me ‘cause when I look at children that grew up the same age as me and grew up in the same era as my gran, their lives didn’t turn out so well.... I constantly want to better myself” H[T2p64].

Thandi’s Christian background is a source of strength for her and has been throughout her life, “and of course having studied the bible at a young age it helped us a lot” H[T2p64] and “I was brought up in a Christian family so my mother’s cultural values somewhat didn’t clash, they just blended in with what we were learning as a Christian family. So you took those all of them together and it is what informs me” H[T2p66].

The degree of emotional pain Thandi has experienced and her strong Christian commitment and responsibility is captured in the excerpt from her second interview, “if He wasn’t looking out for us, I could have easily committed suicide and that, but knowing I have to do this for my children. And again the same reason my mother went to fetch me is the same reason I have to make it work. ‘Cause I have to be responsible to my children and I always tell my children that as parents, we have the obligation, the bible tells us that children are gifts. So when you have a gift you have an obligation to look after it and so no matter what, even if it is hard for me, I have that you know and they are not really mine” H[T2p68].

4.8 FOCUS GROUP: NARRATIVE OF CASE 7

This narrative was created using the two in-depth focus group interviews. The first group was held after the initial round of individual interviews and the second group was conducted after the all participants had their second and final research interview. The groups were therefore held 6½ months apart.

4.8.1 Background information

A total of six participants were present at each focus group, but the compilation of these groups varied slightly. All participants interviewed for the study were invited to attend the focus group sessions and five of them (Janet, Helen, Debbie, Ava, Lara) committed to both groups. Due to practical constraints in her working life, Nokuzola only attended the first group. Thandi committed to the first group but was unable to attend on the day. She was present for the second group. Lara, whose individual interview data was not used in the analysis, was a member of both group sessions (see section 3.4.3.1.2 for the discussion of the reasons for this decision).

4.8.2 Researcher's reflections

The first group took time to become cohesive and therefore the data obtained gives a sense of multiple individual accounts, versus a group conversation. Little new information was gleaned, as participants tended to elaborate on the information shared in their individual interviews, partly for the benefit of the other participants and partly it seemed in order to again share their stories. As the focus group progressed, there was more sharing, identification and elaborating on the experience of others. The rapport in the group was very positive, and there was an energy and dynamism towards the end that suggested that if time had allowed, further deepening of the material may have occurred. The second focus group was very different. The final interviews had taken place and participants explored their views more deeply and with greater engagement. The group sharing was at a deeper level with involvement from all group members. The process was also better facilitated by the researcher who structured the conversation around quotes from some of the individual transcripts and a diagram to encourage discussion. A slight change in group membership may also have been a contributory factor to the content of group discussion, as there was no dominant group member in the second session. Members spontaneously supported each other, referred back to issues raised by fellow participants and generally behaved as a cohesive, "working" group. There was respectful and supportive silence, or encouraging non-verbal responses on the few occasions when group members expressed painful emotion.

4.8.3 Being a mother

4.8.3.1 The importance of reflection

The importance of reflection was raised by participants with reference to two areas. Firstly there was discussion about the value of the research topic and how it had promoted their reflection:

"You get to think deeply....Like I never knew how that made me feel...or what I think about it..." I[FG2p6] and "Just looking back at how I was mothered and it made me remember stuff which I wasn't remembering" I[FG1p2].

Secondly, the importance of being 'witnessed' in their mothering and having their experience validated was also mentioned by many as both a positive aspect of participation in the research, but also as a way of facilitating reflection. One participant expressed this as "the feeling of having verbalized something that I have always just done that someone else was hearing it as well" I[FG1p12].

Later, reference was made by mothers of their goals and hopes for mothering of their children. This provoked a different response from some, "I am feeling terrible. Everybody here has got a plan and I never had a plan..." I[FG1p52] and "I never thought about how to raise my children" I[FG1p52]. Another participant elaborated "I still don't have a plan!

(laughs). Things happen every day and I learn as far as the kids learn" I[FG1p60]. Here the importance of reflection is being suggested by their concern about when being absent. The implication is that mothering is enhanced by mothers reflecting on the process, their own history and their children's needs.

A further perspective on this issue of reflection is seen in the discussion of how mothers need to discern what they will use from their own experience and what they will reject, "We all grew up differently....like you have to sift; you have to see what's going to work for you and what's not" I[FG2p69]. Here again the importance of a reflective process was identified.

4.8.3.2 Compensation and doing it differently

Participants discussed various ways in which they mother differently from their own experience of mothering. One form involved compensatory behaviours where they are actively striving to include or exclude experiences from their children's lives that they did not enjoy themselves as children.

One example of this was "I had a lot of nannies and people and I missed my mom and that is why I specifically decided not to work and I am staying at home looking after my two little ones" I[FG1p21].

Another participant recognized the narrow experience her childhood had provided and has actively sought to broaden that of her children's, saying "We invited everybody to be part of our children's lives....we wanted as big an influence on our children's lives" I[FG1p45] and later she added "I want them to have their eyes open and that they know that there is another world out there" I[FG1p70].

However, an opposite compensatory response was then provided by another mother who stated "I myself am raising my child. She is a single child and there is no village of moms because I don't know if I want them there because I have specific outcomes that I want, and I am afraid of too much influence" I[FG1p24]. She was also able to state that her fear of negative influences had driven this over-compensatory approach, acknowledging "I was so afraid of that negative influence" I[FG1p44].

The determination to correct what they had experienced as negative or unhelpful was strongly evident in the participants' accounts. A participant commented, "the way we were raised, one size fits all, this is how discipline is and this is what happens and ja! You stray and this is the consequences" I[FG1p72]. However, she emphasized "I am not doing this with my own kids, I am going to raise them as individuals....I try and find ways that talk to the specific child, not to compare" I[FGp74]. There was much support from the group participants for the idea of doing the opposite of what they had experienced as children. However, there was also acknowledgement that this intention is not always successful. For

example, it was mentioned that “I was determined not to do it....I am going to do it right” I[FG1p77] “but sometimes I catch myself, just like my mom (laughs)” I[FG1p77].

Some members were adamant that they were doing the opposite of what their mothers provided, such as “I am the total opposite” I[FG1p77] and “I think I am doing things very differently to my mother” I[FG2p30].

Two participants shared the experience of feeling that their parents did not encourage them enough to try to better themselves or do new activities. Now as mothers themselves they seek to do it differently for their children. This was epitomized in the statement “it is such a tender thing to know what you should push your child and what you shouldn’t....I have to push him into everything” I[FG1p106].

Anticipating adolescence with her daughter, a mother mentioned hoping to manage the need for sex education better than she had experienced from her mother, saying, “I could never ask my mom any of that. I got given a book!” I[FG1p197]. These women seem to be using their own childhood experience to mould a different way of mothering. It was generally agreed that having an openness to discuss all topics with their children was something most mothers would like to do differently for their children.

Among the many examples of how the participants strive to mother differently were comments reflecting their motivation for making these changes. These included references such as “Not wanting to repeat the mistakes” I[FG2p38] and “you don’t want your children to go through the bad stuff you had to go through” I[FG2p140].

A comment that encapsulated much of the thinking in the group was “Because some things... (Long pause) you didn’t have as a child and you sort of want them for your children. And the fact that they might not even want it doesn’t come into it. (Loud general laughter)” I[FG2p119]. The group identified with her recognition of how difficult it is to separate a personal agenda from the needs of their children. The participants acknowledged that sometimes their desire for ‘correcting’ past painful experiences, clouds their ability to see what the children want or need. The focus can then become “And I think it’s about perfecting YOU!” I[FG2p131].

4.8.3.3 Imperfect mothers

Their empathic reflections on their own mothers inspired discussion in the group relating to participants’ own sense of inadequacy or imperfection as mothers and the importance of their children understanding this. Examples of this included, “And as I am thinking that, I am thinking, God, I hope (*daughter*) sees that I am flawed! Because I don’t want her to think that my mothering is perfect. I want her to know that I am winging it!” I[FG2p163] and “like when I have said something and they find out that I was wrong. Then I say well mothers make mistakes too!” I[FG2p171].

Some participants expressed feeling pressured by their mothers' success and pressurizing themselves when comparing themselves to their mothers and the circumstances in which they mothered. Once such comment was "which now probably makes me a lot harder on myself about things. Like I am sure, I haven't had any curve balls thrown my way, I should be doing this properly" I[FG2p159]. A second example, humorously delivered to the group was "so she certainly did a better job than her mother, and then my mother did a better job than her. And then I felt the burden of pressure (laughs) to... (group joins in laughing)... Because you can't just keep the trajectory from every generation improving" I[FG2p97].

This last comment stimulated a conversation about how perceptions of their own mothers have changed in light of their own experience of mothering. She had commented that a perception of a mother as capable and infallible can change with new insight and information. This was then discussed with participants expressing how their mothers might have been experienced in ways that did not truly reflect how they were. This was also linked to the empathic understanding mentioned below [see section 4.8.4.1]. Several mothers then reflected on how their own children may therefore experience them, for example saying, "My mom always came across as very sure about what she was doing and very confident, when I was a child. She didn't seem to doubt herself at all. Maybe I seem that way to my kids as well" I[FG1p88].

One participant went on to add how her mother seems to perceive anything that she does differently to her as implicit criticism of the way she mothered her daughter, "I have seen how actually how threatened she feels about it because it feels like a criticism.... I realized she wasn't so sure she was doing it the right way because otherwise she would be, either she would just tell me you are doing it the wrong way, but she feels hurt that I am not doing it exactly as she did it....she also wasn't always sure" I[FG1p89].

This insight and reflection on their own mother's experience of mothering allowed participants to make meaning of how they may be perceived by their children in their mothering role. The realization that children's experience of their mothers may be incongruent with the mother's own experience of herself, gave comfort for the moments when participants are not feeling competent. "My mom was quite terrifying and she seemed absolutely like she knew what she was doing and now I am realizing she was also muddling along, getting it wrong and so on" I[FGp88].

"And also I think it is important for me as a parent not to always want to be right. To be able to say okay how do you think we work it" I[FG1p123].

Discussion also elicited comment showing both tolerance and respect for a mother's imperfect mothering, such as "An incredible amount of strength that came from being in a space of vulnerability" I[FG2p159]. Another participant reminded that group how forgiving children can be in her statement, "Often my kids, I have to open my eyes because I am the

one that goes crazy for something that goes wrong cause I don't want them to experience it and they, they will turn around and say mom it's okay" I[FG1p62].

When the researcher suggested to the group that it would be interesting to consider what their children would say if interviewed about their experience of being mothered, the majority of participants expressed hilarity but dismay. There was an assumption that the feedback would be negative. "I don't want to know" I[FG2p223] and "too scared to find out what they'd say" I[FG2p227] were a few of the responses. Most participants fear not succeeding in this task and being perceived by their children in a negative light. Their anxiety speaks of a commitment to improving and doing this well – and they worry that they may fail.

4.8.3.4 Intergenerational patterns

Participants identified patterns of repetition and patterns of repair occurring across generations. The first involved moments when they become aware that they are doing something that their own mother would have done, and that they would prefer *not* to be repeating. Statements such as "I was determined not to do it....I am going to do it right....but sometimes I catch myself, just like my mom (laughs)" I[FG1p77] encapsulate this. The group's shared laughter indicated how they all resonated with another comment of, "and then the shocking realization that you ARE your mother... (Laughter from everyone)" I[FG2p23] and there were echoes from several people of "no matter how hard you try!" I[FG2p24].

What was evident was that such repetitions tend to occur when the situation is unexpected or when the participant has not had an opportunity to reflect on how she wishes to manage the situation. These 'repetitions' of behaviour were later linked in the group discussion to what Lara called "knee-jerk reactions" I[FG2p33] where in a moment of stress old patterns of interacting are replayed by the participants with their own children.

"I often find it is my knee-jerk reactions that are so like my own mother's" I[FG2p33] and this was supported by "it's like when you don't know what to do..." I[FG2p34].

"And somehow, although you want to change it, it always goes back..." I[FG2p15] and "there are little things that my daughter does that I can see that I did and my mom did, and...without you even trying to bring it forward or mention it, it just carries on" I[FG2p17].

The group then discussed this further with comments such as: "so where I DON'T know what to do, my mother comes out! (Laughter). When I haven't thought about it...But when I am angry...then quick – Sjoe! (Snaps her fingers)...But when I reflect, then I do something very different to my mum. And I don't mean to do the opposite or different to what she did, I just...it's not a conscious thing that I am doing. It just makes sense to me..." I[FG2p36]. The group agreed that unconsidered, non-reflection leads to replaying of patterns from their own experience of being mothered, "You fall back on remembered experiences" I[FG2p37].

While most participants focused on the repeating of negative aspects and “so I try to avoid them but somehow they creep in” I[FG2p42], some provided a more balanced perspective: “But at the same time, I am one hundred percent sure that I am making my own mistakes” I[FG2p44] and “and they’ll be saying similar things about me when they grow up, you know” I[FG2p46].

A view that differed was Janet’s who commented on what she termed “a kind of trajectory of improved mothering” I[FG2p97] over the generations in her family. However, she also expressed concern noting that she felt that there were largely positive patterns to repeat, and that this made her feel “the burden of pressure” I[FG2p97] on how she would continue to improve. Nokuzola also offered a different view explaining how she sees the negative intergenerational, culturally informed pattern of “one size fits all” as inspiration for how she mothers in her own way now. “So I do what I think I would have loved to be done to me” I[FG1p126]. In this way, she feels she is undoing the pattern she did not experience positively.

Identifying similarities between their own childhood responses and their children’s responses to life situations, participants expressed awareness of patterns.

“I can’t force her because I know how scared I was” I[FG1p112]. While understanding her child’s reticence, because she herself was fearful as a child, Helen always wishes her child to take part in new experiences so that she does not miss opportunities like her mother did.

“When I just want to (gestures with her arms indicating holding her child close to her). So I also grew up with those fears...I was cottonwooled as well, in a way...I had very extremes. And I don’t want to cottonwool my child” I[FG2p117].

4.8.4 Factors influencing THEN and NOW

4.8.4.1 Empathy

For some participants the research process had developed for them more empathy for how their mother had raised them, “I have also softened on my mother and forgiven....I have forgiven her a lot since talking about all of this” I[FG1p91]. This forgiveness developed through the insight gained into their own mother’s challenges. “You only realize it once you have your own children what role your parents put in (laughs)” I[FG1p92].

Recognizing that their own mothers were a product of their circumstances helped make sense of some of the difference participants see between their mothering approach and that of their own mother’s. There is evidence of compassion here, and a deliberate attempt to understand and process how the experience might have been for their mother.

“Well one thing that I thought was just that our mothers change as well.... And so your relationship with your mother changes as she changes and sometimes you do things

differently.... I think that even my mom would do things differently....I am doing things differently in a way that she would also do things differently.” I[FG2 p50].

For some, the empathy developed over time as they mothered their own children. “It changed as my kids grew older...As they grew, I could still see my mom’s mistakes but I could understand them better” I[FG2p139].

“So I understand now, that even the way you come into motherhood...it was different. So she had it thrust upon her by bad choices, and I forgive that she made many mistakes then because of that. And I understand that she couldn’t do anything else” I[FG2p146].

Empathy was also developed out of the participants’ own struggles with mothering and increasing insight into the human frailty of their mothers. With the empathic expression towards their mothers some participants also expressed awareness of the flawed nature of their mothers. For some this came as a relief, as it made them feel less pressured to perform as perfect parents. For others, it enhanced their respect for their mothers’ ability to cope despite difficult circumstances.

“And then once you are a mother, I realized that...then I realized....actually she was also not sure....and at the time as a child you don’t perceive it like that. You just perceive her as being in control and making decisions, and being very powerful” I[FG2p152].

“But she was just coping....it was a very interesting perspective to start out motherhood with...having been part of that” I[FG2p159].

This also links to acceptance and empathy being a product of meaning-making for these participants. It is through understanding and making sense of their own experience that they are better able to accept and make sense of that of their mothers’, and indirectly their own experience of being mothered. A significant moment in the focus group, which highlights this, was when a participant stated, “it took me a while to realize ‘hell she is an awesome mother!’ (voice breaking with emotion and tears)...because she was coping with a hell of a lot” I[FG2p155].

4.8.4.2 Social context change

Participants saw changes in the social context as one explanation for how they use their own experience of being mothered to inform their mothering of their children, “So our social context is so different, which then changes, or is the catalyst between then and now” I[FG2p57]. Some of this involves new knowledge, “we know a lot more now; everybody knows a lot more now than we did” I[FG2p81]. Other aspects include changes in attitudes and approaches, “Like she smacked us and I don’t smack my kids....and it is not actually because I think she did a terrible thing but more like attitudes have changed” I[FG1p90].

The social and political context in which many of the mothers present were raised was mentioned, “it is a feature of how we were raised, we were raised in a society that was very

abnormal and we were sheltered from things” I[FG1p128]. A participant mentioned with horror that her parents had not made her aware of political issues and that “I never even knew that we were living in Apartheid....I was a little white girl with my head under the sand. I had no idea what was happening in the rest of the world” I[FG1p120]. Now mothering her own children, she uses her insight into the limitations of her parents’ approach, to make her children more socially and politically aware.

4.8.4.3 Cultural dynamics

Negotiating the influence of culture and how this affects the experience of mothering was a strong theme. A mother spoke of the importance of taking some of the traditional practices from her culture and some from those of her husband’s family and forging them together “so we have created our own new traditions” I[FG1p136] thus merging the past and present to create a new future. This value on culture and traditions was echoed in another mother’s declaration that she and her husband had decided to raise their daughter “knowing that she is Coloured because I am very proud of that” I[FG1p137]. She spoke of the importance of identity formation this embracing of her culture gave to her mothering “well she knows who she is and we you know we tell her about the history” I[FG1p150].

Commenting on some of the positive aspects of growing up in a collective culture, a participant explained “in black communities you just grew up with a lot of women around” I[FG1p26]. She went on to say how beneficial this is as there is constantly support when required. When she moved away from her family, she felt the absence of this acutely, and so deliberately made changes to reincorporate this in her life.

Discussion also addressed balancing the positive aspects of culture with other influences which may be more challenging. Speaking about deciding to allow her children to witness a ritual slaughtering, a participant explained “so next door they are having a ritual and they are about to slaughter a goat and my kids....they are all like Mama, we want to go and see and I am like NO!....I was feeling terrible because I didn’t want them to be in that space but I thought you know what, they will see it and then if they have nightmares that is their problem.... I don’t want to be part of that because for me it is painful. So I let you guys go and see and if you like it you can see more but if you don’t then you know next time not to go” I[FG1p49].

While some participants were finding compromises between old and new cultural ways of being, others were trying to avoid repeating certain cultural patterns. “I don’t know hey, that just doesn’t sit well with me and they will have these rituals where somebody....is supposed to be cooking and making traditional beer....I am sorry, that is where I kind of draw the line” I[FG1p152]. Cultural expectations of fulfilling certain roles were seen as unfair by some participants but recognition was given to how they are enforced by the negative implications

of not conforming. One participant explained how “they will call a meeting for you and they will sit down chop chop and say see this is not what a wife does and you need to pull up your socks and this is like his whole family and you don’t want to look like that” I[FG1p154].

It was also acknowledged that for some participants they would need to negotiate how they would pass these cultural legacies on to their own children, especially their female children who will be expected to perform these rituals and cultural roles. Yet mention was also made of challenging some of the stereotypical roles of the African culture, such as “like why must it always be me? Then the kids will come and say Mama, there is daddy sitting with his feet on the table (laughs). Go ask him!” I[FG1p154]. The possibility of standing against cultural expectations was evident in, “So those kind of traditional roles that we are expected to fulfil as females in our culture, I am not so great at doing, and I don’t even think that I am actually worried, I am not sad about it like I say if my heart does not say yes to it I am not upset about it, I am just not going to do it!” I[FG1p154].

4.8.4.4 Children’s personalities

The personalities of children and how they blend or conflict with that of their mother, were identified as factors in mothering and specifically in determining if a participant could repeat behaviours that had been effectively used by her own mother or not. As explained by one participant, “we are such individuals and you can’t account for the personal dynamic either you know, I mean sometimes what a father can encourage a child to do or a grandmother that child to do is completely different to what you as a mother can encourage that child to do” I[FG1p106].

“But another thing that I think makes the difference between then and now is personalities. The personalities of your children...Because even though you recognize so much of yourself in your children, or you recognize your mother or your father, we are a different mix. And you know, I think that is often the catalyst” I[FG2p57]. It was suggested that the child’s personality challenges a mother to try different approaches which she may herself not have experienced but which suit this particular child.

4.8.4.5 Stages of development

Participants expressed how their approach and experience of mothering has changed as their children grew older, “And the game is always changing” I[FG2p64]. It was generally acknowledged that there was no room for complacency, “And the minute you think you have got something sorted (general laughter) something changes again. So as much as you are trying to be on top of things, I don’t think you ever are” I[FG2p63].

Participants mentioned the challenge of negotiating the different stages of development and changing with their children. In particular, adolescence was spoken of with negative

anticipation, “the tightrope thing is a challenge, knowing when to back off, being a, I don’t want to say controlling mom please, let me not be a controlling mom, but knowing when to back off and when to just let the bird fly on its own” I[FG1p171].

It was clear that not only the mother-child relationships changed with their children’s development. So too, as the participants had aged and developed, their relationships with their mothers had also altered. This was epitomized in comments such as, “your relationship with your mom changes. I find my relationship with my mom became reality once I had my little girl. Then we could share things, then we could talk about things” I[FG2p69]. Another participant contributed that, “But it also changed as my kids grew older. At first when my babies were little, I could look back and see my mom’s mistakes. As they grew up, I could still see my mom’s mistakes but I could understand them better” I[FG2p139].

4.8.4.6 Second chances

The desire for their mothers to embrace the opportunity of being grandparents was expressed by all participants. Becoming a grandmother was seen as an opportunity to repair or improve how their mothers had approached parenting. Some felt that this opportunity was being missed.

“My mother is still banging her head against a brick wall!” I[FG2p175] one group member said with exasperation, and another mentioned, “I always just wish she would loosen up, because I don’t think that she is getting the full experience that she could” I[FG2p191].

Others saw a significant improvement in how their mother approached grandparenthood and this has proved very meaningful to them, particularly where the experience of mothering was inadequate. One participant mentioned, “She is a flawed mom but she is an AWESOME grandmother!...So for me that is healing...it was healing for me” I[FG2p176-178]. Another member voiced, “I think sometimes when you kinda got it wrong the first time, you are more motivated” I[FG2p182].

Participants discussed how allowing their children to forge their own relationships with even those less adequate grandparents can bring surprising results. Comments such as “never keep your kids away from your parents because they have a different bond....there is just something that I don’t have that they have with him and it is amazing!” I[FG1p64] and “we don’t know enough to be the only influence in our children’s lives you know” I[FG1p66] supported this.

Making use of the opportunity for grandparents’ involvement in their children’s lives, even when the relationships were not optimal, was also seen as a way in which mothers could provide support for themselves. The value of this was expressed in, “So I quickly learned that when I did have the grandparents around I should probably just leave them to it and run

away!” (General laughter) I[FGp68]. There was also recognition of the importance of promoting intergenerational connections,

“I realized they are not only just my kids but they are kids who are part of a society and they are also my parents and parent-in-law’s grandchildren and I don’t know everything” I[FG1p51].

4.8.4.7 Support

For many participants, the challenge of mothering in isolation rather than having support easily available was a difficult aspect of their experience. This was sometimes self-inflicted, “as mothers characteristically we tend to forget our own need for support” I[FG1p14].

Another participant agreed saying, “you are just on this rollercoaster and you just keep going so I think sometimes...sometimes you just have to stop and say, I could ask for help!” I[FG1p35-37].

It was a common experience of being so focused and overwhelmed by the need to cope, that the participating mothers forgot that this could be improved by asking for assistance, “it is not that I said I am not going to ask for help, it is that I didn’t even think of it...it never crossed my mind to ask for help” I[FG1p39]. These similarities were brought together in the statement, “Quite a lot of time you have to give yourself permission to get yourself support” I[FG1p30].

However, an opposing view was expressed by a participant who saw asking for support as very crucial to successful mothering and found it easy to do. “If I feel overwhelmed I am not the best mother that I want to be and that does not make me feel good” I[FG1p31]. For her, self-care contributes to her being a good mother and this understanding allows her to give herself permission, without guilt, to have support and “time out”.

A reference to the positive experience of being a research participant in this study was relevant to this theme and concern. “Just a reminder that you are part of a community of mothers. I mean sometimes you mother in isolation...not intentionally but you are just going through what you need to get through” I[FG2p11].

4.8.4.8 Rewards and challenges

The depiction of mothering as very taxing was clear from the comment, “the whole thing is a challenge....there are no rewards!” I[FG1p172] expressed by one participant. However, as this was explored in the group, the complex interweaving of challenges with rich relational returns was apparent. Two pivotal quotations express the subtlety of this experience:

“Never before have I been so challenged and it has been amazing you know to discover your own capacity....for endurance....for love....for just opening yourself up to new experience....they have changed you” I[FG1p180].

“Our lives are enriched by relationships generally and you don’t have to have all of them....but the relationship that you have as a parent to a child is quite specific....it is the most kind of raw and open relationship....you are involved with this little being that doesn’t hold anything back from you....you also open up in a way that maybe you haven’t opened up since you were that small to anyone else....so there is a kind of intensity of relationship I think that is very rewarding” I[FG1p178].

What emerged was general agreement that the relational aspect of the experience is what makes it so intensely fulfilling and provides meaning. Participants linked the challenges and rewards by reflecting on how meaningful the experience has been to them, and how this has helped them to manage the difficult moments.

“I think that having children is one of the things that has made me much happier and has been one of the most enjoyable and important things in my life” I[FG1p178].

“The reward for me is creating a family and being the creator of the family” I[FG1p179].

“The best reward is your kids coming to you and saying you are the best, or that they love you” I[FG1p174].

4.8.4.9 Improved mothering

The desire to improve, despite the mothers’ previously expressed fear of not being able to accomplish this, was a powerful theme in the focus group findings.

“I feel we are all correcting our past mistakes....even with me....it’s not a conscious decision, but it just happens, you don’t want to repeat her mistakes....That is why I feel I CAN say ‘better mom’ because of what I am exposed to compared to what she had at hand” I[FG2p89]. There was also recognition that this improvement is built on the foundation of what they experienced themselves “and that’s why we are able to gauge that this is better than that...it is from what they taught us” I[FG2p91]. However, a word of caution was added with, “I am not sure that I am a better mother than my mom was....You can mother better...but then you might also introduce some new mistakes of your own” I[FG2p97].

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the results of this research in the form of seven case studies. Each of the six cases were treated as single units in order to do justice to every participant’s individuality and unique experience. The focus group was also treated as a single case. The results indicate that all participants found meaning in being a mother and related this in varying degrees to their own experience of having been mothered. These meaning-making processes and the cross-case similarities and differences are discussed in the next chapter by interpreting the findings through the lens of attachment theory, with particular emphasis on intergenerational patterns.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the findings that were presented in Chapter 4 are discussed at a different level of interpretation. This chapter represents steps 3, 4 and 5 of IPA analysis as described in section 3.4.3. These steps are in accordance with IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Each participant's account and the focus group data have been individually presented for interpretation. The focus group data has therefore been treated as a "case", like the narratives of the individual mothers. According to the guidelines of step 3 in IPA (see section 3.4.3.1.4), every individual participant's findings and the focus group findings were examined separately and a meaning structure created for each. The derived meanings were then assessed against the raw data to determine whether they were sufficiently supported. This was in keeping with IPA protocol, which suggests that the focus in this stage of the discussion of the data should move back and forth between the key claims of the participant's to the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of those claims, in a continuous process of checking for goodness of fit (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Presented here then are the researcher's attempts to interpret the participants' efforts to make sense of their experience of mothering and being mothered. Recurrent themes within each case are described with insightful interpretation and linked to relevant literature from Chapter 2. IPA methodology recommends that empirical and theoretical literature is included in the discussion in order to provide and justify an additional, higher-order level of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As such, the existent literature on attachment was continuously integrated with the findings throughout the discussions that follow.

The participants' responses were appraised with the purpose of understanding both their expressed and implied meanings. These meanings were then converted into terminology that communicated the meanings in direct psychological language. The discussion focused on meaning, rather than any causal relationships, which adheres to the IPA approach (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Although some subheadings were utilized these were not an attempt to divide the discussions into themes, but rather are there to provide the reader with an integrated story in a format that is accessible and readily understood.

The cross-case analysis, as described in step 4 of IPA (see section 3.4.3.1.5) identified commonalities and differences between cases. This section describes shared experiences of

mothering and being mothered, as well as noteworthy exceptions. This procedure allowed general findings to emerge regarding their experiences and yielded six cross-case themes. The identified themes across cases were integrated within attachment theory and emphasis placed on the intergenerational context. The inductive nature of this study is further adhered to by including other relevant literature described in Chapter 2 and, while attachment theory created a structure for the interpretations, it was by no means used in a prescriptive manner.

A general meaning structure of the experience of mothering and being mothered for all six participants was then created and encapsulates the process of step 5 in IPA, discussed in section 3.4.3.1.6. Those events that were identified in step 4 were used to generate a full narrative description with the focus on the participants' meaning-making processes. Themes constituting these mothering experiences were situated within attachment theory and viewed with an intergenerational lens to generate a basic model that represents the final level of analysis of this study. In this step, the researcher again aimed to work inductively rather than deductively, as recommended in IPA literature (Smith 2004) in the manner in which literature from Chapter 2 was applied.

Finally, the researcher synthesized all of the themes into a coherent statement of the structure of the participants' experience of being mothers and having been mothered. This conceptual process model is presented in Chapter 6.

Throughout the current chapter direct quotations were used only when they were found to be crucial to the illustration of the point of discussion. Where direct quotations were used the tracking appendix, interview or focus group number, and paragraph number are indicated in brackets. The idiographic emphasis and commitment of IPA to the case study approach allows for an enriched understanding of the mothering experiences discussed in this chapter and highlights the complexity of human meaning-making. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the main points of discussion throughout the above-mentioned steps of analysis.

5.2 JANET: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 1

5.2.1 Gains of motherhood

The findings reveal that Janet has experienced motherhood as a vehicle for positive change in her life. Examples include the freedom to relate with intensity towards her children, the freedom to be real, spontaneous, less considered and less serious. She also reported a sense of belonging which was meaningful to her. These gains appear to challenge, or counter, previous ways of being as well as her childhood experience of mother-child relating. In particular Janet is aware that she has become less anxious and intense since having

children. Motherhood has broadened her relational capacity, both by introducing other people into her social circle and by bringing a type of relationship between her and her children that she believes she would otherwise never have experienced. Her comment that “the mother-child bond is a particularly intense and long lasting bond” C[J1p33] aligns with the nature of a child’s tie to their primary caregiver within the attachment literature, which states that this relational tie has an impact on the behaviour and adjustment of both parties throughout the lifespan (Belsky & Fearon, 2008; Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy, 2008; Fraley, 2002).

Crucial to Janet’s recollected experience of being mothered, has been the way in which she has used her own experience of being a mother, to mediate and understand what her mother was able to offer her and what she lacked. Janet demonstrates a compassion for her mother’s unexpressed vulnerability – citing moments where her mother has felt criticized by Janet not repeating methods she employed, as insights into her mother’s true experience which was not as Janet perceived it at the time. Here Janet reveals her capacity to mentalize, in relation to her mother’s possible experience of mothering (Slade, 2008; Wallin, 2007). This shift, for Janet, in her conceptualization of the “competent, scary mother” has made space for Janet’s own feelings of uncertainty in her role as a mother. It creates for her the space to be more vulnerable, something that is difficult for her to do. Within an attachment theory framework these ideas can be understood with reference to the flexible nature of IWMs which can be updated when experience contrasts with existing expectations (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fraley, 2002) as discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2.2 Adoption and individuality

Janet’s two children were different in gender, character and manner of relating with their mother. One fundamental difference that she consistently raises when narrating this individuality, is that her first child was her biological child and her second child was adopted. Her discussion of many of the dissimilarities between her children can be seen as arising from this difference. It is these disparities, rather than the fact of adoption or not, that are mediated by her internal conceptions of motherhood and influence the manner in which she relates to her children. When considering literature on attachment this is in line with the understanding of the normative nature of attachment (Cassidy, 2008) but also with how individual differences in the nature and quality of attachment are determined by temperament and experience-based expectations of the world and others (Bowlby, 1973; Marvin & Britner, 2008; Weinfield et al., 2008). Literature on attachment formation for adopted children highlights how caregiver consistency or unavailability interacts with individual factors to determine quality of attachments formed with adoptive parents (Dozier &

Rutter, 2008, van den Dries et al., 2009). Recent research by Lionetti (2014) suggests that a mother's history of secure attachment is most significant in increasing the chance of secure attachment in early adopted adoptees, and that the temperament of the adopted child moderates the mother-child attachment match.

The connection she forged with her biological child was positive and easily attained, leaving Janet feeling competent and secure in her ability to mother him. This is in keeping with the literature that notes the role of temperament (Belsky & Fearon, 2008) in enhancing and promoting attachment between mother and child. However, her adopted daughter challenged much of this.

"It's much harder to mother a child like that. Because you know, the kind of, the child who is very, very anxious and distressed from being separated from you, but isn't terribly happy when she is with you anyway" C[J1p91]. This links with the discussion in Chapter 2 on insecure attachment, and in particular the resistant/ambivalent type of attachment responses children may display (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Weinfeld et al., 2008). Janet's daughter seems to have employed attachment strategies of hyper-activation in response to having experienced caregivers as unpredictably responsive prior to her adoption at six months of age (Main, 1990; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009). Such behaviours maximize dependence on attachment figures but the child frequently remains difficult to soothe even when their caregiver responds effectively to them (Berlin et al., 2008). Furthermore, the increased risk for such heightened needs in an adopted child are also addressed by the literature review (Dozier & Rutter, 2008; van den Dries et al., 2009) which indicates that children who are adopted have frequently experienced inadequate or inconsistent caregiving prior to adoption and are subsequently more inclined to forge insecure attachments to their adopting parents (Coakley & Berrick, 2008). However, early adoptions, such as in the case of Janet's daughter, are slightly less at risk for insecurity as their IWMs of unresponsive, unavailable caregivers are less entrenched (Dozier & Rutter, 2008).

Janet has insight into how she became dismissive and distant at times, and was not always able to attend or attune to the needs of her daughter. The literature on attachment in the context of adoption supports Janet's reflection of her response to her daughter's neediness with some detachment (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2009, van den Dries et al., 2009). In fact, Janet has read some of this and found comfort in it, saying "It wasn't all my failure" C[J2p96]. Her experience with her daughter exemplifies how it is possible to become the psychological parent to an adopted child (Roberson, 2006) through forging a secure attachment.

Recognition of her children as individuals who had very different needs because of different temperaments and life experiences came retrospectively for Janet. Her comment that she was less prepared for her daughter because her expectations of motherhood had been forged through her first experience with an easy baby is noteworthy as this experience seems to have reinforced some aspects of her pre-existing expectations (IWMs) of what constitutes competent mothering.

For Janet, the different temperaments and responsiveness of her children has been experienced both positively and as a struggle for her. Although intellectually she understood the value of her son's independence and self-assurance, which are evidence of secure attachment (Solomon & George, 2008), she also felt more dispensable. This is in direct contrast to her experience with her daughter where she had many moments of wishing that the need was not so great. Her daughter's desperation on separation forced Janet to be intensely and continuously available. This is an example of disrupted attachment as introduced by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978) and elaborated by many authors. Kobak and Madsen (2008) emphasize the caregiving and communication processes which influence the formation, conservation and repair of attachment bonds throughout development. Research on adoption and on insecure attachment provide theoretical insight into how Janet's daughter began to make use of her as a secure base, but how this was easily threatened because of her insecurity of attachment (Dozier & Rutter, 2008; van den Dries et al., 2009)

5.2.3 Negotiating the “mother model”

A third theme in Janet's case is her efforts to revise her mental conceptualization of her “mother model” while still retaining certain key elements of this template. Janet has a conceptualization of a “mother” who is “competent” as being the ideal. Only later, did she revize this somewhat, realizing that her own mother did not always know what to do. However, from her account, her experience of the competent mothering of her childhood was accompanied by emotional remoteness and an image of a frightening mother. Janet's experience of being mothered therefore provided her with an IWM of “mother” which included both aspects she wishes to repeat and those she hopes to avoid. The conceptualization of a mother as competent and reliable is a positive aspect which she implements for her children, being consistent and organized in her delivery of their practical needs. The presence of this model in Janet's life is suggested in her satisfaction with feeling competent in her mothering of her first child, but also in her struggle with a lack of competence in mothering her adopted daughter. Apart from the obvious difficulties pertaining to the latter situation, there may also have been distress at “going against” her internalized understanding of mothering. In his writing on attachment, Fraley (2002) argued that change

in IWMs rests not only on contrasting environmental input but also on individual factors which may resist change and favour the familiar and stability. A prototype view of adaptation would suggest that even where change occurs, early experience continues to inform behaviour. Bowlby, although a proponent of a revisionist approach, also recognized the difficulties and resistance to such change (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fraley, 2002). Up to this point, Janet saw a competent mother as one who always knew what to do. In her moments of uncertainty, she may have felt a dissonance between her lived experience and the way she believed it should be.

The revisionist model, discussed in Chapter 2, acknowledges that change and updating of IWMs may be difficult, but that it is possible to do this (Fraley, 2002). Motherhood appears to have been an instigator of such revision for Janet. She does this consciously by attempting to engage with her children in fun activities and to be more spontaneous with them than her mother was able to be. She has also aimed to be a less “scary” figure in her children’s lives than her mother was, but fears she may not have achieved this to her satisfaction. However, in making these revisions Janet has to negotiate the constant tension of maintaining her own and her mother’s role of competence in her “mother model”. However, her struggle has been to retain the aspects of her own mothering experience which were positive, while not fully engaging consciously with the emotional impact of the negative aspects, but cognitively working to change them.

In being a mother, the experience of her son’s attachment was compatible with Janet’s template for motherhood. He responded, and she felt competent. Yet he was also not too emotionally demanding and therefore did not tax her emotional resources unduly. Janet described feeling more able to trust herself intuitively with him, and so felt little dissonance. This relates to the familiarity Fraley (2002) describes which serves to maintain pre-existing IWMs. However, in responding to her second child Janet seemed to distrust her own intuitive judgements and made reflective decisions to satisfy the judgements of an invisible ‘other’ about what was good or suitable. In this case, her reflectiveness interferes with her freedom and spontaneity to act with her child. Here the effect of a contrasting environmental input is seen to create dissonance between Janet’s current experience and her IWMs (Fraley, 2002). This provides both impetus to revise them, but also pressure to try to resist this change. On the other hand, much of the gains in freedom which Janet identifies as emerging from motherhood, relate to allowing herself to respond intuitively and spontaneously with her children. Here her revisions of her IWMs are almost unacknowledged, suggesting an unconscious process of change brought about by her altered life experience since becoming

a mother. This fits with the theoretical understanding of the manner in which such change may occur (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fraley, 2002).

In interpreting Janet's account, it was evident on a process level how uncomfortable some of her moments of engagement with her own experience of being mothered were for her. Intelligent and reflective, Janet wishes to be able to engage with this dissonance with ease. However, in accessing memories, unwanted emotions appear to be generated and are hard for her to acknowledge and integrate into her own story of childhood. She therefore discounts them, particularly those pertaining to emotional engagement between herself and her mother. This is in keeping with attachment theory's explanation of how emotions associated with threats to caregiver availability can be excluded from consciousness and then not be available to promote self-awareness or interpersonal change (Kobak & Madsen, 2008).

5.3 NOKUZOLA: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 2

5.3.1 Premature responsibility

Negotiating an overdeveloped sense of responsibility was a strong theme in Nokuzola's case. The findings show the development of premature responsibility in Nokuzola arising from her childhood. Her responsible, mature manner was rewarded by her becoming the trusted caregiver to her sister and confidante to her mother. However, she recognizes that this experience has made it difficult for her to justify caring for herself over the needs of others. She has insight into the pervasive pattern of self-sacrifice that she has learnt both from her mother's role modelling and from her own embracing of this position as a child, in order to maintain a tie to her mother.

"It is so difficult to tell you what it felt like to be mothered because I am thinking do you know what, that is because it doesn't feel like, it felt like I knew how to mother before I knew what it was like being mothered" D[N1p107].

Although Nokuzola does not completely fulfil the definition of a parent-child where role reversal is the hallmark of the relationship and the child is expected to meet the unmet childhood needs of the parent (Macfie et al., 2008; West & Keller, 1991), there is evidence of some aspects of this in her connection with her mother. Bowlby's (1969/1982) emphasis on the vital importance of creating an attachment, as the primary attachment relationship is a matter of survival for the infant and is therefore prioritized whatever the cost to the child (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1979, 1988; Cassidy, 2008; Slade, 2008) is illustrated by this action of self-compromise. In the findings, it is evident that relating through self-sacrifice has become

part of Nokuzola's identity. This links with the conceptualization of IWMs as expectations of not just relationships to others, but also of the self (Bowlby 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

Classic attachment theorists caution that child pathology may result when a parent of a young child reverses roles and seeks care, support and security from the child (Ainsworth, 2006; Bowlby, 1979). However, Hooper (2007) suggests that IWMs are the mechanism through which meaning-making about such role reversals occur and inform whether positive or negative outcomes arise in adulthood. Nokuzola seems to have resolved her position as her mother's confidante positively, both because it was not an extreme burden and also because she has reframed it to imply meaningful connection.

5.3.2 Responsible rebel

With maturity, Nokuzola's quest for her own identity and the space to become an individual in a highly collectivistic culture led her to find ways in which she could rebel responsibly. Her unplanned pregnancy at the age of 22 provided her with an unexpected freedom, despite the practical restrictions of being a young, single mother. She saw this as a means of breaking away from preconceived ideas of who she was, the child who always did what was right. Nokuzola embraced this opportunity to make a mistake and not be the perfect one, "oh my hat, let me do something wrong for a change!" D[N1p81]. In fact, she had always harboured the fantasy, even as a child, of disappointing the adults in her life and breaking away from the claustrophobic expectations. This is in part what enabled her to approach her impending unplanned motherhood with a positive spirit. She constructed this otherwise daunting life event as meaningful in that it allowed her freedom, while continuing to take responsibility for her error. Coupled with this proactive stance was her sense of prior experience, "No I think I have always been mothering. So when I found out I was pregnant, I was like, okay, we have done this. We might as well carry on!" D[N2p93]. Unplanned motherhood also brought personal growth in the form of increased emotional stability, a belief in her ability to cope, a sense of purpose, and a freedom from the role definition imposed by others.

The findings demonstrate Nokuzola's powerful cognitive orientation and decisiveness. She is reflective in the sense that she tries to understand things cognitively and then uses this understanding to override any emotions and behavioural patterns that might be detrimental to coping, "ultimately we do what was done at home, if we are not conscious. Because we can change it, it is not the default" D[N1p134]. While Nokuzola is exceptionally proactive, using positive reframing of challenges to cope, she still feels the emotional impact of the pressure of expectations. The strength of resolve she exhibits in trying to rework her

childhood and cultural experience of women's roles and approaches to child rearing provide an inkling of the pain she has borne. It is this emotion that has provided the motivation to change the way in which she mothers her own children and to resist integrating these ideas into her own self-concept. However, as shown in her distress about attending to her own self-care, she struggles to negotiate this change at times. She is firm in her resolve to mother individually, but less able to consistently avoid the trap of self-sacrifice, providing evidence of the self-sacrificial IWM that she struggles to overcome.

"but it actually just hit me. I don't want to do that to myself....but I have witnessed it so much that it is just an automatic thing that I do" D[N2p35].

5.3.3 Individuality in motherhood

The findings suggest that Nokuzola enjoyed a secure attachment with her mother. One indication of this was how she was able to provide an integrated, coherent account of their attachment relationship, which investigations into adult attachment security would support as suggesting autonomous adult attachment (Hesse, 2008). This security is based on a foundation of positive practical caring, although there was little time for emotional engagement or individual attention. In Nokuzola's discussion it appears that her mother's reflective functioning was not her strength, in that she did not often respond to the emotional needs of her child. Even though research suggests that reflective functioning is strongly related to the development of secure attachment (Allen, 2011; Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade et al., 2005), in Nokuzola's case her mother's limitations in this area were balanced by other factors. It is clear that she believes that her mother held the best of intentions, even when she failed to deliver on them and was not able to effectively respond to the practical demands of mothering. Secure attachment is based on the premise that in times of danger or emotional need the caregiver will be available (Weinfeld et al., 2008). "I have always felt immense love coming from my mother" D[N1p111]. The contrast is interesting: that this woman who can declare "I was not mothered" can equally say with confidence "I was loved". Although there is perhaps some reframing of this, such as portraying the confidante role as receiving attention, it is also clear from the data that Nokuzola has integrated these experiences into her IWM as a positive and constructive aspect of mothering. She wishes for her children the same sense of certainty of accessing care and being loved for who they are.

However, despite this positive connection, she chose to stand against some of the mothering patterns she experienced from her mother who employed a "one-size fits all" I[FG1p72] approach to child-rearing. While Nokuzola understands her mother's perspective, empathizing with her having to raise nine children, she herself needed something more from her as a child. She sees herself as under-mothered and expected to conform to an

externalized ideal that was applied to all children in the family. She has responded to this by protectively attempting to retain her own sense of identity as a woman, mother and member of the Xhosa culture. Nokuzola has deliberately chosen to raise her own three children with an emphasis on them as individuals, with diverse personalities and needs. It is a source of fulfilment and pleasure to her to identify and meet these differences in ways which facilitate her children's growth. She has therefore changed only some of her mother's patterns but has maintained others, such as the positive, committed caring that she also demonstrates in her mothering. This process would relate to revision of IWMs and deciding to go against the pattern (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). The insight that she has about where she feels it failed her, is the impetus for revision.

Linked to the above, Nokuzola believes that each person has a purpose in life, which they must discover and pursue. For her children, she sees herself as the facilitator of this discovery process. She finds this role very meaningful, particularly as it promotes their individuality and was not something that was provided for her as a child. She expressed awareness of how her children's developmental stages determine what they need and what can be made available to them for this self-discovery to progress, and enjoys the challenge of working out how she can be a part of this. This refers to literature which addresses the dynamic balance between attachment needs and exploration which continues throughout the lifespan but changes with maturation (Zeifman & Hazan, 2008). Interestingly though, this approach allows her to be powerfully involved but simultaneously maintain some distance from her children, perhaps resulting in a replaying of the benign neglect she experienced from her mother, or enabling Nokuzola to ensure that she is not consumed by the mother role but retains her own, hard-won individuality.

5.3.4 Culture and religion

The universality hypothesis of attachment (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008) indicates that regardless of culture, all infants when given the opportunity develop an attachment to one or more specific caregiver. Although this view was challenged by Rothbaum and colleagues (2000) in their Japanese research, various factors render this criticism invalid (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Cross-cultural research showed that children attach individually to one, or more, protective caregiver regardless of the availability of other mother figures (Reed & Liederman, 1981; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Certainly, Nokuzola appears to be an example of someone, raised in a collectivist Xhosa culture, who has forged a primary attachment, not to multiple caregivers, of whom there were many, but to her mother.

For Nokuzola culture is experienced as defining and restricting, precipitating her rebelling to attain some freedom from it. This is particularly apparent in the findings when she spoke to the choices she has made to reconstruct her relationship with her father and husband in ways that are not aligned with culturally prescribed roles. Here she actively states how angry she was to see her mother in a subservient role during her childhood and “so I have none of that in my house because I knew I hated it growing up” D[N1p121].

Bowlby (1969/1982) in clarifying how IWMs are updated stipulated that the restraints on such revision come because IWMs are designed to ensure relationship stability. Therefore, for them to change may challenge the security of existing relationships. IWMs are constructed not just within the individual but also in relationships (Bretherton, 2005; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Therefore change in them requires more than just a conscious cognitive decision to adapt, as Nokuzola has done with culturally prescribed roles for women. There also needs to be a relational “space” to rework how the relationship is defined. The relationship constrains or promotes change. If the constraints are weak in the relationship, it creates more opportunity for the individual to deliberately adapt. It would seem that her parents had been prepared to accommodate her need to address these issues differently.

Her case speaks to the cultural role of women and mother figures, particularly with regard to subjugating their needs for those of others. Work and self-sacrifice are also portrayed in the findings as part of the position that women must fulfil in the culture. Nokuzola is acutely aware of this and feels pressured to conform. It is clear that she struggles to maintain a balance between her internalized sense of responsibility to others and her sense of responsibility to herself and identity. Nokuzola has a conceptualization of the role of women, as depicted by the Xhosa culture of which she is a part. She has seen her mother enact and embrace this role, and has also seen what she perceives as negative consequences of this, such as an inability to relax and take time for herself. While feeling pressure from her culture and family to conform to these expectations, Nokuzola resists performing certain roles and actively finds ways to avoid many of them. She is frustrated by this tension of being a part of a community but struggling to retain her own individuality. She has constructed ways to both explicitly and implicitly circumvent some of these expectations. In the area of mothering, we see her achieving this by not attending or embracing certain cultural practices, raising her children as individuals and choosing to marry a man with whom she can have a more equal partnership. However, there are also aspects of this framework that she has subscribed to, perhaps less consciously than she realizes. Her mother was a “busy” person and Nokuzola, although she reports being able to relax at times, also exudes a nervous energy and is a

busy individual. She shares with her mother a commitment to mothering and the intention to be a positive influence in her children's lives. This is suggestive of an aspect of her IWM of a mothering relationship that she has accepted and is repeating, with her own subjective twist.

Literature supports the fact that in a secure relationship between mother and child, there is less need for revision of IWMs and that changes would be more conscious (Bretherton, 2005; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Nokuzola shows insight into the areas that she is revising and those which she has retained. She has employed cognitive mechanisms to override her feelings of dissonance about not subscribing to cultural expectations and those of her parents, and her forthright, honest style of communication, such as when she clarified for her parents what she needed from them after she discovered her unplanned pregnancy, also facilitates this. There is evidence of reflection and personal resolve to do things differently. Nokuzola recognizes how entrenched the pattern of self-sacrifice is for her in her own concept of self. She despairs of this when she finds herself responding similarly to her mother and prioritizing the needs of everyone except herself. She also despondently recognizes the repetition of this relational pattern in the behaviour of her eldest daughter.

5.4 AVA: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 3

5.4.1 Teenage pregnancy and domestic violence

The findings indicate how Ava's childhood experiences serve not as a foundation on which to base her mothering but rather as warnings of what she wants to avoid. Born to teenage parents, as an unplanned pregnancy, Ava is very conscious of the meaning this had for her development. Her family life was defined by inadequate mothering, her father's substance abuse and physical violence. Her childhood legacy has left its mark and she works relentlessly not to repeat the patterns of childrearing and relating that she experienced. She does this through a deliberate, controlled approach to life, and mothering in particular, and by empathically acknowledging her "teen mom's" poor choices. Fearful of repetition she has defined many of the mistakes her mother made as the result of a lack of conscious deliberation. Ava therefore considers every choice she makes intensely. She deems herself to lack a "blueprint" of how to mother effectively and so can be seen to be constructing one, using input from books, celebrities, her husband, psychotherapy and other role models she has encountered. This reflective, conscious process of Ava's is in keeping with writings on the remodelling of IWMs (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008), and in particular with how this unfolds in a psychotherapy process where revising IWMs involves helping individuals think, feel and behave in new ways that are different to how they thought, felt or behaved in past relationships (Levy, 2013; Slade, 2008; Wallin, 2007). Her negative

childhood experience becomes meaningful for Ava in that it clarifies for her what to change and adapt, thereby guiding and motivating her despite its poor example.

The concept of “earned” security found in the AAI literature (Hesse, 2008) is relevant to Ava’s results. Research in this area suggests a category for adults whose parents had not provided reliable, loving support but who nevertheless were able to provide coherent accounts of childhood experience, like those adults classified as secure-autonomous. It has been shown that earned-secure adults reported more time spent in therapy than their insecure or continuous-secure fellow participants (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 2008).

A child, such as Ava was, who cannot securely rely on their mother’s ability to be available and respond sensitively to their needs is at risk for becoming insecurely attached (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) and later as an adult, developing psychopathology (Dozier, Stovall-McClough, & Albus, 2008). Insecurely attached children learn to either minimize or maximize their attachment needs (Dozier et al., 2008) to cope with the emotional distress they evoke. This need to focus intensely on the issue of caregiver availability and how to negotiate it is seen in Ava’s self-sufficient, controlled approach to her life and mothering. She appears to have adopted the minimizing strategy, deliberately turning away from her emotions, and certainly as a young child, creating an unrealistic portrayal of her mother’s availability (Dozier et al., 2008).

Witnessing domestic violence between parents, as Ava did, may threaten a child’s confidence in the availability of their parents (Davies & Cummings, 1998; Kobak & Madsen, 2008) thus impacting on their security of attachment. While witnessing her mother being abused may have had this effect, Ava has made meaning of the physical abuse she suffered as creating an opportunity in which she received some semblance of mothering from her own mother. In the moment of crisis her mother behaved like a parent because she tried to protect Ava from beatings. Thus, Ava’s appraisal of her mother’s availability and responsiveness suggested that she could mother her in times of emergency (Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Shaver & Fraley, 2008). This preserved the attachment tie and Ava idealized her mother for this.

5.4.2 Adolescence as a turning point

Adolescence is a transitional period for all facets of the maturing person and this includes the attachment system (Allen, 2008). The findings highlight how realization of her mother’s “flawed” mothering came for Ava during her early teenage years and provoked a disconnection, as well as a complete and extreme reaction to all things associated with

motherhood and domestic life. At this time, Ava decided to enter a religious order and become a nun. But even then she was aware of a nurturing side of herself that sought expression. The psychosocial development that takes place in adolescence produces significant changes in the meaning and expression of attachment processes (Ruhl, Dolan, & Buhrmester, 2015). It was here that Ava realized for the first time, the destructive nature of her family life and how ill-equipped her mother was to nurture her. The cognitive and emotional advances of adolescence allow an adolescent to reflect upon and modify his or her states of mind regarding to attachment. The teenager is better able to compare relationships with different attachment figures and in so doing, can “de-idealize” parents (Allen, 2008; Steinberg, 2005). Ava’s emerging ability to operate meta-cognitively on this reflection and use it to reconstruct her own state of mind regarding attachment is clear from her account.

5.4.3 Alternative voices

Since adolescence, Ava has actively sought “alternative voices” to fill the gap that she feels exists in her experience of being mothered. Her reading of self-help books and watching of relationship celebrity television programmes has been meaningful to her, as she feels that these have, both now and historically, equipped her to know how to manage mothering situations with her own daughter. This deliberate engagement with parenting information is a way in which Ava actively and consciously seeks to revise her IWM of what a mother should be and do. Various writers exploring IWM revision acknowledge the place of deliberate, conscious change in adjusting previously held models (Allen et al., 2003; Bretherton & Mulholland, 2008). Attachment bonds are not exclusively the domain of the mother-child relationship and can be forged with other significant caregivers (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Berlin et al., 2008; Cassidy, 2008). Ainsworth’s (1967) empirical observations showed that most children direct attachment behaviours towards more than one consistently available person by the time they are a year old. During her childhood Ava reports experiencing a variety of relationships with substitute mother figures in form of her “village of women” comprising her grandmother and two aunts. Through these relationships, some positive IWMs of mother-figures were created, making mothering and marriage less frightening. Ava recognizes that each of these individuals contributed to her wellbeing in different ways, some with warm nurturance and others with life lessons in assertiveness and expectations. Together they filled some of the “mothering” gap she had in her life, “So those three women had what I would say a mom should have and so it doesn’t really matter how you get it, does it, because I had that?” E[A2p102]. This is consistent with the concept of attachment hierarchies (Bowlby, 1969/1982) delineating that although most infants have multiple attachment figures, they are not all treated equivalently, and while all contribute in some

way, there is likely to remain a principal attachment figure for the provision of comfort and security (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008; Marvin & Britner, 2008). Berlin, Cassidy, and Appleyard (2008) suggest that the nature of a child's attachment to the principal caregiver may serve to inform the way in which they relate to other attachment figures. Ava's relatives also provided role models of strong women, who were making choices for themselves and taking charge of their lives. Through them, Ava was able to reconstruct some idea of a more optimistic future without the legacy of alcohol abuse and violence. Her own therapy process has clearly also been pivotal in this reconstruction, epitomizing what is described as *earned security* in the literature (Hesse, 2008; Wallin, 2007).

5.4.4 The meaning of deliberate, conscious control

The findings show that control means protection for Ava. She explained that "I am a calculated person. I calculate all my moves....it shouldn't be that way, it should be natural" E[A2p88] but the need to control is informed by "that process of trusting is the hardest thing I have ever done" E[A2p66]. Control is a way in which she can minimize risk and maximize the outcomes she hopes for her child. Her need to control has resulted in her not repeating for her own child many aspects of her childhood that were destructive, but also, as discussed above, limiting her access to her own emotions at times. Ava makes less of her mother's mistakes, and implements ways of mothering that her own mother was not aware of or unable to provide. In recent years, attachment researchers, acknowledging the sound evidence that secure attachment has significant benefits for development throughout the lifespan, have sought ways in which to foster attachment security. One area explored has been that of psychotherapy (Allen, 2011; Slade, 2008). Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist and Target (2004) saw mentalizing as a means of promoting secure attachment in psychotherapy. Mentalizing refers to the human capacity to consider mental states in ourselves and others and to understand actions in relation to our anticipation of mental states. Mentalizing has a self-reflective and an interpersonal element, as well as a feeling and a cognitive component (Lieberman, 2007). It occurs explicitly, being conscious, reflective and deliberate, and implicitly, being intuitive and automatic. Parents who are able to mentalize about their early attachment relationships are more likely to mentalize with their own children, thereby promoting the emotional security of their children (Fonagy et al., 2008). Ava's narrative suggests that she has made use of a mentalizing process as a mechanism for change in her own IWMs and in the nature of mothering that she provides to her daughter. Self-esteem is generated through her exercising of control and providing a more positive environment for her child. She describes her daughter as more socially competent and secure than she was as a child, and this gives her great satisfaction.

But while she makes less similar mistakes, which she fears doing, she demonstrates insight into how her “knee-jerk reactions” are reminders of the blueprint within her for more destructive ways of relating, and these she desperately tries to avoid. This links to the debate on the prototype and revisionist models for reworking of early IWMs (Fraley, 2002), as Ava is aware that there may be difficulties with revising some of the internalized templates from her childhood experience. The comparison of herself to her mother is meaningful to Ava in that it enables her to feel positive about her current mothering, as the improvement on her own mother’s approach is so clear. Ava adamantly states, “you will never be able to say I am a bad mom because I am a great mom cause like I am a conscious mom” E[A1p70].

Ava’s current relationship with her mother also provides insight into the meaning she has created from her experience of being mothered in the way she was. There is evidence of role-reversal in their connection, which required that Ava meet the unmet childhood needs of her mother (Macfie et al., 2005; West & Keller, 1991). Research links child and adult pathology and attachment insecurity to such dynamics when a parent of a young child reverses roles and seeks care, support and security from the child (Ainsworth, 2006; Bowlby, 1979; Kobak & Madsen, 2008). However, Ava, through her engagement with psychotherapy, a supportive marital relationship and the presence of substitute caregivers appears to have been able to create for herself an “earned secure” status (Hesse, 2008) as discussed above. Not only has she not recreated such role-reversal with her own daughter, but Ava has also developed empathy and generosity of spirit towards her mother. She sees her mother as being “a flawed mom but she is an AWESOME grandmother” [FG2par178] and rejoices in her being able to provide this for her granddaughter, even though she could not do this for Ava. It allows Ava some semblance of “normal” mother-daughter relating, but Ava does not now idealize this, as with maturity and insight she recognizes that this is just a fragment of what being a mother entails.

Mothering has provided Ava with a personal growth opportunity and a chance to repair and respond differently to the way in which her mother approached parenting. In this way, Ava has made meaning of her difficult childhood, as she is acutely aware of her need to mother differently and more mindfully than her mother. This insight motivated Ava to become the “conscious mom” E[A1p70,138 &179] she describes herself to be. She has willingly compromised any spontaneity for a more controlled approach to life, as she believes this will ensure that she does not repeat the mistakes she perceives her parents to have made. In this way, she is protecting her daughter from the kind of childhood that she had to endure, and repairing for herself some of the hurts of the past. She is confident that she has

improved on the mothering that she received, and this provides her with a sense of personal confidence and healing.

5.5 DEBBIE: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 4

5.5.1 Unresponsive mothering

Debbie shows little sense of having experienced readily available and reliable care from her mother, stating that she “isn’t a helping mom” F[D1p140]. Her observation that her parents couldn’t be counted on and it was better to manage herself led to her becoming strongly self-reliant. An attachment tie for the child is constructed on sensitive, available, consistent, responsive caregiving (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). The “seen and not heard” style of parenting that Debbie reports experiencing, does not create this optimal environment. This would have impacted on the nature of the internal models created by Debbie of caregiver availability and of self, as perhaps less worthy of attention or being prioritized (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). This was reinforced by low expectations from her parents and little discipline or encouragement to better herself. According to the literature, infants whose caregivers respond sensitively to their cues learn that they can influence the world around them and have their needs met (Weinfield et al., 2008). This confidence is not instilled for children whose caregivers ineffectively or inconsistently address their attachment needs (Bowlby, 1973). In Debbie’s life she experienced quite mixed messages from both her parents about their availability and her worth to receive attention. Learning that her needs would not always be acceptable or responded to, denied Debbie the confidence as an adolescent and young adult to function autonomously in the world and make sound decisions for her future. Such a situation promotes the over-development of self-reliance (Bowlby, 1973; Weinfield et al., 2008), such as Debbie displayed in not asking for help with her twin babies.

The attachment behavioural system is best understood by examining its interactions with other biologically informed behavioural systems (Cassidy, 2008). In particular, the link to the exploratory system may be relevant to Debbie’s case. The “attachment-exploration” balance (Cassidy, 2008) ensures the infant of both safety and examination of the world around them. If a child needs to give too much attention to the availability of the caregiver because they are unresponsive or unreliable, then the security to explore is reduced, the exploration behavioural system is deactivated and the attachment system remains in ascendance (Weinfield et al., 2008). It is suggested that Debbie’s relationship to her mother did not encourage security or exploration, designed to develop in Debbie feelings of competence and capacity. Instead, her early attachment relationship with mother and father, characterized by no expectations and permissive parenting, contributed to developing IWMs

of self as not particularly competent and increased her sense of having limited agency. In recent years Debbie has come to realize through observing her children's struggle to accept and understand their own limitations that "you are what you are" F[D1p108] and is more able to apply this to herself as well. However, simultaneously Debbie has also realized that neither she nor her daughters are determined by who they currently understand themselves to be, but can change or redefine this. "At the same time as saying you are who you are with hard work if you want to change who you are you also can, you know?" F[D1p166]. Here Debbie is exploring the possibility of changing an internal model of self, and expressing that she believes in this possibility for both herself and her children. This relates to what is understood in attachment theory as revising of IWMs, which may be a complex process, as they resist change, but it is nevertheless possible (Bowlby, 1973; Wallin, 2007).

5.5.2 Infertility as a source of change

Debbie struggled for eight years with infertility, and became pregnant following extensive treatment. It is generally acknowledged that infertility brings with it profound psychological stress (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). In Debbie's case, her struggle had a positive resolution, culminating in the birth of her fraternal twins, which enabled her to heal from the intense pain of the ordeal and reframe it as a growth experience. It has been suggested that the stress of infertility could activate attachment patterns in either member of the couple (Donarellia et al., 2016) and research indicates that secure attachment is a moderator for psychological wellbeing and an important resource in times of stress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). While Debbie's attachment classification was not assessed in this study, what is evident is that she emerged a changed and stronger person, with a strong sense of accomplishment for having successfully pursued and attained her goal to become a mother. A central issue in attachment theory is the attachment systems involvement in regulating the negative emotions evoked by the appraisal of danger or threat (Bowlby, 1969/1982). In adulthood support or proximity is attained either by requesting it from a present attachment figure, or by accessing mental images or schemas, or memories of previous interactions with attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Debbie was able to draw on some inner strength to manage this turbulent time. Specifically, Debbie reports having a supportive marriage and engaging in psychotherapy, to cope with infertility.

Longing for motherhood informed how Debbie approached mothering and evoked a strong sense of responsibility and coping when her goal was realized. Her struggle to conceive has caused Debbie to feel profound gratitude for the children she now has. This is in keeping with a study that indicated that mothers of children conceived by fertility treatment expressed greater warmth towards their child, interacted more and were more emotionally involved with

their children, and also recounted less stress related with parenting than mothers who conceived their child without assistance (Golombok et al., 1996).

5.5.3 Mothering twins

Motherhood brought purpose to Debbie's life, as well as a sense of competence and the ambition to strive to do it independently and well. Debbie does not see having twins as overly significant to her mothering, beyond the extensive practical challenges that mothers of singletons do not need to negotiate. She saw these as positive opportunities to test and further develop her new found competence. Finding solutions was for the most part rewarding and reinforced her sense of coping and having made a success of her goal. From a relational perspective, Debbie tried initially to see her daughters as individuals, and did not emphasize the twin bond, even referring to them as "my girls" and never "the twins". Only recently has Debbie begun to recognize the significance to them, of their twin connection. This understanding of their need for "twin identity" seems to have emerged as Debbie's capacity for reflective functioning has grown. Contemporary writers on the use of attachment theory in psychotherapy explain reflective functioning (RF), or mentalizing, as the ability to imagine mental states in oneself and others (Fonagy et al., 2004). This ability in a mother would include being able to see her child as a separate, independent person with their own state of mind (Slade, 2005). This then allows for her to acknowledge intentionality, thoughts, desires and feelings in her child, as well as being able to recognize these in herself (Fonagy et al., 1991; Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger, 2005). As Debbie has become more aware of herself and more accepting of her own abilities and limitations, she has been more able to provide this response to her children, and see their individuality and their "twin connection" from their perspective. A further factor in this process has been the developmental stage of her twins, and their ability to communicate their needs verbally to Debbie. Attachment theory discusses how verbal communication serves to promote continued secure attachment in middle childhood as children can now express their needs for connection, rather than rely on behavioural cues for attachment need fulfilment (Kerns, 2008). Debbie has deliberately enquired of her girls as to their experience of the twin bond, and has tried to incorporate the needs they have identified into her mothering of them now.

5.5.4 Self-acceptance and acceptance of others

Debbie's account reads as if she were speaking of two people: the pre-motherhood Debbie and Debbie the mother. It is a story about finding herself and accepting what she is and could be, with all the limitations this entails. She is now working to provide this for her children, although it is a struggle. She does not want to replay the permissive, unambitious style of parenting that she experienced as a child and instead wants to promote in her girls

some ambition to be the best that they can. But she also wants them to feel secure and content within themselves, accepting of their limitations. Mostly, she wishes for them to be equipped for the world, unlike how she left childhood. Psychotherapy and marriage seem to have led to changes in Debbie's IWMs. Her positive coping may suggest a relatively secure state of mind (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008) regarding attachment, which could have been carried from childhood or be the result of "earned" security (Hesse, 2008). Either way, these experiences appear to contribute to producing a different internalized representation of self as someone with ability to pursue goals even if unsure how to accomplish them.

5.5.5 Parenting styles

The nature of her parents' permissiveness is unclear, in that they do not seem either dominantly indulgent or neglectful. Cassidy (2008) explains that a child does not only interact with their parents when the attachment system is activated, and that a parent may not be responsive to an equal extent in all areas of caregiving. Debbie's mother, for example, clearly provided or arranged for provision of practical caregiving tasks but seems to have been insensitive when emotional care was required. Debbie emphasized that her parents expected nothing of her, and subsequently never encouraged her to better herself or disciplined her to work towards a goal. It is hard to assess the personal impact of this style of parenting on Debbie, other than how it has frustrated her in not having a foundation laid for a sound education and career path. However, her parents' low levels of demandingness, as discussed in the literature (Milevsky, Schlechter, Netter, & Keehn, 2007) have left her determined that she will not parent her daughters this way. Debbie possibly overcompensates for this at times, by providing numerous extra-murals for her children, and creating multiple opportunities for exposure to new experiences.

In Debbie's adamant attempts to mother differently to what she experienced, she shows awareness of some of the patterns she does not wish to repeat. However, not all aspects of her relating with her mother are consciously available to her, and so some unrealized aspects of her internal model may still be influential. This is supported by the understanding from attachment theory that not all aspects of IWM will be consciously available, and that this makes revision more challenging (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

5.6 HELEN: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 5

5.6.1 Emotional deficit

Dominating Helen's narrative is her experience of not having her childhood need for emotional connection fulfilled, leaving her still feeling this deficit as an adult. Much of her approach to mothering her children can be understood as compensating for her own unmet

needs. While Helen did have familiarity with being mothered through the annual visit of her grandmother, this was not consistently available. This substitute care was very meaningful for her, and she certainly became to Helen what research terms an alternative attachment figure (Howes & Spieker, 2008) but could not completely replace Helen's need for the responsive, consistently available care of an attachment figure so central to healthy development (Cassidy, 2008; Kobak & Madsen, 2008). This feeling of not having "enough" from her mother, in time and emotional connection, suggests that Helen did not experience her as consistently or responsively available. Furthermore, her mother's personality does not seem to have lent itself to overtures of warmth in relating to her children, adding to Helen's experience of poor responsiveness. The vulnerability that this somewhat "distant", or preoccupied (Atwool, 2006) mothering seems to have created for Helen, is evident in her adult patterns of connection. This is in keeping with writings on the continuity of attachment classifications, which indicate how childhood patterns of relating generally inform relationships in adult life, through the activation of the IWMs formed from early relational experience (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

5.6.2 Role reversal

In reporting on her relationship with her daughter and eldest child, Helen describes how mature, supportive and intuitive her daughter is, especially in her ability to understand Helen. She described their relationship as "we have a strong friendship relationship you know. She sort of comes up with things and understands things that you wouldn't believe. And ja, we can connect, we can chat and she sort of protects her mother all the time, it is quite a thing" G[H1p73] and was particularly proud of the way her daughter intervenes in the marital relationship at times to defend her mother. In the literature, role reversal is a relationship where the parent looks to their child to meet their emotional needs for support, parenting, intimacy or companionship, and the child undertakes to attempt to respond to this solicitation for care (Cassidy, 2008; Fivaz-Dèpeursinge et al., 2007; Macfie et al., 2005). Bowlby firmly asserted that when the roles of parent and child are reversed, with the parent attempting to seek security from the child, it is "almost always not only a sign of pathology in the parent but also a cause of it in the child" (Bowlby, 1969/1982, p.377) and this has been supported in more recent literature and research (Earley & Cushway, 2002; Fivaz-Dèpeursinge et al., 2007; Katz et al., 2009). Helen's daughter is placed in a parenting role, when she defends Helen in arguments against her husband and responds to Helen's need for protection and emotional care. Even in her early years of mothering, some suggestion of role reversal is evident with Helen. It would seem that at times, Helen's children's distress triggered a need within her to be cared for, such as in her early days of separating from her daughter at day-care. Helen was unable to contain her own sadness at the separation, and therefore decided

to become a stay-at-home mother. Even now, despite her children's age, she still speaks about separation from them as unbearable. Motherhood therefore seems to be for Helen an opportunity to connect differently to her children, from how her mother was able to. She is certainly closer emotionally to her children, and they are able to express their thoughts, feelings and dependency needs to her. However, some of the motivation behind this appears to be that this role seems to also be fulfilling Helen's void for being mothered, and as indicated by Zeanah and Klitzke (1991), the children (particularly her daughter) then carry the emotional burden of the relationship.

Bowlby (1973, 1980) writes that the pattern of inversion of the parent role is often transgenerational in nature, with the parent-child relationship in role reversal replaying the parent's own childhood experience of interactional and affective patterns (Earley & Cushway, 2002; Macfie et al., 2005; Macfie et al., 2008; Zeanah & Klitzke, 1991). The results introduce the possibility that Helen may have been in something of a caregiving role to her own mother, as she mentioned as an adolescent, experiencing their relationship as slightly closer and more akin to a friendship. She also spoke of needing to manage her mother's moodiness at times and defend her when her peers commented on this. However, it is equally possible that this shift simply reflects the cognitive and emotional advances which happen during adolescence and which allowed Helen to reflect upon and modify her state of mind regarding to attachment (Allen, 2008) and move beyond some of her anger towards her mother. However, it may be that this "sharing" that then developed was in line with a role-reversal type relationship, although Helen does not speak to this specifically. However, she alludes to a friendship type relationship with her mother, that she was considered the favourite by her siblings and that her mother was both protective of her and spent more time with her.

5.6.3 Protectiveness

Helen's overprotection of her children was a strong theme in the results. This is again linked to role-reversal as it is common for parents who reverse the roles to show excessive worry and overprotection towards their children (Zeanah & Klitzke, 1991). As supported by Bowlby (1973) and evident in Helen's situation, it is the parent's anxiety and not the child's that the overprotectiveness is designed to address. Encouraging the dependence of her children allows Helen to maintain an intense connection to them which meets her emotional needs. Helen showed insight that mothering her children in an overprotective way, may not always be healthy and could even be detrimental to their relationship in the long-term. Helen places her son in the position of being needy and vulnerable due to his learning and health difficulties. Defining him as a child with special needs gives Helen license to overprotect and

engage in compensatory behaviours, giving him the type of overprotective, enmeshed care she may have desired as a child. The historical link to her experience of her mother providing extensive support to Helen in the crisis of changing schools, also suggests that Helen's IWM of the mother-child relationship contains this template, which she is replaying, not just because her son needs attention, but because she believes that this aspect of mothering is beneficial and meaningful because she benefited from it. This correlates with literature on IWMs and how they may inform parenting styles and behaviour (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

5.6.4 Gender

From the results, the difference in how Helen relates to her children was considered in the light of gender differences. The gender focus in attachment research, seems to be primarily on how parents' gender may impact their parenting, rather than how the child's gender affects the attachment relationship (George & Solomon, 2008). Although literature indicates that parents do treat their sons and daughters differently, in a recent study results suggested that parent gender is more significant than child gender in the prediction of parenting approaches in early childhood, with mothers displaying more sensitivity and less intrusiveness than fathers (Haller-Haalboom et al., 2014). While a gender dynamic may provide part explanation for the findings, what is also probable is that Helen is more attuned and sensitive to her son's needs because of the manner in which they recall her own struggle. With her daughter, the bond is maintained to an extent on her daughter's ability to respond to Helen, as discussed above.

5.6.5 Spirituality

Spirituality is important to Helen as a means of making sense of her life experience and as a source of strength. In her mothering she finds solace in praying for her children. She believes in a God-given responsibility to care for and nurture her children as her life purpose, which justifies her decision not to work and remain at home. Investigations into the role of attachment in spirituality propose that a relationship to God can serve similar functions to other human attachment relationships (McDonald et al., 2005). Helen's spiritual life seems to provide her with an anchor that provides meaning and belonging in her life, thereby acting as a protective factor (Horton, Luna, Malloy, 2016). She is able to turn to God when she feels uncertain, which mimics the secure base seeking with the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1985; McDonald et al., 2005). In this way, she has found a healthy and appropriate means of filling the mothering gaps of her youth. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) specified that people develop a particular attachment style based on their distinctive history of experiences with their caregivers during early childhood. This style tends to be carried with them into

adulthood and will be reflected in their interpersonal relationships as a result of activation of their IWMs (Bowlby, 1973). For Helen, her heightened need for a powerful attachment figure on whom she can be entirely dependent, and consistently cared for, is met through her Christian faith. She approaches spiritual matters in a way that reflects her attachment history (Granqvist et al., 2007).

5.6.6 Patterns of meaning

Helen's conscious intention is to do better as a mother than her mother was able to do. Although, as discussed, her unconscious needs may distort her attempts to promote her children's wellbeing at times, she is an active, present mother, which is different to her own experience. What is important to note is that attachment theory acknowledges that most caregivers will not be able to provide with equal effectiveness for all aspects of the child's attachment needs. However, it is the consistent and responsive availability that determines if attachment is healthy and formed (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008). Helen recognized and was intrigued by the intergenerational patterns evident in her account of her experience. She was able to identify ways in which her daughter particularly, is similar to her mother and to Helen. She commented both in her individual interviews and in the focus group that the patterns seem to repeat even when you may not want them to. This is supported by works discussing how IWMs exert unconscious influence and can be resistant to change because of the habitual nature of relational interaction (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008).

5.7 THANDI: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 6

5.7.1 Challenges as opportunities for connection

Thandi's first child, planned and positively anticipated, was born with severe allergies and asthma. Although this posed significant challenges to mothering him, Thandi chose to view this situation as something that made her mothering "feel that much more special because I had all these problems to deal with" H[T1p54]. She saw, in the struggle to find ways to comfort and nurture her baby, an opportunity for closer bonding. This response illustrates the concept of maternal sensitivity, recognizing how Thandi's ability to notice and deduce the meaning behind her child's behavioural signals, as well as her appropriate responsiveness to her child's needs, contributed to a secure connection (Ainsworth, 1967; Bell & Ainsworth, 1972; Stams, Juffer, van IJzendoorn, 2002). For Thandi the challenge of her son's allergies became a way in which she could demonstrate her love and commitment to her child. She applied this approach when her second son also presented with these conditions. Thandi appears to have seen it again as a way in which she was valuable to her sons and possibly also a means of "undoing" her own childhood experience of impoverished maternal

sensitivity, by ministering to them in ways that she would have like her own mother to respond.

An additional challenge was her sons' very different personalities. As infants her eldest was very responsive but her second son was difficult to soothe. Although Thandi negotiated this effectively, she describes feeling desperate at times for how to connect with her second child. The interplay of mothers' responsiveness and infant temperament has been extensively researched (Stams et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 2008). Thandi's experience is supported by research's findings indicating that maternal responsiveness is an important predictor of later child adaption, even when faced with a child with a difficult temperament (Belsky & Fearon, 2008; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2004). Two standpoints can be identified in the debate about the role of temperament in attachment, and are discussed in Chapter 2. Thandi's situation appears in keeping with the view that temperament has no direct influence on attachment quality, because attachment is by definition constructed relationally and even a sensitive or difficult infant, if given responsive care, can attach securely (Belsky & Fearon, 2008; Sroufe, 1985). Her responsiveness to her child despite his irritability and neediness has forged a sound bond.

5.7.2 The father gap

Her position as a divorced, single-parent suggests a similar dynamic to the way in which she dealt with her son's difficult temperament. Although not how she had hoped to parent her children, Thandi has embraced the situation with similar commitment, striving to provide security for her sons despite their absent father. It is a struggle for her to fulfil the dual roles of mother and father, but she attempts to do this because she believes that this is the responsibility she took on when deciding to become a mother. Thandi feels that she is not able to adequately meet some of her sons' needs by virtue of being female, and she is concerned about this gap in their experience of family life. Certainly, the literature on attachment has more recently paid closer attention to the role of the father figure and supports the importance of this in the lives of children (Bretherton, 2010; Grossmann et al., 2002). The father's role as an attachment figure and his influence on a child's development are suggested to be different but complementary to a mother (Bretherton, 2010), frequently encouraging playfulness and exploration (Grossman et al., 2008). Thandi's concern for this lack in the life of her sons is therefore upheld by the attachment research.

5.7.3 The absent internalized mother

Negotiating her own history of having been raised by her grandmother in the guise of her mother, Thandi shows much unresolved pain and she is quite preoccupied by this, returning

in the interviews to it repeatedly without prompting. Research with the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) explores parents' remembered attachment experiences and provides four patterns of response (Bretherton, 2010). This is an important link to understanding the intergenerational transmission of attachment, as mothers' states of mind, relating to their own attachment experience, were shown to meaningfully relate to their infants' classification of security in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) (Main et al., 1985). Thandi's account of her relationship to her biological mother is hard to follow and incoherent at times. Her understanding of the circumstances, personal and cultural, which gave rise to her mother pretending to be her sister and leaving her to be raised by her grandmother, is clear to Thandi. However, this does not reduce the emotional impact of her recollection – and indeed the pain appears to still be quite raw. Although this study does not aim to classify her attachment state of mind, her account shows aspects of the “preoccupied” category (Hesse, 2008; Main et al., 1985).

Despite spending her formative years in the care of her grandmother, Thandi still expresses having a lack of internalized representation, what attachment theory terms IWMs (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Bowlby, 1973) of what mothering is, based on her early experience, stating, “I don't know how it was to be mothered” H[T1p118]. Much of her unresolved anger and hurt stems from now having to grapple with defining and implementing this alone and without prior personal experience. Bowlby (1973), and writers since him, explain the difficulty of such revision of IWMs. Thandi has made conscious decisions to improve on the mothering she received as a child. She chose when to embark on motherhood and to be an involved, emotionally available mother. She filled her knowledge gaps from books and the expertise of others, to help herself construct a template for mothering sensitively. But her sense of having to negotiate childhood essentially alone abounds in her attitude to adult life and she copes by being fiercely independent and self-reliant.

5.7.4 Disruptions to attachment

Apart from the shock of the revelation that her biological mother was her sister, Thandi also experienced an abrupt life change by having to move to live with her mother from Grade 3. The hierarchy of attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969/1982) suggests that even when multiple caregivers are available, a child has a preferential caregiver to whom they turn in times of distress. This attachment relationship may then influence the formation of later attachments to other caregivers (Berlin et al., 2008). For Thandi, this preferential caregiver was her grandmother. Thandi reports a positive relationship, although emotionally distant, with her grandmother, whom she believed until the age of nine years old, to be her biological mother. A disruption of this attachment bond occurred when she was required to leave her

grandmother and live with her real mother in Johannesburg. The foundation of attachment research is in the recognition of the loss and injury a child experiences in the face of the “breaking” of attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1979; Kobak & Madsen, 2008; Shaver & Fraley, 2008). Thandi was a young child when this traumatic experience occurred and her biological mother was not equipped to be responsive or available to Thandi, so was unable to mediate and help her understand this profound loss and change.

From this childhood experience, and the stressful and emotionally impoverished home environment which followed with her biological mother, Thandi has found the means to approach motherhood very differently. Her responsive, committed attitude is driven by a determination to improve on what she experienced. She has embraced motherhood as part of her identity and as an opportunity to provide for her children emotionally in ways that she was deprived of as a child. Thandi acknowledges with pride, “I think I am a better mother than my mother” H[T2p62] but is also generous in acknowledging that she has built on values that her mother taught her in order to achieve what she believes is the goal of motherhood – to improve for the next generation.

5.8 FOCUS GROUP: INTERPRETATION OF CASE 7

In keeping with the recommendations for use of IPA with focus groups (Palmer et al., 2010; Smith, 2004), this discussion serves to acknowledge the group voice. The focus groups shifted the results from individual accounts, to a collaborative sharing of thoughts, feelings and ideas. These were analyzed by examining the group dynamics first, followed by the content of the discussion, as mentioned in section 3.4.2.3. This is in line with what Tomkins and Eatough (2010a) suggest as the protocol for using IPA with focus group data.

5.8.1 Mothering and change

The group identified the power and impact of relating in this close and all consuming bond of mother and child. While participants noted the challenges of motherhood, they acknowledged that even when the rewards seem small, they are profound and a source of great personal change, generating the motivation to continue to improve and change for the good of the child. This links with attachment theory’s emphasis of the importance of this primary caregiving relationship for the child (Bowlby, 1973; Cassidy, 2008), but also the recognition that it is co-created, with the mother bringing to the subjective matrix her own needs, life experience and history, which in conjunction with the child’s innate attachment capacities, forge the connection (Cassidy, 2008; George & Solomon, 2008). It is assumed that initially the mother will have greater relational capacity than the child, although even as infants children are able to seek or avoid engagement (Slade, Sadler, & Mayes, 2005).

5.8.2 Reflection

The importance of reflection, both self-reflection and reflection on mothering, was a powerful theme in the focus group data. Participants linked it with the degree to which patterns from their own mothering experience were repeated or not. Participants' belief in the importance of reflection was reinforced in a number of ways: through experiencing it in their mothering, being reminded of its importance through participation in this study, and also through recognizing where they have not employed reflection, or even where their own mothers did not make use of it for various reasons. Some participants viewed this as something they would like to improve on, while a minority did not express a need to heighten their reflective capacity. Current writings merging attachment theory and psychoanalytic thinking, examine the concept of mentalizing or reflective functioning (RF), as a tool for attaining and transmitting attachment security (Slade, 2008). Mentalizing, or RF, refers to the ability to imagine mental states in oneself and others, and then to be able to understand oneself and the others' behavioural responses in light of these mental states (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002; Slade, 2005). This subtlety of considering a child in a deeper, attuned way was evident in the participants' responses and the varying capacities they exhibited for RF. Clearly, RF is a more complex capacity than just reflection, which refers to consciously giving consideration or thought to an issue. For those participants who reflected on their own experience but considered their children less, or viewed their children as entwined in their own needs, the capacity for RF in other participants in the group seemed to stir something within them. There was an expression of curiosity and enlightenment, as comments of fellow group members evoked for others a consciousness of their child's mental states. In response to such an interaction, one member exclaimed, "Well, [using fellow participant's name] just gave me an aha moment!" I[FG1p17].

When RF is limited, it is less likely that a mother will be able to appropriately respond to the attachment needs which relate to the intentions of her child. Fonagy and Target (1997) hypothesized that such mentalizing allows parents to empathize with their child as someone with mental capacity, emotions and needs. In so doing, the parent appropriately reflects back the child's internal states to them so that "he now knows what he is feeling" (Fonagy & Target, 1997, p.683). Participating mothers' ability to employ this when speaking of their children, appeared to be closely linked to the degree of attunement they reported from their own experience of having been mothered. It was understood that this experience of having been mothered in this positive way, would not necessarily be immediately apparent to them, but possibly only recognized retrospectively and in their own mothering of their children. The comment of "So actually I came through teenage-hood, adulthood... but it took me a while to

realize ‘hell she is an awesome mother!’ (voice breaking with emotion and tears)” I[FG2p157] illustrates this powerfully.

Participants also linked reflection with a need for support as mothers, because when present, they felt that support facilitates opportunities for reflection. All participants agreed that the research process had provided such an opportunity, and had consequently been a rewarding experience. In the focus groups and the individual interviews, participants appreciated the support and the opportunities afforded for being witnessed, saying for example “the feeling of having verbalized something that I have always just done, that someone else was hearing it as well” I[FG1p12]. The focus groups in this study therefore provided an opportunity for the expression by participants of the importance of support in facilitating reflective mothering, and simultaneously created an opportunity in which this could occur. It is acknowledged that this is an advantage of focus groups as a data collection method (Bloor et al., 2001; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the additional context provided by the group interaction is recognized by IPA as adding to the meaning participants construct (Palmer et al., 2010; Smith, 2004).

Participants discussed the need for discernment in how they make use of what is reflected on. It was agreed that this can be a disconcerting process; whether to integrate new ways of being and experiences into their IWM or not. Wallin (2007) elaborates on how patterns from early attachments are seen not only in the way relationships are conducted throughout the lifespan, but also in habits of feeling and thinking. Indeed, Main, Kaplan and Cassidy (1985) state that IWMs should be understood as “structured processes serving to obtain or limit access to information” (p.77) which then provide the rules for what can comfortably be included or excluded in the individuals’ internal conceptualizations. For participants, aspects of their personal contexts which challenge their historically established internal representations of the world and others included social and cultural issues. Some of these were different to those which their mothers had negotiated, while others were similar but the participants felt revision was required. The challenging process of revision of IWMs has been detailed in the literature (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 2005; Bretherton & Mulholland, 2008) and was evident in the results.

5.8.3 Intention, motivation and change

All participants, to varying degrees, were able to identify ways in which they mother differently to their own mothers. The dynamics of what aspects of their experience of mothering they choose to include or exclude in their parenting seemed to be driven by the intention of providing something better for their own children. The desire for, and

commitment to a positive trajectory of better mothering than they had themselves experienced was repeatedly and unanimously expressed. This intention was operationalized in motivation to improve. However, such change is not always easily achieved or effective, despite intentions, and the findings suggest varying degrees of successful change between and within participants.

A lack of change appeared to result from a lack of deliberation on past or present circumstances, or repetition even in the face of reflection, due to habit, with participants reporting returning to a default pattern of behaviour, or “knee-jerk” [FG2p33] reactions. For, without implementation, the decision itself is not always enough, as expressed in “and somehow, although you want to change it, it always goes back” [FG2p15]. Attachment theory supports this in speaking to the automaticity of interaction patterns, hindering conscious alteration of internal working models (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). A further aspect in the findings, contributing to a lack of change was a conscious acceptance of ways of relating and being, and a deliberate decision to repeat or retain ways of relating that the participant had herself experienced. These deliberate repetitions tended to relate to practical issues of mothering, such as physical caretaking practices, whereas areas identified for change tended to be in the relational domain.

Successful change seemed to be linked, in part, to the application of deliberate effort, employing both reflection and motivation. Reflection alone is insufficient. A further level is required where the outcome of conscious deliberation and thought results in a change in behaviour, where necessary or appropriate. Some participants have been more successful than others at fulfilling both aspects of this. Participants can therefore be conceptualized as *advancing backwards* in their approach to motherhood, as they reflect on their past, in order to move forward in their functioning as mothers.

5.8.4 Central positioning

The possibility of adaptation of habitual ways of being and thinking through reflection on recalled experience had three possible targets for the participants. They reflected on themselves as mothers, on their children, and/or on their own mother. In exploring and reflecting on themselves as mothers, participants’ perspectives of themselves were augmented and changed by simultaneously reflecting on their own mothers’ role in their lives. In so doing, many also displayed increased empathy and insight into their mothers’ position and the choices and ways in which she had mothered them. A similar dynamic was apparent in the way that participants balanced their experience of themselves both as a mother and as a daughter. Their perspectives on their own sons and daughters were

adjusted and enhanced by their reflection on their own experience of having been a child who was mothered in a particular way.

This positioning of themselves “in the middle”, that is, as both a mother and a daughter, makes possible the reflection both upwards (towards their children) and downwards (towards their mothers) that all the participants displayed, and allows for clarity on how their mothering has been created intergenerationally through a reflective process. The identification of patterns, both positive and negative, was in the context of their commitment towards better mothering than that which they had experienced. Participants displayed varying degrees of ability to use this “middle position” to aid their mentalizing of themselves and their children. While it was not in the scope of this study to infer the security of attachment in either the participants or their children, it is important to note that the debate about transmission of attachment security has offered as an explanation the idea that RF or mentalizing may in part explain how a mother’s attachment state of mind is transmitted to her child (Berlin et al., Slade 2005).

5.8.5 Context

The evidence of striving for improvement came with an exploration of empathic understanding of their mothers’ limitations, and how the social context of mothering is different for the participants, bringing both support and challenges that their mothers may not have had. There was reflection on cultural dynamics and how this informed both their and their mothers’ approach to mothering. What was noteworthy was that despite the variety of cultures represented in the focus group, there was no sense of diminishing the importance of the attachment bond, due to cultural variations. This is in keeping with the majority of thinkers in the attachment field who accept the premise of the universality of attachment, which predicts that attachment bonds will be formed in any known culture, regardless of how families are compiled or caregiving practices conducted (van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Participants’ discussion on the way in which the personalities and developmental stages of their children inform what they are able to offer as mother to the child, was balanced with realistic discussion of their own limitations and experience of certain phases, such as adolescence. This recognizes debate about the role of temperament and attachment (Vaughn et al., 2008), as well as how the means for maintaining of attachment bonds changes as the child develops (Kerns, 2008; Thompson, 2008).

5.8.6 Compensation and overcompensation

The manner in which participants elected to adapt their mothering from what they had experienced in childhood differed among the participants. As mentioned above, their choices

for inclusion or exclusion seemed to be driven by the intention of providing something better for their own children. Their view of what such an improvement might be was clearly informed by their unique history, their ability to consider their own responses to this, and whether they were able to think about their children as individuals with separate needs and desires. As discussed above, this extends beyond simple reflection to being able to mentalize and demonstrate mind-mindedness, the ability to treat children as individuals with their own emotions and thoughts, rather than just beings with needs to be met (Meins et al., 2001). In some cases, participants' efforts for better mothering were distorted by poorer reflective functioning, as the focus became fulfilling their own unmet childhood needs, rather than being informed by the emotional wellbeing of their children and seeing them as individuals with separate needs, emotions and desires. Meins et al.'s (2001) important research showing links between secure attachment and the role of communication by a mother of her awareness of the child's mental states is relevant here.

In this study, participants whose accounts suggested preoccupation with their own unfilled childhood needs seem less able to reflect mindfully on their children. This was encapsulated in "Because some things... (long pause) you didn't have as a child and you sort of want them for your children. And the fact that they might not even want it doesn't come into it" [FG2p119] and "I think it's about perfecting YOU!" [FG2p131]. From the results, it is suggested that it is possible to distinguish two forms of approach by the participants to 'bettering' their mothering. One would involve COMPENSATION, where through RF the participant identifies her own and her child/children's mental states and makes use of this information to, where appropriate, adjust how she mothers from that which she experienced. The second could be considered OVERCOMPENSATION. Here the participant wishes to avoid repeating experiences from her past or to 'make up' for them, and this may be either consciously or unconsciously informed. The unconscious aspects reflect what Fraiberg, Adelson and Shapiro (1980) referred to as "ghosts in the nursery" who are the "visitors of the unremembered past" (p164). Most importantly, though, the focus for improvement is driven by the participant and not by a mindful conceptualization of her child. What seems to result is more extreme, intense behaviours, which may over time, prove detrimental to the attachment relationship. It would appear that participants who are able to filter through their and their children's responses appropriately are more likely to engage in compensation. However, too little filtering by participants, possibly because they struggle to tolerate what contradicts their IWMs, results in over-compensatory responses. In this way, the mother's experience of being mothered influences her mothering of the next generation. If she is responsive, insightful and able to engage in mentalizing behaviours then the outcome will be more positive for her child. If she is limited (for whatever reason) then despite good intention,

the outcome may be more distorted. Attachment literature supports how infants who were assessed as securely attached had mothers who made use of substantially more references to the infant's mental states, than mothers of insecurely attachment infants (Meins et al., 2001). This important maternal function has also been shown to be an important factor in the maintenance of healthy attachment throughout childhood and adolescence (Kerns, 2008; Thompson, 2008).

5.9 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

5.9.1 Common experiences of mothering and being mothered

The manner in which the data collection process in this study was structured, with a final focus group at the conclusion of the data gathering process, had the effect of drawing together many of the themes emerging in the individual narratives. Therefore the focus group discussion and interpretation, in section 5.8, is already sensitive to cross-case themes. The discussion in the section that follows, therefore, recognizes that this cross-case analysis builds on and augments what was begun in that section.

Based on the individual case interpretations, and the interpretation of the focus group (see sections 5.2-5.8), six themes were identified as common factors of the participants' experience of mothering and being mothered namely: reflection, intention, enactment, central positioning, individuality, and change. These themes were chosen based on their representability across cases as well as on the strength with which they manifested in a case. Given the focus of this study, in the cross-case analysis emphasis was given to the intergenerational dynamics in interpreting the findings. Individual accounts of being mothered were reflected in Chapter 4, and discussed in relation to theory earlier in Chapter 5. For the elaboration which follows, themes that spoke to how the experience of being mothered has influenced participants' current mothering practices were emphasized. In keeping with the phenomenological nature of this study, discussion of participants' meaning-making of their own experience of being mothered, as far as it informs their current mothering, was prioritized. Table 4 depicts the distribution of these themes across participants and in the focus groups.

Table 4: *Distribution of themes across participants and focus groups*

| | | Janet | Nokuzola | Ava | Debbie | Helen | Thandi | Focus Group |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------|----------|-----|--------|-------|--------|-------------|
| REFLECTION | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| INTENTION | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ENACTMENT | Compensation | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| | Over-compensation | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| CENTRAL POSITIONING | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| INDIVIDUALITY | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| CHANGE & MEANING | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

From the focus group and case interpretations, two layers of response are evident in creating a framework for understanding the participants' experience of mothering and being mothered. Four themes are identified in the first layer, relating to general, shared processes among the participants, namely *reflection*, *intention*, *enactment* and *central positioning*. These themes interact, shaping each other, and are then filtered through the second layer, *individuality* and context dynamics, to inform *change and meaning*, the sixth identified theme.

The second layer reflects how these general, shared themes in the mothering experience are nuanced by the participant's *individuality*, identified as the fifth theme. In an IPA study such as this, it is fundamental that the individuality of each participant is identified and acknowledged. The individuality noted and referred to in the results incorporates how participants are influenced by their own intrapsychic processes, their contexts (of which culture is particularly significant), and their idiosyncratic reaction to their context. This is discussed in section 5.9.1.6. This layer of *individuality* then, becomes the filter through which the general themes must pass, in order for meaning to be created and possible change to occur. It is in this second layer that processes implicit in the other themes are elaborated on by the individuality of the participants.

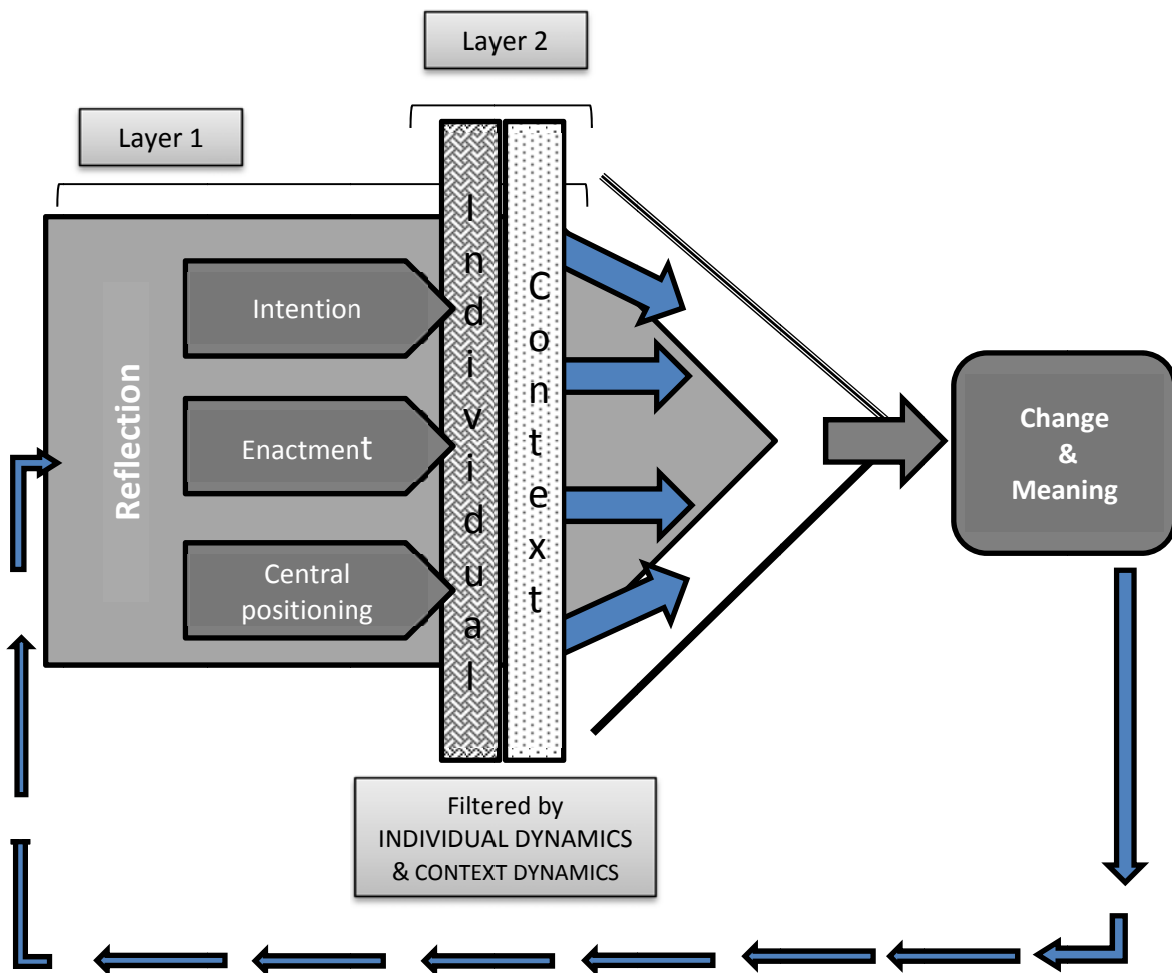
The general themes across cases are thus individually shaped by each participant's personal story, strengths and vulnerabilities. What we see then, in each participant, is how they negotiate and balance these internal and external processes in highly unique ways. This process of moving from general to specific provides a filtering of the mothers' experience, which is refined by their individuality to provide an account of the form and

meaning that this significant life experience of mothering and being mothered has provided for all participants collectively.

An important consideration for an IPA study such as this is that the voices of the individuals are heard, as well as the cross-case issues. It was a methodological challenge to incorporate and do justice to focus group and individual interview data, giving both “voice” to and not neglecting the group dynamics. However, in accepting this challenge, the data collection process became a strength of this study, as it was then possible to draw together the material gleaned in individual interviews in the final focus group, seeking clarity from the participants that the emerging themes truly represented their stories. This layer provides, in addition, insight into various dynamics that support or challenge the mothers’ ability to negotiate intergenerational patterns and is therefore valuable in the study and for later implementation of findings in intervention modalities.

The findings indicate that the experience of motherhood has, across all cases, brought about a personal sense of change and meaning-making. However, it is important to note that the process of change is not linear. Rather, it is a systemic process where each element influences and is influenced by all other elements. Each of the identified themes as well as the influences for individuality are active simultaneously in how they shape the participants’ mothering. Moreover, at times, change and meaning-making served not as an end to the process, but instead as motivators for renewed or increased reflection, enactment, central positioning and intention. Therefore, this was a circular process, as depicted in Figure 1. In the following sections, each theme will be briefly discussed in its generality (Layer 1) and then the moderating influences identified as contributing to the individuality of the experience and meaning of different participants will be discussed (Layer 2).

Figure 1: *Conceptual model of cross-case analysis*



5.9.1.1 Theme 1: Reflection

The theme of reflection was represented in all the participants. As mentioned in section 5.8.2, this was displayed both in their accounts of how they reflect on their own mothering and history of being mothered, and also demonstrated within the focus group environment, where participants stirred reflection in each other. Of note was how their accounts of the degree to which reflection formed part of their life experience, both now and in the past, were supported by the manner in which they employed it in the group context. All participants showed capacity and a predisposition to give serious consideration to their feelings, thoughts and actions around mothering. This was both in the context of their current life circumstances and with reference to their historical experience of being mothered. However, as for other themes, this contemplation or deliberation about themselves and their children differed in degree.

Those who exercised more reflection were better able to understand not only their children's perspectives, but also those of their mothers when they were parenting them. This capacity to perceive and interpret human behaviour as linked to intentional mental states (Allen, 2008; Fonagy et al., 2004; Slade, 2008) has been discussed in section 2.6.3 of the literature review as reflective functioning (RF) or mentalizing. This seems to be a key factor in the degree to which the participants were then able to shift through and evaluate past mothering practices, of both their mothers, and their own, to enable them to make sound decisions for their children. Those then most able to move their perspective 'upwards' and assess the degree to which such choices were suitable for the individual needs of a particular child were better at choosing to leave or use patterns from the previous generations' approach to mothering.

Some mothers were able to reflect on their own experience, but were then caught in a process of compensation, where the 'upward' reflection became less sophisticated, and too determined or influenced by their own unmet childhood needs. They therefore enacted things that were designed to correct mistakes they had experienced as children, rather than engaging with their children's needs and perspective, and evaluating whether such adjustments were appropriate or required.

Reflection, while a theme that is strongly evident in the results, serves not just a common pattern in the narratives of the participants, but also as a condition that shapes the way in which they have changed or constructed meaning. The other themes of intention, enactment and central positioning are therefore informed by the way the mother engages with reflection, even though they are not a part of it, or types of reflection. Reflection is therefore understood, as diagrammatically depicted in Figure 1, to underlie the other three themes. Thus it serves as a condition for meaningful self-motivation for change.

5.9.1.2 *Theme 2: Intention*

Intention was a strong theme in all mothers participating in the study. In psychology, intention relates to a person's goal directedness, or motivation, which may or may not be positive in orientation (Wellman & Phillips, 2001). Personality theories in psychology acknowledge that striving is a part of human nature (Maddi, 1996). The goal to which the individual strives differs depending on the theoretical conceptualization of the human psyche. In conflict models, such as classical psychoanalysis, for example, the goal is compromise (Maddi, 1996). However, for fulfilment models of personality, the goal may be perfection or actualization of potential (Frankl, 1985; Maddi, 1996; Maslow, 1968, Rogers, 1961). It would seem then, that while there is always a striving for something, the nature of

what this may be differs. Social cognition theory recognizes that people act intentionally and have intentions (Wellman & Phillips, 2001). It is also assumed that adults understand other human beings in intentional terms. “People act intentionally, but intentions are not actions, they are mental states” (Wellman & Phillips, 2001, p.126). While intentions and actions are linked, actions frequently demonstrate the person’s intentions. Certainly in the results of this research, the participants showed goal directedness and intention in their striving for what they understood to be positive trajectory.

Generally, participants were motivated to mother better. A desire for a “positive trajectory” and movement towards better mothering was frequently expressed. This suggests the intention to improve, in all participants. They all verbalized a determination to act in ways that differed from how their own mother had interacted or behaved. However, despite this strong intentionality, which also suggests an awareness and reflection on areas for improvement or alteration in their own childhood experience with their mother, the degree to which this resolve was enacted, was again moderated by the individual factors discussed within the narratives. The import or significance of the expressed intention to change was also moderated by factors from the individual’s internal and external world, as discussed in section 5.9.1.6.

5.9.1.3 *Theme 3: Enactment*

The theme of enactment refers to using the products of reflection to make adjustments in accordance with how the insight is meaningful to the mother. All participants showed aspects of this, but the enactments appeared to take two forms. Some participants enacted what they gained from reflection to compensate for past experiences that they felt required adaptation. Others enacted their insights in an over-compensatory manner, doing *more* than required to “correct” a situation they experienced as unhelpful, painful or even destructive when they were being raised. For example, a lack of closeness with their own mothers, was responded to by some with over-involvement with their own children, resulting in an intensity of relating that may in itself be problematic. Over-compensation seemed to be an unconscious response, although a few mothers expressed some anxiety about the possibility that their behaviour may be disproportionate to the occasion or even inappropriate at times, such as becoming fiercely protective or competitive on behalf of their child. Compensatory responses, on the other hand, seemed to be less emotionally driven than the over-compensatory ones. Participants showing compensatory types of enactments gave examples of practical forms of compensation for things they did not enjoy, such as changing the method of discipline they employ for their children from the physical punishment used by their mothers. As expressed in the second focus group, mothers recognized that “We know a

lot more now, everybody knows a lot more now” I[FG2 p81], identifying the role of context too, in making these pragmatic adjustments to childrearing practices. In addition, many of the compensatory behaviours involved making changes to the nature of relationship offered between mother and child. All mothers showed evidence of attempts to connect more emotionally with their children. This took different forms, such as being available to listen to their children, explaining to their children, not withholding relevant information from them and communicating explicitly about feelings and responses. All mothers identified this as something they would have liked more of in their own childhood, although they varied in their understanding and tolerance of why this was not made available to them by their mothers.

Based on these themes it is suggested that general factors influencing how mothers experience mothering, in relation to their own childhood experience, can be conceptualized as involving two processes: mental processes and implementation processes. The ability for reflection, in some cases, deepening into sound and efficient mentalizing or RF, as well as intention and central positioning, constitute the mental processes. Implementation processes would include change and enacting, as these processes then require action in the world. The implementation processes inform how the particular mother is able to regulate herself in the world and use her mental processes to correct or balance responses.

The two processes work together to promote change and meaning-making from one generation’s experience of mothering to another. Again, this is not a linear process but rather, one of mutually informing each other in a dynamic interaction that enables change to occur.

5.9.1.4 *Theme 4: Central positioning*

The positioning of themselves ‘in the centre’ between their mother and their children was something that was evident across participants. Most importantly, it was their use of this positioning to aid their reflection on their mothering, using the needs of their children and understanding of their mothers’ role in their lives which was common to them all. While this approach was evident to some degree for everyone, two participants showed limited ability to make use of this stance, as their own emotional pain imposed itself too strongly to allow this perspective to have much influence. For another participant, this approach of positioning herself in the centre was initiated for her by the experience of being part of this study. While she engaged thoroughly with the opportunity, she also recognized that this was new to her. The value of ‘central positioning’ and how it influenced her meaning and decision-making was therefore only emerging for her.

The intergenerational aspects of participants' experience were evident in how they balanced the "then" experience, with the limits, constraints and opportunities of "now", to strive towards providing an experience for their children which improved on the one that they had. By positioning themselves 'in the centre', that is reflecting upwards towards their children and downwards towards their mothers, participants identified an important meaning-making process for mothering and bringing about change and improvement. Thus they were incorporating the full trajectory of past-present-future, using historic experiences of themselves and their mothers to inform the current and future experience of their children.

5.9.1.5 *Theme 5: Individuality*

Individuality, like reflection, emerges from the data not just as a pattern shared in the participants' responses but also with a specific function. It serves as a filter through which the other four themes pass in the change and meaning-making process.

It is clear from the results and discussion that each participant, while sharing common experiences, also brought to the study her own idiosyncratic history. There were shared issues among the women which influenced who they are as individuals, such as being born as a result of unplanned pregnancies, alcoholism in their family of origin, death of a parent, struggling with infertility, and role reversal dynamics. Nevertheless, the way in which these challenges impacted on each participant varied by virtue of their personalities, social context, culture and the resources available to them to process and resolve any struggle. Thus it is clear that across cases, the power of the individual's intrapsychic world and external life world had significance in the meaning that they made of the experiences they had. This individual layer then accounts for how, in each of the themes mentioned above, the participants engaged to a greater or lesser degree as shaped by their personalities, life history and context.

Culture was a significant aspect of individual context. There were variations among participants regarding representation of cultural groups but also regarding their response to their culture, even for those with similar backgrounds. The context then was another important aspect of the theme of individuality, because while context was not often controllable by the participant, the manner in which she engaged or rejected its influence and constructed meaning from it varied considerably across participants. This was informed by her intrapsychic resources and her own ability to reflect.

The strong emergent patterns of unique dynamics of each woman's experience, so significant in every account, provide support for the choice of IPA as a methodology for this

study. IPA embraces an idiographic stance, seeing each subject as providing an exclusive perspective on a phenomenon (Smith, 2004). The approach aims to draw out nuanced, in-depth accounts of the life-world and meaning-making of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This has been achieved in this study.

5.9.1.6 *Theme 6: Change*

The results show that the experience of motherhood has, across all cases, led to a personal sense of profound change. All the participants reported experiencing some form of change in themselves as a result of being a mother. What is also apparent is that motherhood has also served as an impetus for further personal change, through experiencing being a mother as meaningful. Mothering is therefore both a change agent, and an impetus for change, in varying degrees for all participants. All the women involved in the study expressed a desire for change from how they had experienced being mothered themselves, to what they hoped to provide for their own children. There was also a general demonstration of thought and the belief that changes are important, and that it would contribute to the meaning-making they derived from being mothers. However, individual factors (see section 5.9.1.5) determined the specifics of how and to what degree changes were made. Again, the dynamic interplay of themes is evident as change acts as cause for, and a result of, reflection and meaning-making.

5.10 CONCLUSION

The current study has attempted to highlight the value of examining experiences of mother-child relating, from an intergenerational perspective. From the findings, these experiences have been revealed as being multi-faceted with both rewarding and challenging dimensions. This phenomenological investigation has provided a detailed, in-depth account of the experience of mothering and being mothered for seven women. Each case, as well as the focus group interpretation, yielded unique components and processes related to mothering. All the participants were able to engage with a process of meaning-making in their mothering experience. From the cross-case analysis six themes were identified, namely (a) reflection; (b) intention; (c) enactment; (d) central positioning; (e) individuality and (f) change. The themes of reflection and individuality also served as a condition for meaningful change and a filter, respectively. These shared themes were drawn together to provide a description of the most important factors that entailed the intergenerational experiences of these women. Emphasis was placed on how the participants created meaning of their own childhood experience of mothering, to equip themselves to mother their own children. Participants unanimously reported that they have changed and grown through the experience of being a mother. Furthermore, they all identified within themselves the intention to improve their

mothering, based on aspects of their experience in childhood of the mother-child relationship. To bring about this change, it was clear that a process of reflection was employed to greater or lesser degree, by all participants. In addition, by positioning themselves between their children and their mothers, in a 'central' position, the mothers' reflection and insight into intergenerational processes and targets for change was facilitated. Finally, participants spoke to ways in which they enacted their growing awareness. Such enactments were classified as either compensatory or over-compensatory, depending on the intensity of emotion and consciousness that informed them.

This study is concluded in the next chapter, with specific focus on the limitations and strengths of the research, as well as recommendations for future investigations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research questions were framed in the first chapter as “How does each mother’s experience of being mothered influence her mothering of the next generation? What enables them to use, or alter, mothering practices which they themselves experienced?” This chapter reviews the course of action that was taken in an attempt to answer these questions. The significant literature for this study was provided in Chapter 2 and an argument made for the relevance of this particular gap in the research. The research process itself was introduced in Chapter 1 and then extensively explored in Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, the results were presented and discussed. In addition, Chapter 5 offered a conceptual process model which emerged from the findings of this study. This final chapter focuses on the identification of the strengths and limitations of the study and provides the reader with some recommendations for further research within this field.

6.2 IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE OF THE FINDINGS

The value of this study lies in it being an in-depth investigation into the experiential journey of mothering and being mothered amongst South African women with children in the developmental phase of middle childhood. It has provided explicit insight into the mothering experience from an intergenerational perspective, the implications of which have been conceptualized in a model presented in Chapter 5.

For the most part, the concepts of mothering and attachment have not been extensively researched in South Africa. Recent studies have addressed postpartum depression and its impact on mothering bonds and attachment (Tomlinson et al., 2005) and the importance of attachment in the healthy development of children is an area of current exploration (Berg, 2016). Culturally sensitive implementation methods involving adaptations of parent-infant psychotherapy are being addressed (Aspaos & Arnod, 2014; Bromley, 2012; Cwele, 2012; Dugmore, 2011, 2012; Frost, 2012; Pininski, 2015) and have been shown to be effective in enhancing attachment. Studies, mentioned in sections 2.1.1 and 2.9 have explored mothering and attachment in the context of attachment and Apartheid (Chetwin, 2012), cerebral palsy (Quinn & Gordon, 2011), bullying (Darney, 2009) and therapeutic process (Crafford, 2005). The intergenerational focus of mothering and how mothers’ childhood experience shapes the mother-child relationships in the next generation has only begun to be explored (Dugmore, 2013). This study makes a contribution towards addressing this gap.

It therefore contributes to the extant literature by capturing an in-depth, nuanced understanding of these issues related to mothering, as experienced by seven mothers.

The IPA approach used in this study has made it possible to explore the complex interplay of different aspects of mothering as they manifest in the lived experience of the participants. Although IPA studies need not draw on specific theory, the findings in the study have been viewed through the lens of attachment theory and an intergenerational perspective, which has therefore allowed the understanding of the mother's experience to be conceptualized with theoretical ideas in mind. This contributes towards developing a more refined and complex understanding of this phenomenon. Further studies will be able to gauge to what extent the meanings captured in this study compare and contrast to those found in other contexts. In addition, the use of focus groups, with an IPA approach has been a methodological contribution.

As initially hoped, the study has implications for implementation, as the conceptual model suggested in Chapter 5 is accessible to those with little background in psychology. As such it could be valuable in promoting understanding among mothers of how their own experience informs the way in which they relate to their children. This could possibly, with further research, be generalized to any caregiver involved in the raising of children. The model may be helpful for facilitating or enhancing attachment security between mothers and children, but could possibly be extended to father-child relationships, foster parents and other alternate caregivers. This is important in the South African context, where, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, attachments are frequently compromised due to the dire socio-economic context. The conceptual model offered could be used for psychoeducation, workshops, training and individual psychotherapy to address attachment deficits. An additional and unexpected implication of this study was that most participants reported enhanced levels of personal insight by virtue of their involvement in this research, suggesting that their participation had personal value for them. This opens the possibility of further similar studies achieving both the attainment of additional data for informing interventions, but also being therapeutic in the research process itself.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents an overview of the six themes and the conceptual model which encapsulate the broad insights emerging from the study. While this synopsis provides a general understanding of the possible processes and relations linked to the research focus, it needs to be read in the context of the detailed specifics presented in the results and

discussion chapters. Only in so doing can the fundamental strength of this IPA study be fully appreciated.

Across all cases six themes were identified, namely *reflection*, *intention*, *enactment*, *central positioning*, *individuality* and *change*.

- The theme of *reflection* captured the way in which all the participants showed capacity and a predisposition to give serious consideration to their feelings, thoughts and actions around mothering. The mothers applied reflection to their current mothering and to their own past experience of being mothered. The extent to which they accomplished this differed in degree. In the conceptual model created from the findings, the theme of reflection also acts as a specific condition which influences the extent and the manner in which each of the other themes are expressed.
- The theme of *intention* referred to the mothers' goal directedness, or motivation. The participants all showed goal directedness, demonstrating the intention to mother better than their mothers had done. A desire for a "positive trajectory" and movement towards better mothering was frequently expressed, as well as the determination to act in ways that contrasted with how their own mothers had responded to them.
- The theme of *enactment* refers to how the mothers used the products of reflection to make adjustments to their mothering and the meaning they create from the experience. All participants showed features of this, but the enactments emerged in two forms: compensation and over-compensation. Some participants enacted what they gained from reflection to compensate for past experiences from their childhoods which they felt required revision. Others enacted their insights in an over-compensatory manner, appearing to do *more* than was absolutely required to revise situations that they had experienced as difficult (from their mothers' responses) when they were children.
- *Central positioning* was a theme which described how participants positioned themselves 'in the centre' between their mother and their children. This positioning was used to aid their reflection on their mothering, using the needs of their children and their understanding of their mothers' role in their lives, to inform the meaning made and their decisions for action.

- The theme of *individuality*, like reflection, had a dual role in the data. Firstly, it is clear from the results and discussion that each participant, while sharing common experiences, also brought to the study her own idiosyncratic history. Secondly, individuality served as a filter through which the other four themes passed in the change and meaning-making process of mothering and being mothered. In this research, individuality encapsulated dynamics related to adoption, infertility, role reversal, religion/spirituality, and specific aspects of the participants' culture and context.
- Finally, the results show that the experience of motherhood has, for all participants, led to a personal sense of *change*. Each woman reported experiencing some form of change in herself as a result of being a mother. It was apparent that motherhood operated as an instigator for additional personal change, due to the participants experiencing being a mother as meaningful. Mothering was therefore understood to be both a change agent, and an impetus for change.

A conceptual model was offered to understand how these themes relate as mothers use their experience of being mothered to shape how they mother their own children. From the findings of this phenomenological study, the experiences of the participants have been revealed as being multi-faceted, with both rewarding and challenging dimensions.

The manner in which the mothers sift, organize and make meaning of the phenomena of mothering and being mothered is achieved through the four mutually influencing themes of reflection, intention, enactment and central positioning, depicted in Figure 1 in Chapter 5. Reflection is necessary as a condition or as a backdrop against which the other three themes interact and shapes how they inform each other. These themes are then filtered through a layer which consists of the theme of individuality, referring to factors specific to the participants' intrapsychic structure and life context. Culture is an important aspect of this contextual experience. The product of the sifting and filtering process is a unique, individualized meaning which in all participants also showed change, the final theme. This change occurred either in themselves or in their approach to and practice of mothering, which differs from their experience when they were children.

All participants reported identifying within themselves the intention of improving their mothering, based on their childhood experience of mother-child relating. To achieve this, there was use of reflection processes by all participants, although the extent and depth of reflection varied. In addition, by making use of the 'central positioning' of themselves

between their children and their mothers, coupled with the reflection mentioned, participants showed how they gained insight into intergenerational processes, which enabled them to establish aspects requiring change. Lastly, this growing awareness was operationalized as enactment in the form of either compensatory or over-compensatory approaches, which depended on the degree of emotion and level of conscious engagement of each mother. In this way, the conceptual model depicts mother-child relating from an intergenerational perspective.

6.4 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

Several strengths of this study can be identified. Firstly, the choice of a phenomenological methodological approach was found to be very appropriate to the aims of the research. It enabled the researcher to gain the desired in-depth information, in order to understand the meaning-making processes of the participants. As this approach is interested in the lived world of the participants and more specifically the construction of meaning, it was most fitting for exploring the experience of mothering and being mothered. The flexible and accessible nature of IPA strengthened this study. It ensured that the accounts of the participants were encouraged to emerge in all their uniqueness, lending itself to the focus of the study. It is understood that IPA is powerful in exploring, understanding and communicating the experiences and viewpoints offered by participants (Larkin & Watts, 2006) and the outcome of the research reinforces the decision to make use of this method.

A second strength of this study involves the sampling and range of selected participants. Women were selected from different cultural and social-economic groups, within a small Eastern Cape town, in order to create the possibility of obtaining data from a population that was representative, in some small way, of the diversity of the population in South Africa. The participants therefore brought different cultural aspects to the study. Had the sample been more homogenous, one of the main themes (Individuality) would have been less likely to emerge, denying some of the richness and unique depth that was attained in the data.

A third identified strength was the honest, in-depth expression of experience offered by the participants. This is understood to have been facilitated by several factors. Rapport in the interview and focus group sessions was prioritized to maximize participants' comfort and willingness to engage. Although all participants reported mainly positive experiences of being mothers, there was a range of accounts of having been mothered, from positive, to neutral and very negative. This suggests that, certainly in the individual interviews, most felt able to share honestly about what they had experienced. Care was taken to not over-interpret positive experiences and under-interpret negative experiences, or vice versa, but

rather to try to truthfully report and interpret what each woman brought. Consideration of language ability also contributed to the honest, in-depth expression offered by the mothers. One of the principles for conducting IPA is that the participants should be fluent in the language of the research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This is important to ensure that they are able to give detailed and deep expression of their thoughts, opinions, feelings and experiences. An advantage of this study was that all participants, even those who spoke a different mother-tongue, were fluent in English and therefore able to express and articulate their thoughts easily. Furthermore, the participants were very willing and engaged throughout the research process, as evidenced by their increasing depth of sharing and the fact that nobody exercised their right to withdraw from the study. Clearly, this contributed to the quality of the data obtained.

The combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group data collection methods was a fourth strength of the study as they created opportunities for more comprehensive data to emerge, both in terms of individual experiences and in collaboration with other mothers' sharing. The flexible nature of the interviews allowed for spontaneous information to come to the fore. Although some topics of discussion were raised by the researcher, participants were not restricted to specific areas. The focus groups, particularly the second group, which was positioned at the end of the data collection process, provided an opportunity to validate the information gained from individual accounts and to begin to draw out themes which the participants then had the opportunity to confirm and augment. Focus groups are effective in revealing socially constructed beliefs, but are less valuable in uncovering individual accounts (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010a). Had the study only used focus groups, it may have yielded interesting group data at the expense of deeper accounts of the mothering experiences that were obtained by the addition of individual interviews. Therefore, the combination of data collection methods is considered to have been effective in achieving the aims of the study.

The fifth strength identified is that of personal experience and reflexivity of the researcher. The fact that the researcher has personal experience of motherhood was regarded as a strength of the study since she entered the process with understanding of many of the life events and basic concepts used by the participants. This also strengthened the data interpretation as she could personally relate to aspects of the participants' account. Thorough reflexivity on the part of the researcher counteracted the risk of becoming too familiar with the participants and projecting her own ideas onto the data.

Finally, the creation of the conceptual process model, discussed in Chapter 5, although at this stage presented as both exploratory and tentative, may be considered a further strength of this study, as it could be further developed and formalized through future research. The use of two lenses, namely attachment theory and an intergenerational perspective kept the study to its focus, which was an important strength as the experience of mothering is such a vast and all-encompassing one.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In every study there are inherent limitations which are important to acknowledge. This study is no exception, as there were shortcomings in the scope, methodological aspects and practical realities, which are discussed below.

In this study, the small sample size employed limits the generalizability of its findings. However, the nature of this study was exploratory and aimed to attain a deeper understanding of the mothering experiences of the participants. Therefore the small size of the sample was deliberate in order to obtain in-depth information and to focus on quality of content instead of quantity. This is in keeping with IPA recommendations regarding sample size (Smith, 2004). However, the result of this limitation is that the findings of this study can be described as indications only. The model proposed in section 5.9 is therefore offered only as a conceptual meaning structure and is not empirically validated.

Although also stipulated as a strength of this study, the homogeneity of the sample required by the IPA method was somewhat compromised due to the participants' varied life experiences, which produced a complexed, layered quality of data that was not entirely anticipated by the researcher. It had not been fully realized how many individual factors would need to be considered in the narratives, despite the shared experience of mothering children of a particular developmental period. Narrowing the inclusion criteria would have possibly addressed this. Awareness of the importance of revisiting the inclusion criteria could inform future research. However, this limitation was countered by the researcher spending at least two weeks per narrative to be able to do justice to the individual account. This was also the manner in which the limitation of having been over-inclusive in the data collection was addressed. The sample utilized for this study was very large by IPA standards, and thus generated a vast amount of information, which was a challenge to analyze. In order to ensure that the richness of the data gathered was not compromised and to keep the discussion of the results as focused as possible to the topic of mothering and being mothered from an intergenerational perspective, the researcher was cognisant of this

possible limitation and spent enough time per transcript to select the most prominent and relevant themes for discussion.

The 14 interviews and two focus groups produced a vast quantity of data, which then required meticulous analysis so as not to overlook key themes. Another way in which the quantity of data was addressed was to make the decision to omit the individual interview data of one of the participants from the process of individual case analysis.

A further limitation was that this research focused specifically on the mothers' voices regarding their experiences and did not capture the independent voices of their own mothers or their children. While this would have expanded the project beyond the scope of manageability for a project of this size, the researcher acknowledges that even deeper understanding would have been gained if these additional role players were involved in the research.

In the focus group, the researcher is aware that the sharing of some participants may have skewed or limited what others disclosed, which is recognized as a disadvantage of group processes (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Palmer et al., 2010). However, this was addressed by conducting an individual interview before and after the first focus group. This served to establish each individual's detailed story prior to the group meeting, and allowed participants a chance to reflect and adapt or add to their account, following the first group. Participants were thus able to share both negative and positive experiences of mothering and being mothered, and to mention deeply personal information, which they could then choose to include or exclude from their contribution in the group.

The limited generalizable value of the findings of this study must also be acknowledged. However, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, IPA studies emphasize obtaining an in-depth, idiographic understanding of the participant rather than making general truth claims (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Subsequent research may build on the findings that emerged in this exploration, thereby increasing generalizability (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Furthermore, the aim of the study was to identify possible processes and variations in the mothering experience of participants, and this informed the choice of methodology. It was therefore not a validation study but aimed for insight into possibilities and not for statistically validated generalization.

A further important limitation regarding the generalizability of this study is that the findings are restricted to the particular sample of mothers who participated in this study. Only a small

sample of women from a particular geographical location were involved in this study. The findings that arose from this research might be unique to this area or this group of people. However, the possible processes identified can be specified in terms of more general characteristics, suggesting a possible generality of the themes and model, which could be further investigated by subsequent studies. Additional research would be needed to establish whether similar results might be obtained from another sample of mothers from different populations. Furthermore, this study used purposive sampling to select participants from a limited population. The applicability of the research to broader populations of mothers in the world would require global coverage and a very different design, aimed at drawing from and validating possible hypotheses suggested by exploratory studies such as this.

A final limitation involves the paucity of prior research on this specific topic. Research studies form the basis of the literature review and lay a foundation for understanding the topic being investigated in this document. However, the lack of literature directly related to this specific research focus, and the limited number of South African studies addressing mothering and attachment from an intergenerational perspective, made it difficult to critique or build strong arguments for or against existing findings.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the study's limitations discussed above, several recommendations can be made for future research. Firstly, the available data could be extended by further investigations in this field that incorporate the independent voices of the significant role players such as the participants' mothers and the participants' children. This would deepen and strengthen the data.

In addition, as the participants in this study emphasized the vital role of reflection in mothering, future research could explore these practices in more detail thus adding to the depth of the data. From the findings of this study there appears to be a strong relationship between reflection and addressing intergenerational patterns of mothering. Further research may play a role in strengthening or verifying the validity of these results.

To make the findings more generalizable, a larger sample size is recommended. A bigger sample size could also be used to informally test the relevance of the conceptual process model which was derived from this study. Two other areas of potential research aimed at increasing generalizability could be further in-depth studies to extend or refine the possibilities identified in this study, and validation studies with greatly extended sampling to investigate hypotheses generated from the suggested model.

Moreover, it is evident from this study that context plays a significant role, and thus further research specific to mothering within a South African context would also be advantageous. Future research endeavours may include repeating this research with participants from other areas in South Africa with the purpose of obtaining more information about the experiences of this phenomenon and again, addressing the need to make the findings more generalizable. In this study, the role of other attachment figures such as fathers was not given attention. Further research may play a valuable role in looking at differences in or between both South African parents, and how patterns from previous generations are negotiated to inform current parenting practices.

Valuable data was obtained during the course of this research, which has inevitably also yielded new questions that could be asked. These include, for example, Does the age of parents influence the findings? Does gender of children influence the nature of intergenerational patterns that are evoked? If marital status had been controlled in this study would that have influenced the findings? To achieve a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the experience of mothering and how this shapes the mothering of the next generation in the South African context, there is indeed a need for more research.

6.7 CONCLUSION

In light of the research findings, and in conjunction with the literature review, it is clear that this study contributed to filling a gap in the research on the topic of mother-child relating, particularly in the South African context. The researcher is of the opinion that, even with the limitations of the study, the implications and value of the findings could have influence beyond the mere documentation thereof. The study was an extensive and enriching exercise, and the process of engaging in the research was beneficial for the participants in ways that mirror the potential implementation value of the results and model. It is hoped that similar gains could be experienced for mothers if the model was implemented or used to extend existing therapeutic or psychoeducational approaches. The researcher would like to see future research building upon these findings in order to optimize mothering and reflection on prior experience of being mothered, to enhance parenting practices in South Africa.

This research has attempted to offer an in-depth and thorough exploration of the experiences of mothering and being mothered, and the relationship this may have to intergenerational patterns. The conceptual model provided offers an accessible and unique approach to working collaboratively with mothers, fathers and other caregivers to enhance the quality of care that they offer to children.

This process has been a humbling, moving and deeply enriching experience for the researcher. The stories of the mothers, so generously shared during this process, have evoked a profound respect for their determined efforts to provide a quality of care for their children beyond that which they experienced. The enormity of this task, particularly for those mothers who entered motherhood with limited personal conceptualizations of effective parenting, has been strongly emphasized in this study.

While certain limitations to this study have been identified, the realm of possibility for future research in this area abounds. As a PhD student in the field of child and adolescent psychology, it is important for the researcher that this study contributes to knowledge but most importantly, to interventions which enhance quality of life for children in South Africa. It is therefore her hope that this, and further research, will add to programmes and approaches which will promote sound relationships between children and their caregivers. Should this study be able to extend beyond theory and academic rhetoric to informing therapeutic intervention, then it will have made the contribution that was envisaged in its initial conceptualization: to enable mothers to embrace the power of the “ordinariness” of mothering and utilize a process of reflection on their past and their children’s future, to mother with insight and dedication towards their children’s wellbeing. Indeed, this will be to *advance backwards*, to a society of well-mothered, healthy children.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

APPENDIX B

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTERS

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPT CASE 1: JANET

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT CASE 2: NOKUZOLA

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPT CASE 3: AVA

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX F

TRANSCRIPT CASE 4: DEBBIE

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX G

TRANSCRIPT CASE 5: HELEN

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX H

TRANSCRIPT CASE 6: THANDI

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIPT CASE 7: FOCUS GROUP

[Please see attached CD for all transcriptions]

Please note: It is respectfully requested that in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, the CD should be destroyed by the examiner at the end of the examination process

APPENDIX J

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

APPENDIX K

SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULES